



Prince of the Seas

By Megan Hussey

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Chapter One

Endless lines of azure coral and schools of tiny sand dollar fish swimming freely through its waves accented the natural seascape of Florida waters. Yet even as lavender-hued water lilies stood tall and proud in their natural habitat, they shared their space with another being.

Kieran, a merman who inhabited the waters of Port Emerald, Florida, also called the ocean home.

His tail held the tint of emerald and resembled that of a fish – though few women would dispute that his upper half, with its trim waist, massive chest, and firm, rippled abdomen, was all man.

Kieran, who often strove to avoid humans and their prying eyes, graced few women with the vision of his beauty.

For just as surely as a lady might be impressed by his fine physique, or by the striking green eyes offset by sculpted cheekbones and long, silky reddish-blond hair, she would be repulsed by the fin that completed the package.

“Some guys insist on burping the alphabet at the dinner table; others fake minor coronaries to avoid sitting through a Tom Hanks/Meg Ryan film festival,” he pondered. “Is a fin really so bad?”

Of course, Kieran could spout land legs if he needed to leave the water for an extended length of time.

It just doesn't feel natural, he thought. Then again, incessant loneliness doesn't feel natural either.

A few days ago, Kieran overheard a beachcomber discuss Neptune Park, a Port Emerald

amusement park where mermaids performed in a water show. His heart – and tail – flipped joyously at the news.

“Merfolk are usually so quick and illusive we even manage to avoid each other,” he pondered. “Here is a place where we can convene freely, and even find work!”

On this sunny Florida morning, and with the loan of ‘land clothes’ from a lifeguard buddy, Kieran finally garnered the courage to go investigate this water park – and perhaps find a place where he could meet others of his kind.

And perhaps, finally, he could meet and fall in love with a woman of like mind. And heart.

And fin.

Chapter Two

“Drat it to blazes! Ten minutes before the show, and my fin has a hole. Dori!”

Aurora McFadden, a slender brunette, starred in the Neptune Park mermaid show; a showcase of water ballet and acrobatics that drew spectators from across the state.

“Of course, I think that’s why people come,” reasoned Dorian Majors, manager of Neptune Park and the ‘Dori’ Aurora summoned so frantically. “Though I’m sure they also enjoy our Terry the Trout puppet shows and our Kelp Karaoke Night. Oh who am I kidding? I’d better go fix the starlet’s fin before we face a walkout and lose the lease.”

Of course, Aurora wouldn’t likely ‘walk’ anywhere with her lower half mummified in a pink satin fin. And in truth, she always vowed she and sister Agatha, a statuesque blonde who also appeared at Port Emerald Park, would never desert the show; she and Dorian seemed themselves as close as sisters.

Except she got the boobs and the unbelievable metabolism in the family, Dorian stopped as always to gaze enviously at Aurora’s slender, well-endowed form.

Dorian affectionately referred to her show’s star as “Catherine Zeta-Jellyfish.” Aurora, in turn, addressed the sturdy, athletic Dorian as “Xena Warrior Plankton Princess;” and more seriously, as the creative force behind the Neptune Park water show.

The daughter of park owners, Kyle and Janine Majors, Dorian often proved herself a championship swimmer and an expert on the legend of merpeople. And she had put her knowledge of both to good use in the creation of the show.

Dorian choreographed the dance and acrobatic routines performed by Aurora and the other “mermaids;” attractive swimmers handpicked to play sea nymphs before a quickly growing

Neptune Park audience.

Dorian also marketed the show and greeted incoming visitors. Aurora sold tickets. And both ladies now sighed with relief as Dori threaded and patched the offending hole in Aurora's makeshift fin.

"You know," she broke the thread with her teeth. "This really is a strange job we have here."

"And you love every minute," Aurora pushed Dorian gently out the door. "Go greet our public."

* * * *

Within minutes, Dorian took her place in the Neptune Park amphitheater; a lowly lit underground arena complete with plush seats, a stage, and a curtain that concealed the mystical world of mermaids.

Running a smoothing hand through her short crop of golden blonde hair, Dorian cleared her throat before addressing the gathered crowd: a curious collection of senior citizens, school children and tourists who listened attentively to her words of welcome.

"Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentleman," she waved expressively. "Let me begin today by posing a deceptively simple question: Do you believe in merfolk?"

Her question was met by a chorus of skeptical voices, the loudest of which belonged to a twelve-year-old boy who sat squarely in the center of the front row.

"Why? Are you a mermaid?" he cocked his head.

Chuckling, Dorian patted the boy's head.

“No, Sweetie,” she smiled warmly, “but thank you for asking.”

The boy shrugged.

“Didn’t think so,” he scoffed. “You have big hips and no rack to speak of. Where’s Aurora?”

Dorian’s blue eyes widened with shock, then narrowed in blatant anger.

Yet quickly she recovered, issuing a loud, sharp cough that just barely concealed the words, “Bite me.”

An unexpected tingle tickled her skin as the smooth, melodic tones of a distinctly masculine voice filled her ears. Apparently someone else took offense at the boy’s words.

“Young man, that was very rude. You will apologize to the lady – now.”

Both Dorian and the boy looked with wide eyes at the chivalrous stranger who now stood before them.

And for distinctly different reasons. While the boy stared with wide, fearful eyes at the man’s imposing height -- accentuated by broad shoulders and well-muscled arms – Dorian gaped at the long mane of reddish gold hair that fell freely down his back, and the keen emerald eyes that stared condemningly at the boy.

“Must I ask twice?” his eyes threatened while his voice remained calm.

Shaking his head briskly, the boy shifted his startled gaze to Dorian.

“I’m sorry, Ma’am,” The apology was diminished with a mischievous grin. “Now can we see Aurora?”

Sighing deeply, Dorian turned to face the amphitheater’s royal blue curtains, which now parted to reveal an azure panorama; an underwater scene accented by sleek lines of gold and lavender coral, passing schools of fish colored every hue of the rainbow, and smooth, swaying

water plants.

“What you now behold are the waters of Neptune Park,” Dorian scrunched her nose at her self-admittedly pompous use of the word ‘behold.’ “This is where the mermaids swim.”

She started as she heard the man beside her exhale sharply. Turning, she saw that his already striking green eyes were alight with wonder, and that his full, masculine lips parted in awe.

“You like?” she wondered if the soft tones of her voice even reached his ears. Turning to face her, the man graced her with a full-toothed, dazzling smile.

“It reminds me so much of home,” He turned sharply. “I have to go.”

“Go?” Dorian repeated, an unexpected wave of disappointment suddenly overtaking her. “You just arrived. What’s your name?”

Yet with a charming tip of his head, the man made his way quickly up the alley of the amphitheater. And then he was gone.

Chapter Three

Shrugging, Dorian turned to face the large-scale aquarium that served as the setting of the Neptune Park water show.

“Let me introduce you to our first performer of the day,” Dori paused to allow the anticipation to mount. “The star of the Neptune Park water show, Aurora!”

On cue, a pink satin fin appeared at the top of the aquarium – followed quickly by the slender, trim waist and ample bosom of the raven-haired Aurora.

“Can’t hate her, she’s like family,” Dorian repeated a litany common among the female employees of Neptune Park.

Her friend now dazzled the crowd with a well-executed series of flips, dives, and waterborne pirouettes.

This graceful display of water acrobatics came to an abrupt halt, however, when a second figure joined Aurora in the tank.

This one, also of flowing hair and flawless form, performed a similar graceful set of twists, turns and dives that dazzled the gathered crowd.

The audience didn’t know, however, that this second performer – a male who appeared to be in his late 20s – did not belong to the Neptune Park entourage. In fact, the show never featured male performers.

“But it’s about damn time,” exclaimed a maternal, gray-haired woman who sat in the front row – after moving quickly up from her seat in the fourth. “You go, Stud!”

Aurora and Dorian, for their part, were not amused. While the park manager gestured for the man to leave the tank, Aurora took matters into her own hands.

Although she hardly considered her hands her primary weapons of defense.

An expression of contorted fury marring her delicate features, Aurora abruptly floated sideways in the water.

Then, in a calculated move, she smacked the intruder's face with the firm slap of her mermaid's fin.

The second swimmer staggered back, then struggled for escape as Aurora wrapped her arm around his muscled shoulders and fairly dragged him to the water's surface.

Ignoring the cheers and cries of audience members, who apparently regarded their actions as part of the show, Dorian ran up a flight of nearby stairs and into the backstage area. Here she witnessed a chorus of hysterical swimmers who stood in a circle around their star and the intruder she now confronted.

"Get back!" Dorian's authoritative voice didn't reveal her amusement at the sight of the petite Aurora pinning a broad-shouldered, muscular man securely to the ground.

I'm sure many men would pay to be caught in this predicament, she mused.

This one, however, pointed an accusing finger in the swimmer's direction.

"You're a fake!" the man glared, finally freeing himself from her grasp.

Aurora gaped, visibly offended by the man's accusations.

"So the eyelashes come courtesy of the props department," Aurora planted her hands firmly on her hips and raising her chin defiantly. "Everything else on this body is real, Bucko."

The man shook his head, gesturing wildly toward Aurora's pink satin fin.

"I'm talking about the fin," he gestured at Aurora's costume. "No true mermaid has a fin that color. Woman, you are fake!"

Aurora drew back, snorting.

“And you’re a friggin’ lunatic,” she countered, eyebrows raised. “So I guess we’re even.”

“Both of you, please be quiet so we can sort this out,” Dorian interrupted, then kneeled to address the distressed stranger, “I know you. Aren’t you the man who just defended me to that brat in the amphitheater?”

She already knew the answer to this question; the image this man presented was unmistakable.

Lying on his back, the stranger’s muscular golden chest glistened with shiny water droplets. His reddish gold hair, soaking wet and hanging in ringlets down his smooth back, likened the sunrise after a midsummer’s rain.

And the expression in his stormy green eyes softened considerably as he beheld his current questioner.

“Yes, I just met you below in the amphitheater,” Kieran gazed with gentle eyes at Dorian. “You spoke so articulately about the marvel of the sea, and you were so kind to that little ruffian.”

Pausing, he gestured toward the smooth green tail that now occupied the lower half of his body.

“I wish I could have given that rude lad a firm ‘thwack’ upside the head with my built-in weapon of self-defense here,” he winked.

“Thanks,” Dorian praised, laughing in spite of herself. “But about that tail – where did you get it? And why didn’t you tell me you wanted to audition for the show?”

“Oh I meant to,” The man’s tone was sincere. “I meant to see the show first, then request an audition time.”

He paused, his gaze suddenly filled with wonder.

“Your aquarium is so beautiful – you truly captured the sea in your design,” He grinned, voice barely above a whisper. “I just had to ‘dive in’ and experience it firsthand.”

Dorian’s cheeks flushed flatteringly, and she shrugged.

“I designed it myself,” she ducked her head.

Their gazes collided, and the chaos of their surroundings melted as their eyes conveyed an exquisite sense of mutual understanding.

An intrusive snort, issued by Aurora, broke the mood.

“Dori, I know he’s hot and you haven’t gotten your toes curled in awhile,” she smirked. “Yet are you really going to fall for this guy’s lines?”

The stranger’s smile disappeared, and he turned to glare at the snide Aurora.

“Not only does your fin fall well short of befitting a true mermaid,” He pointed accusingly in her direction. “Your attitude does not become a person of the seas. Do you know nothing of our code of kindness and nobility?”

“Okay, that’s it!” Aurora lost her patience. “I’ve had quite enough of this little charade.”

With this, she fixed her visibly delicate but flexible hands around the merman’s fin and tugged sharply.

Her eyes flew open, however, as her fingertips scanned a material that felt nothing like satin or silk – and everything like finely textured skin.

The stranger threw his head back and screamed.

“Have you no mercy, Woman?” Kieran writhed in obvious pain. “The fin doesn’t come off – it’s part of my body.”

It was Aurora’s turn to scream. Her previous gumption deserting her, she jumped to her feet and ran from the backstage area. The other mermaids followed suit, in a perfectly

synchronized line that gave them the appearance of retreating renegade Rockettes.

Yet Dorian remained at the stranger's side, regarding him with curious eyes.

Curious – but not frightened or judgmental, thought the merman, then extended his hand in greeting. "I'm Kieran. Who are you, gentle lady – and why aren't you running in a state of sheer panic, like the others?"

Beaming, Dorian accepted the stranger's handshake and silently thrilled at his warm, masculine grasp.

"I'm Dorian Majors, manager of Neptune Park," Dorian shrugged as she considered this question, "I know I should be stunned by your presence, Kieran – but somehow I'm not."

She shrugged. "For most of my life, I have been a student of the merfolk legend. I guess it's always seemed real to me."

With this she smiled, charming him with the involuntary flash of her intense blue eyes.

"Or perhaps I just wished the stories were true," she grinned softly. "Maybe I wished you here."

Returning her beam, Kieran extended a bold but tender hand to caress her soft cheek.

"I am here," he continued to stroke her delicate skin. "I am real."

Pausing, he flashed her a devilish smile.

"What you do with me is entirely up to you," His whisper sounded soft, flirtatious.

Another unexpected commotion cut Dorian's response short. *I'm quite accustomed to 'expected' commotions around this crazy, busy place*, Dorian mused, eyebrows slanted sardonically. *This day presents new challenges.*

This time the disruption came courtesy of her parents, Kyle and Janine Majors, who now bounded into the backstage area beaming broadly.

Stepping sharply away from Kieran, Dorian embraced her obviously jubilant mother. Kyle, meanwhile, grinned broadly as he shook hands with Kieran.

“I don’t know where my daughter found you, Sir,” he patted the merman’s back. “What I do know is that you have made my customers very happy. The kids just screamed in amazement, the young women fell in love with you, and the older women. . .”

Here he paused, shifting uncomfortably.

“Well, we did have to help one lady find her heart medication – and quickly,” he murmured, reddening slightly. “On the upside, however, the Port Emerald Red Hat Society is now planning its annual convention at Neptune Park.”

Kieran shook his head, overwhelmed by the praise.

“Thank you,” He inclined his head in a gracious nod. “The pleasure, however, was all mine. I loved performing here today.”

“Great,” Kyle nodded approvingly. “Then you’ll accept my offer to perform here every day.”

The merman shifted backward, gaping.

“Every day, Sir?” he shifted uncomfortably, “Please don’t misunderstand; I love performing water tricks and enjoy entertaining people. I guess I’m just something of a hermit – I’m not accustomed to being around people, and don’t know how to relate to them on a regular basis.”

Janine Majors, a tall blonde woman who was the mirror image of her daughter, shook her head confusedly.

“Where do you live around here that you remain so isolated?” she squinted skeptically.

Kieran and Dorian looked at one another, eyes wide.

“I have a place. . .” Kieran looked to Dorian for help.

“On the water,” she reddened visibly.

After an uneasy pause, she addressed her parents.

“I myself would love to see Kieran join the show on a regular basis,” she nodded affirmingly. “He does seem to be a very private person, however, and this might be a bit overwhelming for him. Maybe we should give him time to consider our offer. Or perhaps we could start him out in one show a week. . .”

The sudden presence of a strong, firm hand on her shoulder stilled her words.

“I accept your offer,” Kieran assented with a nod.

Dorian turned to him, eyes wide.

“Are you sure, Kieran?” she shook her head confusedly.

Nodding, the merman leaned forward and pressed his warm, full lips tenderly against Dori’s cheek.

“If this job gives me the opportunity to see you every day,” he whispered. “I consider that the greatest fringe benefit; an offer I can’t possibly refuse.”

Dorian closed her eyes, warming at the merman’s touch.

Those same eyes flew open, however, as her father cleared his throat loudly.

“Young man,” his tone was official. “I’m pleased to welcome you to the show – but we must get you a new fin.”

With this he shook his head, gesturing toward the merman’s very real appendage.

“That fake prosthetic thing just ain’t workin’ for me.”

Chapter Four

As any good park manager would, Dorian began Kieran's term of employment with a complete tour of Neptune Park.

Of course, the employee's tour didn't generally last two hours – but he didn't have to know that, now did he?

The two walked side by side through sprawling park gardens filled with red and golden roses, violet pansies, and vibrant yellow sunflowers.

"Isn't this place ideal?" Dorian stopped to sniff a pure pink carnation.

However, Kieran handed her a golden rose, instead of a carnation, as he joined his hand with hers.

"Its color reminds me of your hair," he gazed with what seemed to be warm, intent eyes at her blonde mane.

Beaming, Dorian kissed Kieran's cheek before slipping his gift into her lapel.

"I'll wear it always," She cocked her head slightly, smirking. "Or at least until it wilts and I replace it with one of those fake buds they sell at the drugstore and feebly pretend it's the one you gave me."

Chuckling, Kieran lead Dori through the floral maze that was quickly becoming their own private paradise.

"I usually don't feel comfortable on land," he shrugged, raising his eyebrows. "It tends to confine me. Here, though, I feel just as free as I do in the ocean."

Nodding, Dorian threw her head back and closed her eyes, basking in the passing of a summer breeze.

“At Neptune Park, we strive to surround ourselves with water and nature,” She looked with admiring eyes at the flowers and plants that surrounded them. “And it’s not just for the sake of those who come to the park. I really can’t think of any other way to live.”

Later in the tour, the two trekked side by side – a little closer this time – through the Neptune Park wildlife preserve, filled with lions, tigers, and birds of prey.

“I never quite get used to this section,” Dorian used her surroundings as a blatant, gratuitous excuse to walk closer to Kieran.

Chuckling, the merman laughed as he wrapped his arm securely around Dorian’s shoulders.

“I swim beside dolphins and whales, and once had to wrestle and kill a shark that was attacking a swimmer,” He pulled her closer to him. “You’re safe with me, Dori.”

They shared another intimate moment outside the amphitheater, which also housed an exotic bird show.

“I used to work as an assistant in this show,” Dorian gestured toward the brightly feathered creatures on vibrant display as she and Kieran trekked the long, winding corridor that lead into the theater. “As a matter of fact, my first kiss was shared at age 8 with a flame-colored parrot.”

Her companion stopped, then turned sharply to face her. Gently he wrapped his arms around Dorian’s waist, and pulled her closer to him.

Their faces inches apart, he mesmerized her with a sultry gaze.

“That’s one lucky bird,” he whispered, raising his hand to stroke her soft cheek. “I envy the fact that he was the first to kiss you. May I be the next?”

“Yes,” breathed Dorian.

Closing her eyes, her breath stilled as she felt his full, sumptuous lips dissolve sensuously into hers. Long he lingered there, stroking and teasing until her mouth opened to accept the passionate courtship of his tongue.

His hands caressed the strands of her golden hair, while hers made slow, massaging motions across his muscular shoulders.

For the first time since his arrival at the park, Kieran felt at home.

“Dorian,” His tone was slightly breathless. “Would you have dinner with me Friday night?”

Chapter Five

“Dori, sit still!”

Aurora sat on the edge of Dorian’s bed, using a hair pick to add volume and finesse to her friend’s no-nonsense cut.

“So this is the amount of time and painstaking effort it takes to appear nearly half as glamorous as you do?” Dorian gaped, eyes wide in amazement. “Well, I feel a little better now.”

Her light words, however, failed to belie the slight tremor of nervous excitement that filled her voice.

Although a seasoned businesswoman and gold medallist swimmer, Dorian -- in her own estimation – stunk at dating.

I don’t know enough about cars and sports to talk about ‘the guy stuff,’ she thought. And I’m not skilled enough with makeup and clothes to make ‘em forget about ‘the guy stuff.’

Yet with Aurora’s help, Dorian cut a striking figure in a foot-length, jewel-blue dress that well matched her eyes.

A pair of matching earrings and flattering blonde coif completed the package.

Aurora stepped back, beaming with pride at her own handiwork.

“This is my apology to your boyfriend for sideswiping him with my fin,” she smirked.

Aurora’s expression and tone turned serious. “Dorian, during the past week I’ve gotten to know Kieran, and he’s a remarkably kind man.”

Aurora paused.

“I’m still not exactly sure what he is,” she nodded affirmingly and smiled, “but who he is seems pretty special.”

Giving her friend a grateful hug, Dorian stood to walk delicately toward the front door – wincing somewhat at the tight fit of her dress and shoes.

Her discomfort was reflected in the eyes of her dinner date, who waited patiently by the door.

Kieran himself struck a handsome form in a black dinner suit accented by a sea blue shirt.

His hair, meanwhile, lay tied at his neck in a neat, orderly queue.

“My friend the lifeguard loaned me this outfit,” he cocked his head curiously. “He calls it the ‘Miami Vice merman’ look.”

He shrugged, clearly overwhelmed by this concept, then gestured toward his uncommonly quiet date.

“You look lovely,” he beamed in obvious approval, then nodded politely in the direction of a proud, beaming Aurora. “Hello, Aurora.”

Aurora gestured toward Dorian. “Cleans up well, doesn’t she?”

Dorian reddened slightly, and Kieran moved forward to offer a chivalrous arm to his slightly flustered date.

“To me, Aurora,” He never took took his eyes from his date. “Dorian is always beautiful.”

The two began their evening at an elegant waterfront restaurant accented by low lighting, silken table linens, and expansive wall murals that depicted detailed beachfront scenes.

Both Kieran and Dorian stared wistfully at the rolling waves and clear golden sands

depicted in these paintings. Then they turned to face one another across a candlelit table.

“So did you get settled in your new apartment?” Dorian admired the way Kieran’s bronzed face glowed in the candlelight.

Kieran nodded.

“It’s nice enough,” He shifted slightly. “Though it feels odd to live away from the water.”

Dorian grinned.

“No worries; you’re going to spend plenty of time in the Neptune Park tank,” she winked. “Especially since the Port Emerald Senior Ladies League has moved their weekly meetings to our amphitheater.”

Dorian wiggled her eyebrows and nudged him. “You beat out their regularly scheduled afternoons of Bingo and Dr. Phil. Congratulations.”

Kieran laughed, and squeezed Dorian’s hand.

“I’m still a bit uncertain about my new life of land,” He leaned forward to kiss her cheek. “One thing I’m sure of, however, is that I’m so glad I’ve met you.”

The two shared more laughter a moment later, as a waiter offered them a fish menu.

“Um, no thanks,” Dorian turned to Kieran with a conspiratorial wink. “I’m a vegetarian.”

“Same here,” The merman chuckled her chin.

Then, as they enjoyed their ‘sea salads’ of fruit and fresh greens, they discovered the true depths of their common interests.

“I’ve never known a human family,” Kieran touched Dorian with a sad-eyed expression. “My familial relationships are shared with creatures of the sea. I swim freely through crystalline waters aside friendly dolphins and mystical starfish, and amid schools of rainbow-colored

guppies.”

Kieran’s gaze brightened, and seemed filled with an awe-filled wonder. “Dori, I have seen vast underwater caverns marked by tall, noble rocks and naturemade waterfalls, as well as ethereal sea gardens lined with fluorescent coral and swaying water lilies of lavender and fuchsia. I can’t imagine a life lived totally out of water.”

Dorian nodded in agreement.

“When I was a kid, I either could be found in the bathtub or the kiddie pool – or in the supersized swimming pool at Neptune Park. That’s when the pool was the center of activity at the park.”

“In school I constantly studied the legends of merpeople,” She sipped her wine. “That’s what gave me the idea for the Neptune Park water show.”

Beaming warmly, she reached across the table to grasp Kieran’s hand.

“I always wanted to include male swimmers in the show,” she nodded affirmingly. “Sadly, though, people didn’t seem open to the idea of a merman.”

Kieran squeezed her offered hand.

“I can verify that they’re not open to the idea,” He rolled his eyes. “Unless one takes screaming and running in terror as signs of warm acceptance – or nicknames such as ‘seafreak’ and ‘nature’s mistake’ as certified terms of endearment.”

Kieran’s eyes widened in surprise as, leaning across the table, Dorian wrapped her arms around his broad, muscled shoulders. Pressing her lips against his, she shared her tender understanding in a warm, intimate kiss.

Drawing back, she pressed her forehead firmly to his and stared into his emerald eyes.

“How can anyone look at you and see something other than beautiful?” she whispered.

Kieran nodded, apparently appreciating the praise.

“Check, please!” Kieran’s voice sounded loud and slightly desperate.

Chapter Six

Soon the couple again stood at Dorian's door, soothing night breezes and the sound of nearby wind chimes creating the ideal atmosphere for moonlit kisses.

Gathering her into a warm, all-encompassing embrace, Kieran cupped his date's delicate cheek and pressed his lips warmly against hers. At first tender and relaxed, he inhaled sharply as her delicate pink lips opened boldly beneath his own, and their tongues entangled in a moonlit dance matched by the emboldened exploration of their hands.

Kieran's fingers, in fact, tickled and kneaded Dorian's shoulders, easing them of their ever-present tension. And he sighed contentedly as her own sturdy but feminine hands made lazy circles down his back.

Their bodies drew subtly closer before finally melting in a unifying embrace, and a sensual friction began to emerge between and within them.

"May I come in?" Kieran's tone was slightly hoarse.

"Ya' think?" Dorian became breathless as she hurriedly unlocked and opened her front door.

Once inside, the couple collapsed in the depths of Dorian's soft leather couch, fairly clinging to one another as their kisses grew deeper and more passionate.

Yet despite the added privacy of their new surroundings, Kieran already missed the rhythmic clinking of the outdoor wind chimes and the mood-setting sway of the ocean breezes.

The four walls of Dorian's apartment seemed to close around him, and he drew back suddenly to take a deep breath and adjust to their indoor setting.

"What's wrong?" Dorian asked, though she too seemed to stiffen noticeably the moment

they stepped inside.

“I’m not sure,” Kieran stroked her hair reassuringly, “It’s not you, Baby. I want to be with you more than anything. It’s just. . .”

Dorian looked at him, head cocked curiously.

“Have you ever been with a woman?” she searched his eyes for an answer.

Kieran nodded, reddening slightly.

“Most beachcombers are repelled by my fin. Through the years, however, a few women have found it most intriguing and invited me onshore for – er -- beachfront frolic.”

“So that’s what the kids are calling it these days,” Dorian scoffed and rolled her eyes. “Would you mind telling me, then, what the problem is?”

Kieran pressed his lips tenderly against her forehead.

“Maybe it’s just too soon for us,” He kissed her affirmingly. “Or maybe I’m just more comfortable outside.”

Pursing her lips, Dorian folded her arms protectively before her and considered his words. Ultimately she nodded, and squeezed his hand.

“I feel the same way,” She regarded him curiously, “Maybe we have too much in common, Kieran.”

These words haunted Dorian the next day, as she saw Kieran deliver another artistically beautiful performance in the Neptune Park amphitheater.

As he displayed a complex series of twists, turns and flips, and even a few mermanized

dance moves, he appeared far more relaxed than he did on land – and certainly more comfortable than he seemed on their date.

“Of course, that’s probably only because he’s accustomed to the water,” she assured herself.

Her feelings seemed to be confirmed a moment later, when he dazzled her with an affectionate, full-toothed beam and blew her a kiss rife with water bubbles.

Still, she had to know for certain. So the moment he emerged from the backstage area, she invited him to the Neptune Park swimming pool.

The couple finished the afternoon with a fun trek down the park waterslide, followed by a quick, refreshing dip in the pool.

Kieran marveled as he saw Dorian, dressed in a flattering one-piece bathing suit, perform a number of complex dives and water tricks. And her broad, fluid swimming strokes left him breathless.

“Dori, you’re one with the water – just as I am,” He stared at her in blatant amazement. “Why aren’t you a mermaid?”

Dorian herself admired the way Kieran’s long, wet hair clung to his golden skin.

“I’ll have to write ‘Extreme Makeover’ and ask them to graft a fin onto the lower half of my body,” she raised her eyebrows.

Laughing, Kieran playfully splashed his companion before continuing.

“I wasn’t referring to a real mermaid, Silly Girl.” He waved his finger teasingly in her direction. “I mean that, as the daughter of the owners and a natural swimmer, you should be the star of the Neptune Park water show.”

Dorian rolled her eyes.

“Tell that to your audience,” She cringed slightly. “You heard what that obnoxious kid said the other day about my figure. Those people don’t pay to see cute and athletic – they want to see slender sirens with flowing hair and flawless faces, like Aurora. . .”

She paused, grinning slightly as she observed the way that water droplets further defined Kieran’s massive chest.

“And you,” her eyes widened in obvious approval of his masculine beauty.

Leaning forward, the merman kissed her cheek.

“Dori,” he whispered. His eyes and voice brimming with tender warmth. “How could anyone think you’re anything but beautiful?”

With this, he fixed his warm, wet hands onto her bare shoulders and covered her mouth with his.

Suddenly their kiss intensified and he swooped down upon her – sweeping her into a heated, passionate embrace and devouring her lips with his.

Their public surroundings dissolved around them. The couple drew dangerously close in the water until their wet, slick bodies clung almost desperately together.

Dorian tilted her head back to feel the full impact of the merman’s kiss and inhaled sharply as his full, hot tongue scorched her willing mouth.

Clutching his masculine shoulders, she lightly grazed his slick, wet back with her hungry hands – then smiled warmly against his lips as he pressed his masculine, massive chest hungrily into hers.

For a moment they seemed one radiant being, suspended in an element in which both felt infinitely comfortable.

Unfortunately, however, their comfort level did not come accompanied by any degree of

privacy.

“Excuse us?”

Scowling, Dorian turned to confront a group of teenagers who swam the water behind them, laughing and making exaggerated kissing noises as they did.

“Haven’t you ever seen two people kissing before?” she planted her hands firmly on her hips.

“Sure,” one boy replied. “We’ve just never seen a dude with a fin before.”

As the still cackling teenagers left the pool, Dorian looked back at Kieran with apologetic eyes.

“Sorry.” She smiled softly. “I should’ve considered that before suggesting a swim. I guess I just tend to forget you have a fin.”

Grinning unabashedly, Kieran chuckled Dori’s chin.

“That’s what I love about you, Baby,” He stared at her with affectionate eyes, his fin swaying relaxedly in the waters beneath him.

Dorian smiled, reddening slightly.

“I guess we’d better get going,” she murmured, though she stared longingly at the water – and at the mystical man who swam so gracefully in its waters.

She took in her breath as the merman grasped her hand and drew her closer to him. Pressing his face to hers, he seared her with a hard, passionate kiss before drawing back to stare deeply into her eyes.

Previously friendly and amiable, Kieran’s intense, narroweyed gaze betrayed a fresh sense of passion and sexual hunger.

“You’ve lit a fire in my soul,” He cupped her chin in his masculine hand and rubbed his

thumb against her blushing cheek. "I have to have you."

He frowned, however, as Dorian drew back.

"That wasn't the way it seemed last night," she shook her head firmly.

Yet she gasped as Kieran swept her up into a tight, all-encompassing embrace and rested his head on her ivory-skinned neck.

"It was the wrong time and place," Kieran ran his tongue slowly from the base of her neck to her slightly quivering chin. "But you, Dorian, are the right woman. And I want to prove it to you tonight."

His grasp tightened around her waist, and he leaned forward to whisper intimately into her ear.

"I'll make you feel so good that you forget about last night. I'll surrender myself as a servant to your needs and fantasies; all of your wishes will be obeyed."

Dorian closed her eyes; a telltale wetness flooded her feminine area.

She couldn't conceal this from a man who knew better than most the meaning of the word 'wet.'

Seeking to heighten her arousal, Kieran blew softly into her ear and lowered his hand to cup her full behind.

Then, nestling her cheek, he shifted his fingers with agonizing slowness further downward.

"Is this all right?" he asked.

Dorian nodded, her breath quickening as his gentle but purposeful fingertips ignited sharp bolts of arousal in her feminine area.

"Um, I'm gonna' say, 'yes?'" She nodded with a fair degree of certainty. "It feels pretty

‘all right’ so far.”

Giving her a sexy grin, Kieran stared deeply into her eyes as he slipped his hand inside her bathing suit and slowly, deliberately rubbed her soft feminine folds.

“The other people. . .” Dorian’s voice trailed off and she grinned as he created a pleasant tingle in her delicate nether regions.

“Can’t see a thing that’s going on underwater,” he reminded her in a whisper. “Just relax, keep your eyes on me, and let me take care of you.”

Dorian closed her eyes as Kieran’s fingers penetrated her folds and lightly grasped her throbbing clit.

Slowly his skillful fingers tickled and massaged her womanhood, building a pleasant tingle into a throbbing, raging fire.

Above the water’s surface, Kieran covered his lover’s face with sweet, tender kisses and used his free hand to grasp and massage her shoulder.

Dorian bit her lip and sighed softly, her knees threatening to buckle as waves of pleasure coursed thrillingly through her body.

I can’t believe I’m letting him do this in public, she thought vaguely, then focused her gaze on his heaving, masculine chest, Who am I kidding? I’d let him do this in the middle of Grand Central Station – or on the Brooklyn Bridge, during rush hour. . .

All coherent thought abandoned her as a sharp, reverberating spasm bathed her body in ecstatic heat. Reaching out to grasp Kieran’s muscular shoulders, she gritted her teeth to avoid screaming outright.

She finally bowed her head as her body erupted from within with shards of ecstasy, and Kieran caught her up in a warm, loving embrace.

“Okay, you sold me,” she hissed; her voice trembled as she buried her head in his long, silken hair. “That compensates for last night.”

Chuckling sexily, Kieran pressed his warm, moist lips firmly against her forehead.

“You ain’t seen nothin’ yet,” He drew back to stare intently into her passion-dazed eyes, “Meet me tonight on Port Emerald Beach. I’ll make it very, very worth your while.”

Dorian nodded, kissing his perfect mouth with tender appreciation.

“It has to be on the beach,” she gestured expressively to the waters below them. “It’s where we both feel natural and comfortable.”

Dazzling her with a full-toothed smile, Kieran chucked her chin playfully.

“Until tonight, Love.”

Chapter Seven

That evening around midnight, Dori walked with slow, purposeful steps across Port Emerald Beach, noting how its ivory sands turned a surreal hue of gold in the rays of a Florida moon.

I'm usually not out this late. Dorian wrapped her arms protectively around her.

She had to admit that the night sky held a tint of ethereal beauty, with the stars illuminating the crystalline waves that crashed rhythmically beneath them. Even so she felt small and isolated in this vast, deserted tropical oasis.

And it's no small feat to make me feel small, she snorted.

After telling Aurora of her planned rendezvous, her friend declared a verified “fashion emergency” and took her to a local boutique.

She eventually cloaked the tall, sturdy Dori in a floor-length ebony kaftan; one with roses embroidered along its v-neck collar.

Then she loaned her a gold-plated necklace to complete the picture.

“When Kieran rips off the kaftan in a fit of passion, make sure he keeps his hunky paws off the hardware,” The teasing smile slowly faded from Aurora’s face, and she became serious. “You’re beautiful, Dori.”

Dorian marveled at the results of the impromptu makeover; now, however, she needed to find her lover before she lost her nerve.

She thrust her head upward at the sound of a clear, deep voice that rang out beautifully in the night, summoning her attention to the far end of the beach.

Walking quickly forward, she soon approached a tall granite rock that cut a defined

profile in the moonlight. And although tall and regal, it served as a stage for another sort of natural wonder.

Kieran lounged gracefully in full merman form, having just emerged from the waters of Port Emerald Bay. His fin shone like a rare gem in the moonlight, as did his muscular, dew-glistened chest.

His glorious leonine mane, tossed beautifully back to reflect the rays of the moon, accented the shine of his green eyes as he sang the wordless ballad of a seaside siren.

“Sirens sing to lure sailors from the shore,” Dorian recalled an important piece of merman lore.

Grinning slyly, Kieran slowly lifted his gaze to meet hers.

Yet he issued her no greeting – only continued to pour forth a smooth, seamless melody.

Moving slowly forward, Dorian admired the way his sculpted face shone flawlessly in starlight. And she liked the way his eyes widened admiringly as they finally and fully regarded her.

Falling abruptly silent, Kieran’s sultry gaze moved admiringly over her like the warm, sensual waters of the ocean before him.

“Can a siren tempt an angel?” He grinned devilishly. “Tell me, my angel; can I lure you into sin?”

With this his body changed dramatically before her eyes, morphing to produce a long, toned pair of legs and a thick, hard, fully erect shaft.

“That’s a start.” Dorian nodded approvingly.

Her breath caught in her throat as she climbed the rock, then released itself as she sank in his waiting embrace.

Wordlessly he lowered her onto the rock beneath him. Burying his head into her ivory-skinned neck, he rained sweet baby kisses against her skin.

Sighing contentedly, Dorian filled her arms with his succulent form and dug her hungry fingers into his back. Their chests, legs, and finally their lips met in a full-bodied embrace, and their tongues entangled hungrily as they clung almost desperately to one another.

Kieran then swept Dorian's body up into his arms and pressed himself fully into her.

She took in her breath as she experienced the full strength of his sheer, mystical masculinity. And she brazenly wrapped her legs around his trim waist.

"Oh yes," he hissed, his gaze hungry and intense. "How long I've dreamed of joining with you, my love. I want to taste every inch of you, to pleasure you thoroughly. . ."

Sitting upright on the rock, Dorian held her lover's gaze as she peeled her dress slowly from her shoulders and slid it down the length of her body, until her bare ivory skin shone in the moonlight.

Beaming with obvious approval, Kieran took the dress from her hands and placed it beside them on the rock.

"Now you've done it, my beauty." He wiggled a teasing, scolding finger in her direction. "I'll never let you dress again -- at least not in my presence."

Leaning forward, he brazenly kissed the top of her bosom before taking one breast surely into his mouth and suckling her with tender lips. His thick, luscious tongue and peerless teeth served to harden her nipple, while his hand rubbed and massaged her back.

His lips traveled lower as he kissed and licked her bellybutton and gently rounded abdomen.

Then, kneeling almost reverently before her on the rock, he gently but purposefully parted

her legs and set about giving her, her greatest pleasure.

His tongue teased her feminine folds until they opened like a flower before him; then he fixed his lips around her throbbing clitoris and slowly, luxuriously teased her until she exploded in orgasmic ecstasy.

Dorian bolted upright on the rock, her entire body coursing with sublime pleasure. Digging her hands into his soft, flowing hair, she screamed her release.

Eager to return his affections, she used her substantial feminine strength to roll Kieran onto his back and straddle him boldly.

Playfully pinning his hands alongside his head, she kissed his lips and neck and nestled the strands of his silken, reddish-blond hair.

She then turned her attentions to his lusciously perfect body, nibbling his nipples, laving his bellybutton, stroking his rippled abs, and finally facing his long, deliciously erect shaft.

Dorian reveled in his low, intense moans as her tongue playfully flicked his aroused member. And when she placed her hands on his lean, perfect hips and feasted on his masculine fullness, he treated her to yet another ‘siren’s serenade.’

The woman thrilled further when Kieran took her into his arms and engaged her in a fiercely passionate kiss. She moaned as he swept her up in an all-consuming embrace, and settled into his lap until their bodies faced. Then, staring deeply into his eyes, she sighed as he finally joined with her – sinking his hungry cock into her femininity and pumping her heatedly.

Digging her fingernails into his muscular shoulders, Dorian rode Kieran until waves of pure, unadulterated ecstasy bathed their spent bodies.

Enacting an intimate seaside tango, the couple joined hands and mouths as their hips flexed in perfect rhythm – until finally they reached a full, simultaneous climax.

Finally the couple collapsed in one another's arms, cuddling sweetly as they admired the moon that blessed their naturemade union.

"That was perfect," Kieran proclaimed and nudged her affectionately, "I told you all we needed to do was get back to nature."

Dorian nodded.

"This was perfect," she agreed. "As a matter of fact, I've never felt more natural – more comfortable in my own skin. I seem to feel pretty comfortable with your skin too."

Resting her head on Kieran's shoulder, she stared with deep reflection at the vast, mysterious azure seas that lay before them.

After feeling so 'natural,' she thought, how do I go back to 'normal?'

Chapter Eight

The couple made a reluctant return to ‘normal’ the next morning, and Kieran truly felt out of his element as he shared a Neptune Park cafeteria table with the rest of the mermaid troupe.

Dressed in a newly purchased pair of shorts and a tightfitting Neptune Park T-shirt, he easily drew the attention of customers who dined in the cafeteria.

Yet his gaze was fixed solely on Dorian, who sat at the head of their table.

“Mom and Dad have decided that, with the welcome addition of a male to our troupe, we can expand our options,” She glowed with obvious enthusiasm. “And as opposed to performing vignettes from water ballets, we can stage an entire production. For the first of these shows, we’ve decided to present a ‘mermanized’ version of ‘Cinderella.’ “

After nodding to acknowledge the approving cheers of the ‘merpeople,’ Dorian continued.

“I want you all to remain calm, as I’m certain this cast list will positively shock you,” she snorted sarcastically. “In the role of Prince Charming will be our own Kieran. And in the role of Cinderella, Aurora.”

“Thanks, Dori!” The leading lady met Dorian in a celebratory high five, though her brow quickly furrowed. “One question though. How am I going to manage the glass slipper part with a fin?”

“Oh yeah, like the guys will be looking at your fin, Aurora,” Dorian narrowed her eyes in mock irritation.

Kieran, Dorian noticed, shifted uncomfortably during the entire course of her presentation. And he waited until the others left before adding his own comments.

“Dorian, I know nothing about being a prince,” He gritted his teeth in an apparent show of uncertainty. “Let alone an actor.”

He paused, spreading his arms expressively.

“And how am I supposed to call Aurora my princess,” He sighed in frustration. “when it’s you I . . .”

“It’s just a play, Kieran,” Dorian interrupted, shifting uncomfortably. “You won’t even have any lines to speak – after all, you’ll be underwater.”

Kieran shook his head, still uncertain.

“Sure, I can swim as well as the next guy with a fin,” He smiled slightly. “Yet I know nothing of choreography or theater.”

“All good actors still need directors,” Dorian squeezed his arm. “And I’ll be yours. I arrange all of the choreography for Neptune shows, and oversee the shows themselves. You’ll be in good hands.”

Kieran raised his eyebrows, gifting her with a devilish grin.

Chuckling, Dorian gathered her notes and arose from the table.

“Whether you have feet or a fin, you males all think with the same part of your body,” she snorted, waving her finger accusingly.

As Dorian predicted, both Kieran and Aurora took easily and gracefully to their roles as fairy tale characters, showing great grace and skill in early rehearsals.

They take to their parts like – well, like fish to water. She rolled her eyes at her own

obvious, rather obnoxious analogy.

Dorian herself took pride in the undersea kingdom she designed for Neptune Park's production of "Cinderella." And when opening day finally arrived, she stood silently before the amphitheater aquarium, her eyes wide with admiration.

A towering structure carved from pink marble, and lined with flecks of gold, stood at the center of the aquarium.

With its tall turrets and broad balconies, the building was a flawless replica of Cinderella's castle – or, for the purposes of this production, her sand castle.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she asked Kieran, who stood stoically beside her.

Turning toward her, the merman planted an affectionate peck on her forehead.

"Yes," he replied. "You are."

"Oh stop, you flirtatious fish," Dorian scolded, grinning. "Didn't you read the sign posted outside? 'No cell phones, cameras with flashbulbs, or stolen clandestine kisses in the amphitheater.'"

Leaning forward, she then planted a hot, firm kiss on Kieran's lips.

"Hey!" The merman raised an accusing eyebrow in her direction. "You just broke your own rule."

"Manager's prerogative," Dorian nudged him teasingly.

As the two walked arm in arm to the backstage area, they enjoyed a time of companionable silence that was enhanced by the sight of a smiling Aurora, signing autographs for a throng of giggling, boisterous children.

The mood changed sharply, however, as the 'makeshift mermaid' – dressed in a glittering pink satin fin and seated on a tall stool – spotted the same obnoxious young man who had

insulted Dorian in the amphitheater. And this time he stood too close for her comfort.

“Let me touch the fin!” he suddenly raced toward his idol.

Startled, Aurora leaned sharply backward to avoid the boy’s probing fingers. Yet this move, made clearly in self-defense, sent her body careening over the side of the stool and crashing to the ground.

Rushing forward, Dorian and Kieran took immediate action. The merman, for his part, grabbed the stunned boy by his shirt collar and escorted him roughly toward an exit door.

“We’re going to call your parents,” he informed him sternly. “Then I’m going to wait with you outside until they come, to make sure you tell the truth of what you did.”

Ignoring the boy’s protests, Dorian knelt quickly beside the fallen body of her friend.

“Aurora, are you all right?” Her brow was furrowed with concern.

Attempting a weak smile, Aurora squeezed her friend’s offered hand.

“I’ll be OKAY,” Her grimace belied her brave words, “but not in time for this afternoon’s show. I think my leg is broken, Dori.”

Nodding sadly, Dorian removed her cell phone from her jacket pocket and dialed 9-1-1.

“We’ll get you some help, Aurora,” Her tone was soft and maternal. “Don’t worry about the show.”

Moments later, as some awestruck medics loaded the most beautiful injured woman they’d ever seen into the back of their ambulance, Dorian found her troubles had only begun.

“What do we do, Dorian?” demanded Elena, a Neptune Park swimmer who would play the Wicked Stepmother in today’s show. “Each of the mermaids has been trained to play a specific role. No one else can play Cinderella. No one else knows the role.”

A long, uncomfortable pause ensued, after which Agatha – a striking blonde ‘mermaid’

and Aurora's younger sister – offered her opinion.

“One other person knows Aurora's role,” She cleared her throat and looked pointedly at Dorian, “The one who trained her for it.”

Immediately Dorian shook her head.

“I'm nobody's Cinderella, and nobody's mermaid. I can't play that role.”

“Aurora would want no one else to stand – er, swim – in her place,” Agatha countered. Then she graced Dorian with a beautiful, all-knowing smile, “And Kieran would want no one else swimming by his side.”

One by one, each of the other mermaids nodded her agreement.

If only I could feel so sure of this, Dorian stroked her chin thoughtfully. *Of course, Kieran didn't think he could pull this off either – but he had the courage to try.*

The merman Kieran floated gracefully across an aquatic stage, drawing the applause of the gathered crowd.

For the purposes of this performance, he'd pulled his smooth blondish-red hair into a tidy queue at his neck. And his upper half was cloaked in a white satin jacket laced at the shoulders with gold trim.

After performing a waterborne somersault that drew further applause from the crowd, Kieran turned slightly and extended his hand outward.

His eyes widened as he saw the lady who answered his summons.

As expected, she wore a pink satin fin costume and a sparkling tiara of crystalline

rhinestones. And she carried a long, lean oxygen line that facilitated her underwater journey.

Yet in place of Aurora's long, luxurious brown mane was a short, elegant blonde coif. And the swimmer who now approached him showed a strength and certainty of motion unmatched by any mermaid.

"Dorian," Kieran whispered, and he watched in what appeared to be quiet awe as his princess floated gracefully toward him.

Finally he too found movement, and the two joined hands centerstage. For a moment they floated suspended in the water, staring wordlessly at one another.

Then slowly they circled, their bodies drawing closer with every move. And finally they commenced a waterborne waltz that cut an elegant arch in the waves.

"I told you you were made for the water, Dorian," breathed Kieran, gracefully dipping his beaming co-star.

"I'm flying by the seat of my fin," Dorian started as she realized the two were carrying on a clear, coherent conversation underwater.

I didn't think that was possible for a 'land person' like myself, she thought, twirling gracefully under the gentle direction of Kieran's hand.

Parting for a moment from her admiring leading man, Dorian executed a peerless pirouette that earned yet another round of applause.

The swimmer grinned broadly in the direction of her proud parents, who waved an enthusiastic response from the amphitheater's front row.

Her beam disappeared, however, as a bizarre tingling feeling overcame her entire body. Frightened that she was cramping, she leaned forward to rub some relief into toes that were trembling strangely.

These toes, she was shocked to discover, were no longer separate entities. They had merged to fit perfectly into the v-shaped bottom of her makeshift fin.

Panicking, she hastily ripped off her pink satin fin costume; a move that fully exposed her lower half to a captivated Neptune Park audience – and a still more captivated Kieran.

“Oh, dear.”

Out in the audience, Janine Majors slumped into the depths of her soft plush chair, then sprawled unceremoniously across the floor.

The first reaction could be owed to the astounding cost of the costume her daughter had just destroyed.

The second sprang from the fact that, once Dorian’s fake fin had been removed fully, she was left with a very real one.

Dorian herself screamed when she saw the eerie transformation that had overtaken her lower half.

While her torso remained covered with a theatrical corset, she’d spouted a most uncommon appendage during the course of her performance: something that appeared to be a mermaid’s fin.

“What the. . .” her eyes widened with shock. “I have spouted a blasted tail! How in the blazes did this happen?”

Her eyes wide, she looked to Kieran for support – for the answers that clearly eluded her.

Yet the merman only smiled.

“Like the glass slipper,” He extended his hand to her. “the fin fits.”

Chapter Nine

One year later.

Dorian stood on the dew-glistened banks of a picturesque Florida cove, an isolated oasis situated in the sanctity of Port Emerald Bay.

Behind her, a grove of tall, regal sable palms, as well as blossoming crepe myrtles colored fuchsia and lavender, rose from the ground. Roses red and pink, and softly textured golden aster, also grew there.

A pond of sun-glistened azure water sparkled before her. A glimpse beneath its surface would reveal swaying aquatic ferns; tiny schools of sand dollar fish and stately seahorses; and perhaps one additional creature of the sea.

That would be my husband, Dorian thought now, smirking.

As if on cue, the previously still pond erupted with a mighty splash, and Kieran flew into a graceful arch that sent him soaring into the sky above them.

“You go, Baby!” Dorian cried, grinning.

She was further delighted a moment later, when her finned mate landed squarely beside her on the shore. The couple kissed warmly before speaking.

“I think we should definitely incorporate that move into the show,” Dorian nodded approvingly.

Since their wedding four months ago, Dorian had joined Kieran at his “home on the water” – a place of natural beauty that seemed custom-made for merpeople.

In another major life change, Aurora readily exchanged job titles at Neptune Park. Her dearest friend, who held a bachelor’s degree in business administration, long yearned for a more

challenging career. Now she directed and choreographed the Neptune Park water show.

Dorian, for her part, now reigned as the star of that show, alongside Kieran, her leading merman.

“I still don’t understand this, Kieran,” she shook her head in sheer wonder. “I’ve been an active swimmer for years; why didn’t my fin appear sooner?”

Kieran shrugged, playfully chucking her chin.

“My fin has been with me as long as I can remember,” He stroked his chin thoughtfully. “Yet perhaps that’s because I’ve always lived at sea, and have never known a human family.”

“Until now,” he kissed her smiling lips.

Dorian nodded.

“For years, people always accused me of being a ‘fish out of water,’ almost literally,” she squinted in a show of deep contemplation. “I’ve always been more comfortable in the pool or at the beach than in my own home.”

“And I’ve always heard these rumors about Port Emerald being ‘the land of the merpeople,’” she grinned slightly. “As a matter of fact, my friend Monique has a boyfriend who I swear is a siren. That man is some catch. . .”

Noticing Kieran’s curiously cocked head, Dorian quickly amended, “Not as hot as you, of course. And I think it’s because of you, Kieran, that I was able to show my other side. Once my mind could grasp the reality of a merperson, my body followed suit – I was finally ready to assume my natural state.”

Kieran nodded.

“Perhaps one of your distant relatives happened to be a merperson, and your family concealed the fact throughout the generations. Or perhaps, because of the excessive amount of

time you spend immersed in Port Emerald waters, the characteristic just emerged in you.”

He beamed warmly. “I sense, though, that you are intended to be a mermaid,” With this he kissed her hand. “Just as I was intended for you.”

Opening her arms widely, Dorian drew her husband into a warm, all-encompassing embrace. The couple again kissed, their tongues entangling as they collapsed on the banks of the sun-drenched cove.

Dorian grinned as Kieran quickly and feverishly assumed his human form.

She felt his hard erection brush with tender insistence against her gently rounded abdomen.

She wrapped her long legs securely around his waist as she ran two gentle hands down his wet, slick back and cupped his perfect behind.

Hissing with pleasure, Kieran tossed his blondish-red hair so that its soaking wet strands fell gently across Dorian’s bosom. His mouth soon followed as he lovingly laved her nipples, while his hands treated her full, sturdy hips to a gentle but penetrating massage.

Meanwhile, Dorian cupped her husband’s shaft in her hand, stroking him to a state of full arousal. Then she clung to his shoulders as he entered her, and the two engaged in a passionate kiss that matched the flawless rhythm of their engaged hips.

Kieran growled as his hands clutched Dori’s waist, and the two embraced fiercely as they rode a mutual wave of pleasure; one that lifted them higher than either thought possible.

Some time later they lay gently in one another’s arms, enjoying a soft ocean breeze that tickled and blanketed their naked, sweaty bodies.

“I think you’re right, Kieran,” Dorian stroked her husband’s carved cheek with a warm, tender hand. “To be the person I truly am, to assume my natural form, all I had to do was

believe.”

With this she kissed him, and stared into the eyes that sparkled like the ocean from which he was made.

“Thank you for making me believe,” she tilted her forehead affectionately against his. “I love you, my prince of the seas.”