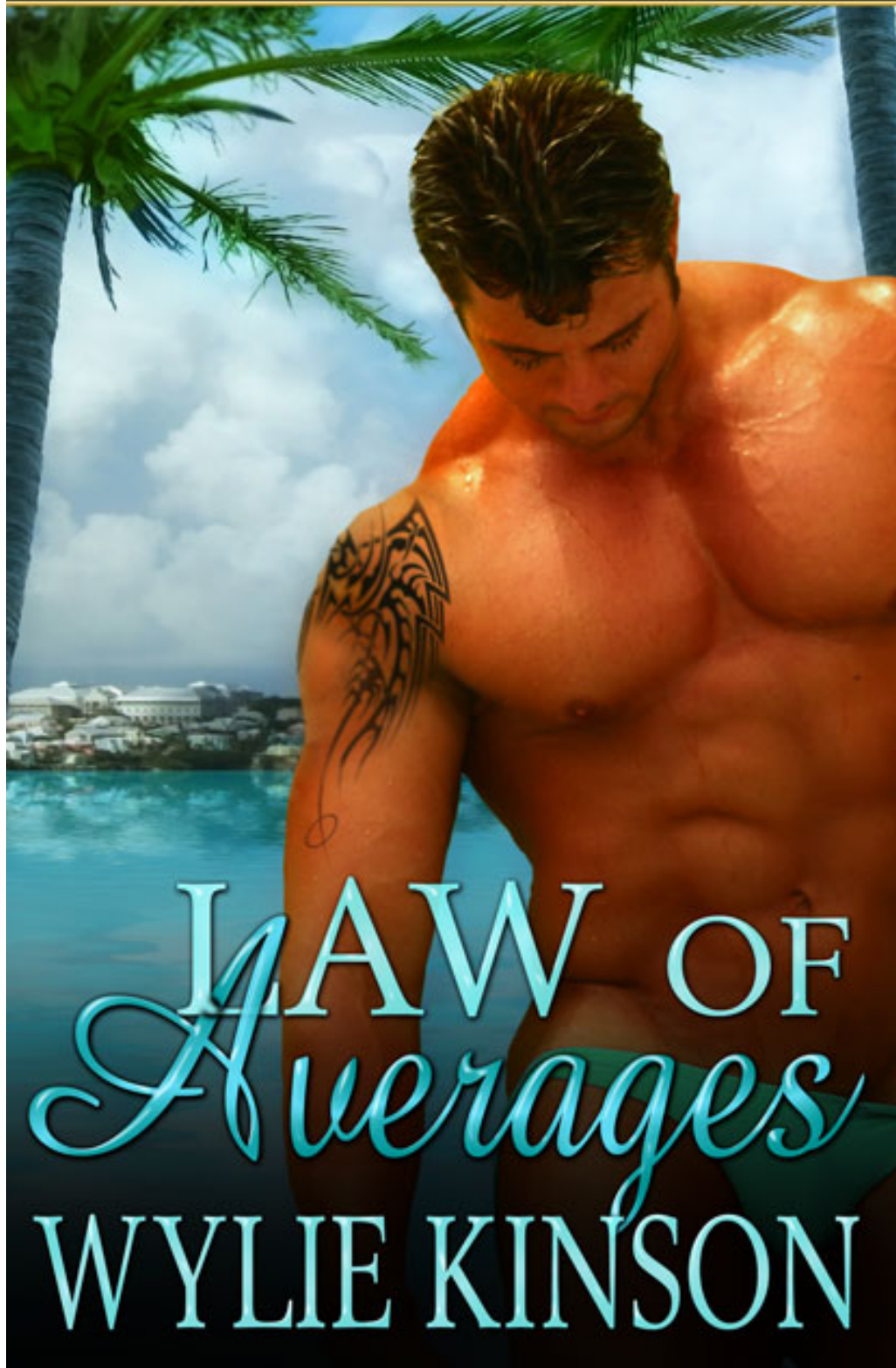


ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



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Law of Averages

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LAW OF AVERAGES

Wylie Kinson

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Kelli K, Dream Editor, whom I admire for her patience and wisdom, and appreciate for her keen sense of humor...

~and~

My blog buddies – you know who you are! – all talented authors and poets in their own right, who continue to inspire and support, cheer, cajole and sympathize. Writing is a solitary business and I credit my sanity to you ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you.

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Chapter One

Saturday

“Give it up, Audrey, or I swear I’ll prune you to within an inch of your life.” Megan tried again, reaching through the dense foliage, her fingertips meeting nothing but leaves and damp soil. She pushed in farther, running her hands along the bark, fingering the branches, but the dark, waxy leaves insisted on obscuring her view. Damn it, she didn’t have time for this. She was already late for her flight. She gave a frustrated grunt and shook the verdant bastard, its shaking leaves swishing in laughter. “Just for that, no water for a week.”

Damn ficus ate her sunblock, the last thing on her packing list. The overgrown shrub, tree, whatever the hell it was, stood in the corner of her bedroom, sucking up all available light. It had grown so big since her parents “gifted” it to her when they had retired out west, she started calling it Audrey II after the bloodsucking plant in *The Little Shop of Horrors*. And now it was sucking the patience out of Megan. She was late and the last thing she needed was a rebellious houseplant.

Audrey’s leaves overwhelmed half of the junk on Megan’s cluttered dresser. When she went to grab her bottle of SPF 30, she’d accidentally knocked it sideways, dove for the save, fumbled and watched the plastic squeeze bottle tumble off the dresser and land deep in the foliage. Swallowed whole by Audrey.

“Keep it then. I’ll just tan sensibly,” she said to Audrey as she dragged her suitcase out of the room. “And when I get back, I’m replacing you with a fern.”

Megan had been looking forward to this vacation ever since her boss had sprung it on her, four short days ago. *An appreciation gift, a reward for hard work and a job well done!*

Three months earlier, when the restaurant’s executive manager underwent a double bypass, Megan had gladly taken over his managerial duties. It was a dream come true—

the chance to prove herself without risking her own position as assistant—and despite working ninety-three days straight without a break, she hadn't complained. In fact, she'd loved every minute of it, and the fact that she'd managed to do it without alienating Chef was ganache on the *gâteau*. She was given a generous monetary bonus and Gemma flew in from London to personally thank her.

"I'd like to give you a fabulous holiday, Megan. How would you like to come back to London with me on Saturday? You could stay with Ash and me, visit my London restaurant, take in some sights."

Excitement had built in her chest. She'd always wanted to visit a castle, visit the Queen, see if there really was a mouse under her chair. She'd had to swallow a giggle. "But I can't."

"Nonsense. You've been working like a dog. You need to relax, have some fun, meet some nice men," Gemma had argued, winking.

Megan had laughed. Gemma couldn't have summed up her needs better. She only wished she could. "As much as I'd love to, Gemma, I'm sorry, I can't."

"Of course you can. It's my gift to you," she'd persisted. Gemma, shrewd, stylish and generous, was impossibly hard to say no to, a trait that undoubtedly got her where she was today. "Now stop being so modest. I want to do this for you."

"No, I mean I *really* can't, Gemma. I don't have a passport." Gemma's eyebrows had flown up. For a woman who bounced around the world on a weekly basis, that was surely beyond her comprehension. "I've never needed one before and it takes weeks and weeks to process, so really, I can't. But I appreciate the offer, thank you."

Gemma had furrowed her brow and tapped her index finger against her bottom lip. "No problem. You're still going on a holiday, my dear, and I've got just the place."

* * * * *

Sunday

“Oh, how could you let me do this?” Megan turned her head and peered through the open balcony doors at the magnificent sculpted hibiscus that cradled the flagstone patio like giant hugging arms. The pretentious, palm-sized flowers that obnoxiously matched her red skin in both delicacy and color were now bashfully closed in sleep.

“Don’t look so innocent,” she moaned, trying to find a comfortable position on the king-sized bed. The plush white linens that had made her feel as if she’d been sleeping on a cloud last night felt suspiciously like sandpaper as she squirmed and moaned, rolled and moaned, straightened and moaned. “You and my damned ficus, you’re all in this together.”

The second day of her holiday in Bermuda, her vacation still in its infancy, and she’d gone and ruined it by falling asleep in the sun, which explained the broiled-lobster flesh on the front half of her body—but how her back got burned, well, that was still a mystery.

She had been so excited when Gemma proposed this holiday. Six whole days of nothing to do but have fun. She loved her job at the restaurant, but after that grueling stint, she’d needed to shake things up a bit. Add some zing to her mundane work-home-work-home routine. She hadn’t had a date in over a year!

The flight over had given her ample time to devour her guidebook—dog-earring the pages that described the sights, the shows and nightspots—and even contemplate having a vacay fling, a little taste of the local flavor. The perfect vacation to do list—tan, sightsee, get laid.

Damn it, if only she’d added, “Pick up more sunscreen.”

No matter how she turned, braced or propped her limbs on pillows, she couldn’t find a position where the contact between her naked, tender skin and the offensive bed sheet didn’t leave her in absolute agony.

This put quite the damper on getting laid. Was it too much to ask—something to make her first and probably only trip to Bermuda memorable, exciting? An appetizer of sun and a nice, fluffy dessert of no-questions-asked, hot vacation sex?

Maybe even a mini-romance? An unattached, drop-dead-gorgeous Italian vineyard owner, visiting a sick friend on the island. He would pick her out, alone in a sea of tourists on the beach, and offer to rub lotion on her back. He'd ask if she minded – "Of course not, please, go ahead" – then stretch out next to her. They'd relax, chat, get lost in each other's eyes until the sun went down. His accent would charm her, but he'd get many words wrong and she'd gently correct him. He'd take her to a local restaurant, recommended by the sick friend—who's actually a cousin, a male cousin—and they'd agree to meet the following day for some sightseeing. Maybe ride the ferry around the harbor. That would lead, of course, to the hot sex...

She started to drift off, moved her arm and was jolted with a fresh sliver of pain across her chest and shoulder. Damn, damn, damn. Her lovely fantasy was blown sky-high because there was no way in hell she was going back outside in the sun, let alone allow someone's hands on her.

After spending the morning snorkeling over the colorful reefs around Bermuda and shamelessly flirting with the boat captain, Megan had returned to the cottage exhausted. She'd thought about lunch but decided to put it off until after her shower. But first, she needed a moment to relax, think about the amazing spectrum of fishes she'd seen but could no longer recall the names of and mentally plan the rest of her vacation. She'd pulled her straw boater forward over her face so she didn't crush the back into the thick cushion of the chaise. Ah, heaven. The tall hibiscus bush shaded all but her feet from the noonday sun. The salt water had made her skin feel tight as it dried on her skin. Her back felt hot and itchy. She reminded herself to moisturize after her shower, but at that moment, she'd just needed to relax and enjoy the fragrant breeze.

It was her growling tummy that had finally woken her. Five hours later. The sun had crept out from behind the hibiscus, slowly exposing all but her face and giving her an utterly ridiculous-looking sunburn. From the pink blush of her chest and shoulders to the angry flaming red of her feet, she looked as if she'd been dipped in a vat of food

coloring, the burn growing in intensity in a graduated fashion. She looked like a freaking sundial. But it still didn't explain how her back got burned. Unless she'd turned in her sleep? Not likely.

"Just you wait," she growled in the direction of the hibiscus, "tomorrow, if I'm still alive, I'm going on a search and destroy mission for your little buddy aloe vera, cutting him up and grinding him into pulp."

Every time she started to drift off, a movement jarred her awake. She put her palms lightly against her thighs, shocked at the heat coming off them, as if burning embers had been shoved under her epidermis.

She'd tried a tepid shower, but the light spray of water hitting her skin had been a thousand needles of agony. And there was no bathtub. Something about there being no source of fresh water on the island, collecting rain in cisterns, blah de blah de blah. Water conservation sucked when one had a sunburn to deactivate.

She'd tried cooling some bath towels in the freezer and laying them over herself, but the material rubbed against her tender flesh and became warm within minutes. She needed something that would *stay* cool, something akin to the chilled relief of the porcelain toilet god after a night of excessive imbibing. If only the bathroom wasn't so small she'd stretch—

The tiles!

The kitchen-living combo was a sea of cool, white ceramic tile.

She struggled to sit up, grimacing when her stinging butt cheeks—that strip of exposed flesh between her bikini bottoms and the tops of her thighs—slid against the mattress. She did the Frankenstein walk to the living room, arms held rigidly out from her sides, a pillow pinched between her thumb and forefinger lest, God forbid, the pillow swing and hit her body, and legs locked straight to avoid aggravating the tender flesh on and behind her knees. She turned sideways and inched her way through the bedroom door, careful not to come into contact with anything.

She felt like a giant post-torch crème brûlée.

Megan threw the pillow down in front of the French doors and fell forward, catching herself in push-up position, arms straight, and began lowering herself inch by painful inch to the floor. The relief was instant as first her knees then thighs made contact with the chilly floor. She caught a small jolt of shock when her unburned hipbones touched down. Her burnt tummy was next.

Why, oh why, when her entire life she'd been a one-piece kind of gal, had she decided to exercise her inner tramp and wear a bikini? A very skimpy bikini. The skin she could have saved!

A second jolt, much stronger than the first, struck as the lily-white flesh of her breasts pressed against the hard, cold surface. Her nipples tightened...

She laid her arms straight down by her sides, put her cheek on the pillow and let her body relax against the floor. It was bittersweet. One of half of her body was on fire while the other was basking in relief. She'd have to try to turn over at some point and give her aching back a break.

The last thing that went through her mind before jumping into the deep end of sleep was, *The only man I'm likely to attract is a hypothermic Eskimo.*

* * * * *

Weary from hours of travel, Gabriel Law stood at the bottom of the dimly lit welcoming-arm stairs, his guitar case slung over his back. The rumbling of his stomach was momentarily drowned out by the taxi's wheels crunching against the stone driveway as it reversed into the night.

Miss Stella Maris—who thrust her card toward him just in case he needed a driver and whom, without any prompting whatsoever, gave him a ten-minute lecture on Bermudian culture on the drive from the airport—hadn't recognized him.

Odd.

The black eyeliner still in place from the morning's promo appearance, streaked hair and piercings usually raised a few fan squeals, or at least questions.

He pinched the bridge of his nose, eager to dispel his growing headache, and surveyed his luggage. Bloody hell! Where was a roadie when he needed one? He should have stayed in a hotel.

A hotel with a bellman.

And room service.

But a hotel meant people, and people meant recognition which invariably led to socializing, and that would defeat the purpose of this retreat. He had one week, a mere seven days, one hundred and sixty-eight hours, ten thousand and eighty minutes to finish the rest of the album before his band was scheduled to reconvene in the studio. And he was still short of decent material. Ten years ago, this wouldn't have been a problem. Even five years ago he would have had a dozen extra songs. But back then he was ignorantly pulling all-nighters, mostly with pharmaceutical assistance.

Now, at the ripe old age of thirty-eight, Gabriel Law was tired. Not just from the six-hour flight, but from touring and partying, and always being *on*. Twenty years of it. The "R" word was beginning to sound pretty.

Ashley Wellington III, Gabriel's best friend, financial advisor and pain in his arse, insisted that a change of scenery was in order.

"Solitude, peace, a change of scenery to stimulate your creativity," Ash promised, pressing house keys and an airline ticket into his palm. Gabriel suspected his manager, Jackson "Peter" Hewitt, had put Ash up to it. The fact that Hewitt had conveniently cleared his appearance schedule and drove him to the airport where a charter awaited pretty much confirmed it. The fucking tool.

"And no distractions. Nothing exciting happens in Bermuda," Ash had boasted, as if that were a good thing. "It's a quiet little island. No wild celebrity parties to pull you away from your work. And you'll love my cottage. The views are to die for, and I'll

make sure you have everything you need so you don't have to leave the house. It'll be the perfect composing retreat.

"You might as well enjoy it. It was your success that bought me the place!" Guffaw, guffaw, back slap.

Pompous bastard.

With a resigned sigh, he tightened his grip on the leather handles and lugged his Louis Vuittons up the steps, regretting with each one that he hadn't take up Branson's offer to spend a wild week at Necker.

* * * * *

She didn't hear the key in the door, she didn't hear the bags drop and she didn't hear his booted footsteps. What she did hear was a baritone voice from above whisper, "Bloody hell. What's this?"

Megan's eyes snapped open then fluttered rapidly as they adjusted to the light. Her heart kicked into overdrive when she saw a pair of black square-toed boots inches from her face. She was barely able to crane her neck far enough to see the face of a man who was in the process of crouching next to her – a thin gold bar through his eyebrow, a ring in his nostril, dark red streaks in his wild onyx hair and a black triangular soul patch that made him look like the very devil. But before fear even registered as the appropriate emotion, he gave her an amused grin that bore no hint of malice.

"Who the hell are you?" Megan asked, struggling to rise. *Is he wearing makeup? What the...* She noticed his amused green eyes roam the length of her and was mortified when she realized she was naked. Buck-red naked.

"Gabriel," he said, his eyes lingering on her backside. "And you must be the *special equipment* Ash promised."

"Special what? Ashley sent you?" Fighting the scorching pain as she moved, she reached around and tried to cover her bare bottom with her hands. "Oh for heaven's sake, get me a robe or a towel, will you?" Her heart was still tripping furiously in her

chest, but more from shock and embarrassment than fear. He mentioned Ashley, Gemma's husband, so he must be an acquaintance. And he must have had a key for the deadbolt because a breaking window surely would have awoken her.

"And where would I find...?" he asked, standing and turning about the room.

"Bathroom, end of the hall." She directed with her eyes.

This was the most embarrassing, mortifying, shameful, infuriating... She ran out of adjectives before he returned carrying her fluffy pink robe.

He held it out to her with one hand, while the other reached to help her up.

"Just...just throw it down and turn around." Flustered, Megan was quite satisfied that her face matched the rest of her body.

"Bloody hell. I'm trying to help," he said, reaching down for her arm.

"Just close your eyes."

"Honey, I've seen tits before. Plenty of 'em."

"Not mine!"

"Suit yourself." Gabriel dropped the robe and turned toward the kitchen. "I'm fucking starving."

Stiff and sore, Megan pressed her lips together, trying to stifle the moan that was clawing its way out of her mouth as she tried to get up. It didn't work. The bugger escaped, or perhaps there was a cat trapped in a bag somewhere near by.

"I did offer," came the voice from the kitchen.

"Ahhrrgh!" When the terry robe hit the skin of her shoulders, that's all she could come up with. At least her heart rate was beginning to return to normal. She shuffled to the breakfast bar and attempted to sit, but when her thighs pressed against the stool she jolted upright from the pain, so she opted for the casual lean.

Maybe I'm still sleeping. Maybe this is all a pain-induced dream. Men don't wear black eyeliner in real life.

But the pain in her shoulders, something akin to being flayed, was telling her she was wide awake. This guy, Gabriel something or other, certainly looked like a figment of her imagination. He looked sinister and dangerous, yet sexy as hell, and he moved with grace that contradicted both his appearance and size. He was tall enough that Megan would need to reach up to brush that stray lock of hair that rested on his smooth brow. Not that she would, of course. And his chest was broad enough that she doubted she'd be able to get her arms all the way around him. Not that she'd want to try. Well, maybe just as an experiment.

And his voice! Deep and rich, with a hint of sexy rasp, like a thick hollandaise sauce with a pinch of horseradish. He spoke like a British stage actor, with the makeup to boot, but dressed in ancient blue jeans and a black Killers T-shirt, the sleeves stretched to accommodate his bulging muscles. He resembled a 'roided-up hoodlum with the vocabulary of an angry teenager. If she looked around, she was sure there'd be a leather jacket dripping with chains lying someplace. And was that a tattoo on his arm?

Yup, definitely a dream. It made sense. She'd been lamenting the fact that vacation sex was out and boom—her mind conjures up a naughty biker dude. A bad-ass, dangerous alpha male that she'd never cross paths with in real life. This was her brain on sun.

"One more time, please," she said to her walking dream man rummaging through the cupboards. "Who are you and what are you doing in my vacation?"

"Your vacation?" he asked, slamming the last cupboard. "Where's all the fucking food? Ash promised enough supplies for a week."

"Fridge."

"Ah." He opened the double-door stainless steel Viking at the end of the galley kitchen and pulled out a loaf of bread and a jar of mustard. "Odd arrangement, this."

"Bugs."

"Sorry?"

"They keep everything in the fridge so the cockroaches don't get it," Megan explained while he spread two slices of bread with mustard and slapped them together.

"Ah, yes. But I was referring to us," he said and devoured half the sandwich in one bite.

"You forgot the meat."

He held her gaze while he finished chewing. In the center of all that black eye makeup, he had the greenest eyes she'd ever seen. And the very act of chewing only enhanced the angularity of his face, the clean parallel lines of his cheekbones and jaw. The only flaw in his perfectly sculpted face, if you could even call it a flaw, was a slight bump on the bridge of his nose. She watched his Adam's apple bob in his corded neck before he answered, "I don't eat meat."

"Oh." Megan was disappointed. He looked like a meat eater, one that would kill his own prey with his hands and eat it raw. Can alpha males be vegetarians? Shit. This was no dream. She worked in a restaurant renowned for their prime cuts of animal flesh. A non-red-meat-eating male would be a nightmare. Hallucination perhaps? A delusional episode? Combination of too much sun and hibiscus fumes?

The plants. It's a damn conspiracy.

He pulled the orange juice out of the fridge, unscrewed the cap and put the bottle to his lips, taking a long pull.

"Hey—I've got to drink from that too," she said with measured disgust. To waste her tumbling emotions on something as trivial as the orange juice bottle was ridiculous, but she needed to voice her objection on principle. Besides, the way his glossy hair fell back, exposing every inch of that virile jaw, was making her woozy.

"Right. Sorry." He turned his back on her, giving her a lovely view of his ass in those shabby, softly clinging jeans—tight, perfectly shaped with those little indents on either side. Deliciously cuppable. She averted her eyes as he turned. "I didn't get your name."

"Megan." He took two glasses out and filled them to the brim, pushing one toward her.

"There you go, Megan. Drink up."

"Not MEH-gan," she corrected. "It's pronounced with a long 'e'. MEE-gan." She pushed the glass back toward him. "No thanks."

He pushed it back toward her. "It'll help with the breath thing, MEEgan."

"Oh!" Megan grabbed the glass and gulped. Oh yes, she was making a marvelous first impression. She could see him watching her out her peripheral vision. He must have her pegged her for a total train wreck—body burned past well done, white faced and, just to ensure her celibacy, she now had halitosis. Well, she hadn't brushed, flossed or eaten since seven that morning.

"So," she said, placing the empty glass on the counter. "You're a friend of Ash and Gemma's and your name is Gabriel."

He took a long, slow sip of his juice. "Full points for the girl in red."

She would have counter-parried his sarcasm, but she was completely un-witted by the lovely way he pronounced girl—*gel*—so she opted for defensive. "If you could just get to the part about why you're here, in my holiday cottage?"

"Thing is," Gabriel began, slapping his empty glass on the granite countertop, "unless you're the little surprise Ash mentioned, it's *you* who's in *my* cottage."

Green with slivers of gold, like tourmalines, Megan thought when she met his questioning gaze. One finely arched eyebrow rose. Not the pierced one.

"I don't know about any surprise, but Gemma surely would have mentioned if I was expected to share her cottage. Unless," Megan's mind quickly tripped over her conversations with her friend, looking for some hint that Gemma was playing matchmaker, "she's trying to set us up."

A deep, rich rumble erupted from his chest. "I think not."

"Thanks a lot." Megan would have been insulted, incensed at such rudeness, had his sexy laugh not made the heat flow straight to her groin.

"No, I didn't mean like that," he chuckled, leaning forward across the breakfast bar. "But you're hardly my type."

Shit. He's gay.

"Listen, love," he began in that baritone English, melted chocolate over hard candy, "it's obvious that Ash had no idea that Gemma lent you the house when he fucking insisted I come. It was a last-minute arrangement and I'm quite sure my well-meaning mate hadn't an inkling you'd be here."

"So you'll leave?" It was more a question than a demand. Gay or not, it would be nice to have a holiday companion. Someone to hang with since she wouldn't be getting any.

"No. I can't really afford to be seen at a hotel," he said, looking around the place, sizing up its quaint size. There was definitely room enough for two people, but they'd be in close company. The cottage was cozy—one bed, one bath, a kitchen-living combo and a loft with an office and single bed. He gaze lingered on the latter before flitting back to her. "And I have a lot of work to do. I need the peace and quiet."

His face was set in a mask of indifference. Except for that penetrating stare, he was silent, leaving the proverbial ball bouncing in her court. He wasn't suggesting...

"Well, *I'm* not going anywhere." And to make her point, Megan set her mouth against the pain that she was about to inflict on her butt and hopped up on the stool. "And, I'm already unpacked. Settled. In the *master bedroom*."

"Funny. The only place you seemed quite settled was on the living room floor."

"I'm not leaving, Mr...Mr..."

"Law."

"Mr. Law. As it happens, Bermudian hotels are a tad out of my price range. And Gemma offered me these accommodations weeks ago." Okay, maybe Tuesday wasn't technically "weeks", but she was staying put.

The corners of his mouth began to lift but the smile didn't reach his eyes. Megan felt like she was losing ground and instinct made her lean forward toward him to make her point. "And you just so much as admitted that your being here was no more than a whim on Ashley's part. I'm staying."

"So stay," he said, his gaze fixed on her gaping robe. "You'll be an interesting diversion from my work."

Megan followed his eyes to her chest and clutched the lapels of her robe together. She winced as material scraped her skin.

"Nasty sunburn," he said, as if he hadn't been checking out her boobs but the angry red lines around them. "Fall asleep in the sun?"

"I did not," she said indignantly. *Who would be that stupid?*

"Well you don't look daft enough to forget your sunblock, so I just assumed."

Damn him.

"I may have drifted off this afternoon. My book wasn't particularly interesting."

"Right," he said, studying her with squinted eyes. "Have you tried aloe?"

"First thing tomorrow I'm going to hunt some up. My guide book says it grows wild all over the island."

"There's a bunch growing right outside the cottage."

"Here? There's aloe growing here?"

"Those thick, spiky tendrils next to the front steps, that's aloe," he said, pushing away from the counter. "Don't move. I'll get you some."

How could she not have noticed? She loved plants! Well, some plants. And there they were, practically brushing her hands as she walked up the stairs, hiding in plain sight.

First Audrey, then the damn hibiscus and now the damn aloe. Definitely a conspiracy. They were probably getting back at her for neglecting the lucky bamboo on her desk at work. And there was that incident with the African violet.

Before she could make a mental list of how many plants she'd killed in her lifetime, Gabriel came back with a handful of aloe stalks and set them on a cutting board. With the precision of a surgeon, he sliced the succulent leaves lengthwise, pried them open and scraped the goopy gel into a bowl.

"Where did you... How do you know how to do this?"

"Barbados. I *drifted off* one morning and didn't wake until nightfall. I had a bugger of a burn. Blistered, peeled, I looked like a fucking leper." Megan loved that he worked as he talked. It gave her the opportunity to watch his mouth move, his sensual lips form every sound, every syllable.

"So a local girl fixed me up using this stuff and a healthy dose of Cockspur," he chuckled, "which is ironic considering the Cockspur was to blame for my fucking nap in the sun in the first place." The stalks now lay empty, gutted, and Gabriel walked around the breakfast bar and headed in the direction of the bedroom.

"Get a towel. This stuff is sticky."

He intended to apply it? Megan's heart did a little flip. She hopped off the stool with a wince and did a stiff run-walk after him.

"It's okay, thank you, but I can manage."

He set the bowl on her nightstand and turned to look at her. She couldn't tell if it was amusement or mockery in his eyes.

"You sure? Because I'm happy to..."

Her hands still gripping the top of her robe closed despite the shooting pains in her bent elbows, she gave a desperate shake of her head. Gabriel shrugged and slipped by her.

The door had barely clicked behind him when she dropped the offending garment from her shoulders, cringing as it slid like a cheese grater down her skin. She scooped up some of the cool goop and slathered it on her arms and chest. The relief was almost instantaneous.

Her shoulders were a problem. As she stretched one arm to apply the gel to the opposite shoulder, the movement pulled the tender skin of her back and she cried out in pain. Switching tactics, she did the front of her thighs.

Ah, success.

She put a foot on the edge of the bed and bent to do her calves, but when her tummy connected with her gooey thigh, she groaned. She tried straightening her leg, but that stretched the skin on the back of her thigh, which drew yet another audible moan.

"I did offer!" he called from beyond the closed door.

Damn him.

She closed her eyes and wanted to cry. Her dream vacation—sun, sand, ocean and a gorgeous bad boy—the *stuff of Cosmo!*—and she couldn't freaking move.

Great. Well done, MEE-gan.

She picked up a beach towel with her toe and with the grace of a drunken gymnast, managed to raise her leg high enough to grab the towel with her hands. She wrapped it around her middle, wincing as it cut into her chest, and opened the door.

Gabriel had started to unpack—he laid his twelve-string on the couch next to his open briefcase and set up his laptop on the coffee table next to her iPod—but gave it up to shoot a text message off to Ashley—he had some serious explaining to do—when she poked her head into the room.

"If you don't mind then," she said, standing in the doorway and looking wretched. "I guess I could use a little help—just my shoulders and feet."

He hit send, threw his cell on the coffee table and followed her into the bedroom. It was a generous-sized room decorated in white and blue like the rest of the cottage. The comforter was twisted in a heap in the middle of the king bed and the blue pillows were beaten into unnatural positions.

Megan turned on the bedside table lamp, skirted stiffly around him and shut off the overhead light.

"Now all we need is some soft music," he quipped.

She blushed. Again.

"I was just —"

"I know what you were doing, Megan. I'm just having a go."

"Oh."

"Can you sit? Or shall we do this standing?"

"Standing, please."

Gabriel knelt down in front of her, gently hooked the back of her ankle and placed her foot on his thigh. With as much tenderness as he could muster, he spread the gel on her foot. He could feel the heat of her skin through the cool aloe as his long fingers slid up her shin to her knee and around to her calf.

"How's that feel?"

"Good, better. Thanks," she said, putting her foot on the floor and placing the other on his thigh. "Thank you."

"I can tell you're Canadian."

"How? Did I say 'eh'?"

"No. It's just that you're so fucking polite. Canadians say please and thank you more than any people in any other country I've been to. I know I'm in Canada when all I can hear in a crowd is 'excuse me', 'may I?', 'do you mind?'."

"Have you traveled a lot?"

"A fair bit," he said, standing and moving behind her. "I'm going to do your shoulders now. Do you have a clip for your hair?"

Megan grabbed the butterfly clip from the nightstand and reached up but felt her towel slipping, so grabbed it instead.

"Here, let me." He took the clip from her, twisted her blonde shoulder-length hair and secured it in place. She shivered.

"You all right?"

"Yes, fine. Thank you." She turned her head and gave him a little forced smile.

He dipped his fingers in the bowl, rubbed the gel between his palms and laid his hands across the top of her shoulders. Megan shuddered again.

"Sorry."

"No, it's not you. You're being very gentle."

He moved his hands across her shoulders and down slightly, spreading a thin, even layer of aloe.

"It begs to be asked, Megan. If you fell asleep in the sun while lying on your back, how did your back get burned?"

"Good question," she huffed. "Maybe while I was on the snorkel boat this morning, though I did have a T-shirt on."

"Did you keep it on when you went in the water?"

"Ah, no."

"That would explain it. The water acts like a giant magnifying glass."

She was very quiet for a moment and Gabriel felt a pang of guilt for making her feel like an idiot. He was just about to give her an "it can happen to anybody" platitude when she looked over her shoulder.

"So, are you a musician?"

"Can't fool you, can I?" he said teasingly.

"Yeah, the guitar and eyeliner tipped me off."

She smiled a wicked grin and his hand stilled on her back. Her eyes were lovely – long, dark lashes framed the clearest blue – at least from what he could see in this light. Had he passed her on the street, he would've chalked her up as average. Tall, oval face, cute nose, wide mouth over lovely, even white teeth, pale complexion...nothing the

boys in the band would fight over—but bloody hell, when she smiled it transformed her into a head-fucking-turning beauty.

The Julia Roberts effect—from plain to my-place-or-yours in the space of a smile.

In addition to finishing the album, Gabriel decided to make it his personal goal to see how many of those dazzling smiles he could squeeze out of her in the next week.

“So, what do you do for a living?” she asked.

“I play in a band. Didn’t we just do this?”

“Oh, you mean it’s a full-time gig? I’m sorry, I thought maybe you did it as a hobby, you know, jam with the boys at the local bar after hours. That kind of thing. I have a few friends in a jazz band and they all have day jobs.”

“No, it’s a full-time thing...” She’d obviously been in a lot of pain and confused when they’d met earlier, but it never occurred to him that she couldn’t possibly *not* know who he was.

“Megan? You have absolutely no idea who I am, do you?” he asked and continued to spread the goop down her upper arms. She was feverishly hot. Even through his desensitized, calloused fingertips he could feel the heat radiating off her. It was no wonder she was in pain.

“Sure, you’re, um...Gabriel Law?” It sounded more like a question than a statement.

“Gemma and Ash, they’ve never mentioned me?”

“Not that I recall, exactly. I don’t...um...I don’t really see Ash often. He’s only been in the restaurant once or twice—I’m assistant manager at Gemma’s Toronto—and I’ve spoken to him on the telephone...” She was starting to look rather uncomfortable. “He’s a nice guy, isn’t he?”

Clear attempt at a subject change. He used the maneuver many times himself when he was trying to get out of a sticky situation.

Gabriel, last night was fantastic! Will you call me?

To which he'd reply, *That sheet suits you. You should always walk around in white linen. Oh, look at the time, I'm late for rehearsal! Shall I call you a cab?*

He wanted to laugh. He wanted to squeeze her until she popped. Here he was, stuck sharing accommodation with an average-looking female who turned into a goddess when she smiled, and she had no fucking idea that he was Gabriel Law, the famous Dark Angel of Rock, as dubbed by *Rolling Stone* magazine. Completely clueless to the fact that he fronted a multi-Grammy-winning rock group, had circled the fucking globe touring for the better part of two decades. And, *excuse the fuck out of me*, had been *People's Sexiest Man Alive* on three occasions, beating both Brad and George-fucking-Clooney.

Fucking charming!

His ego should have been shattered, but the situation was incredibly fucking amusing. Especially since she was sensitive enough to pretend to know him.

He was immediately struck by a sense of freedom, like dropping a heavy box he hadn't even realized he was carrying. He didn't have to worry about being "on". He didn't have to worry that she'd be on her cell phone to the tabloids every night reporting his every move. She wouldn't be trying to take his picture while he sunbathed or scratched his balls in the morning, or collecting his hair to sell on eBay.

I think I love you, Sweet Megan.

But he intended to check her iPod, just to be sure.

"Have you known them long?"

"Gemma and Ash?" he asked, his mind having gone astray. "Ash and I were mates at Eton."

"Eton? Isn't that some posh—"

"Yes." *Posh, suffocating and ridiculously uptight.* "And Ash went on to become a financial genius, married the woman of my dreams—"

"Gemma?"

Ah, sweet Gem, best chef in the world with a God-given talent for blowjobs. “Yes, I introduced them—she was my bird first, ancient history—and I’m a bum who likes to jam with the boys after hours.” Ironically, that’s exactly how his old man would describe him, even now, after out-earning his family’s fortune tenfold. *Fucker.*

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it like—”

Gabriel realized he was scowling and quickly tucked away his resentment. “I know, Sweet Megan. I’m just fucking with you.”

“Oh,” she said, looking down at her feet.

Well done, Dark-fucking-Angel. Let’s try some tact.

“You like music?”

“Love it.”

“And you never...” *Heard of me? No, don’t go there, mate. That’s your fucking ego talking.* “So tell me, what kind of music floats Megan’s boat.”

“Jazz mostly. Coltrain, Ellington. My dad got me hooked. Everyone in school thought I was loopy at having Billie Holiday, Nina Simone and Ella Fitzgerald in my Discman rather than Bon Jovi.”

At least she had good taste. He would have gotten back on the fucking jet if she’d said Britney.

“Country?”

“Not my thing.”

Thank fucking God.

“Celine Dion?”

“Yes, but before you give me that disapproving scowl, you cannot tell me she can’t sing the hide off a horse. That girl has some pipes.”

“I’ll concede, but—”

"Nah!" She stopped him dead with her palm in the air. "Ms. Dion is Canadian. It's my patriotic obligation to own at least one CD."

"I'll give you that," he chuckled, but now it was time for the real test. "Rock?"

"A little. I like The Eagles, Genesis, Elton John."

Good answers, Sweet Megan, but I have to push. "Have you ever heard of U2? Bowie? Pink Floyd? Rough Cut?"

"Of course," she said sharply. "I haven't been living under a rock, you know. It's just not my kind of sound."

Interesting. At least she didn't run screaming from the room. "Mmmm."

"I've got a few Beyoncé songs on my iPod."

"Yeah, she's a..." *Sweetie*, he wanted to say. He'd known her since she was a teenager. "Talented girl," he finished.

"What kind of music does your band play?"

"Rock, mostly. Definitely not your kind of sound."

"Are you famous?" she asked. "Have I heard of you?"

"If my name hasn't drifted under that rock of yours, then I guess not," he teased.

"Do you play clubs and stuff?"

Clubs, stadiums, arenas, they even did a gig in a Saudi palace—a private performance for some young prince's eighteenth birthday. He made more money singing ten songs to an audience of fifty well-behaved teenagers than he'd made off his first album.

"Yeah," he said, clearing his throat. "We've done some club gigs."

He tugged lightly on the back of her towel. "You're going to have to drop this so I can do your back."

"Thanks but I can manage."

"No, you can't. Just drop the fucking thing, please."

"But—"

"Drop it."

She undid the flap and held the towel against her chest, letting the back fall away completely. Her ass, creamy white in stark contrast to her red back and legs, was exposed for his viewing pleasure. Actually, he only meant for her to loosen the towel so that it dropped lower on her back, but he must have startled her with his demand. Never mind. This would do rather nicely.

He tried to control his breathing, but fucking hell, it was the second time tonight he'd had the pleasure of seeing her pert little ass. A man could only take so much. He needed to think about something else.

"So tell me about you, Megan."

"Not much to tell, Gabriel." They both seemed to take pleasure in saying each other's names.

"Amuse me."

"I'm an average girl. I live in Toronto, in a nice condo which I shall own in approximately seventeen more years. I'm the youngest of two, my brother is a high school teacher in British Columbia, married, two kids—my brother, not me—which makes me an aunt to two adorable little boys who I hardly ever get to see except in pictures. My folks retired out west a few years ago to be closer to their grandchildren, so I don't see them much either. I drive a Honda, never had a drug, alcohol or gambling problem. I don't cook despite the fact that I work in a world-class restaurant—I'm smart enough to know where my talents lie and cooking is not one of them—love to eat dessert and, as you already know, I'm assistant manager of Gemma's. All very average. I'm Average Megan. Everyone's friend, no one's enemy."

"You don't sound average at all, Megan. You sound like a decent individual making her way in the world."

"Well thanks, Gabriel, but I believe you've just demoted me from average to boring."

A low, rumbling laugh erupted. "Boring? I doubt that." This girl's sense of humor made him smile, all the way to the inside.

"Besides, average girls don't have eyes the color of the ocean, Megan. Deep and enchanting. A man could get lost in those seas."

Megan couldn't believe she was standing half-naked while some rock dude spread gooey plant matter over her back. She desperately tried to stop the shivers from making her look like a dancing monkey by tensing her muscles. But when he complimented her eyes, she didn't think her lungs would be capable of sucking in another breath. She couldn't speak, not even a polite Canadian "thank you", so she simply stared at her feet.

Loser Express now leaving from Platform Seven...

He gradually made his way down to her lower back, just above her bikini line. She should have been burning with shame at the thought of his hands hovering over her bum crack, but Holy Hannah, it was turning her on. Or maybe it was the aloe fumes addling her brain.

Here she was with a well-traveled, observant, perhaps cultured—but the jury's still out on that point—hoodlum who plays a guitar and has a BlackBerry, but can't afford to stay in a hotel. Couldn't say it was what she had in mind when she was fantasizing about a holiday tryst, but it could work. Simple, brief, exciting. He certainly wasn't relationship material—she could just see the look on her mother's face if she showed up with a pierced, tattooed man on her arm—but she wasn't looking for that anyway.

"I'm going to do the tops of your thighs, Megan. Don't slap me or anything."

Slap him? With those magical hands roaming her flesh? No. She might turn around and jump him, but slapping was out. His palm slid up from the back of her knee, higher until his fingers followed the bottom curve of her butt. She could see him out of the corner of his eye. He was down on one knee, his face inches from her. *Inches from her ass,*

her pussy! She couldn't control the shiver this time and felt her entire body vibrate, like someone had banged a saucepan on her head.

"Cold?" he asked, starting on her other leg, delicately dabbing his way up her thigh.

"Yes." *No!* Goddamn, he was touching her ass and it felt so amazingly intimate. She hadn't had male hands on her in so long even this pathetic circumstance had her practically orgasmic. What if he could sense her arousal?

"A bad burn will do that. It's like having a fever, body's hot but you feel shivery." Gabriel wiped his fingers on the towel that hung at her side and stood. "Make sure you take an aspirin and drink a couple glasses of water before you go to bed. You're probably dehydrated."

"Thanks."

"Goodnight, Average Megan," he said and walked out the door.

* * * * *

Megan lay atop her beach towel in the middle of the bed. Somewhat relieved of her discomfort thanks to the aspirin—*Duh! Why didn't I think of that?*—and aloe, she cocked her head, straining to pick up sounds of him beyond her bedroom door—sleeping, working, breathing—she'd take anything. Once he'd laid those talented hands on her, she was hooked. His touch had sent mini-volts of electricity shooting through her veins, making her quiver like gelatin.

She was dying to ask again if he was famous, if she'd know the name of his band, but she'd filled her quota in looking like an idiot tonight.

Gabriel Law. Gabriel Law. Gabriel Law. The more she repeated it, the more familiar it sounded, like she'd heard it before. Somewhere. But damn, it wouldn't come to her. If she'd only brought her laptop, she could Google him. She could call Gemma, but it would surely get back to Gabriel via Ash, leaving her again looking like a total moron.

Gabriel Law. Gabriel Law. Gabriel Law.

Jude Law! Maybe that's why it sounded familiar.

Wide awake, she glanced up at the glowing green numbers on the alarm clock. It was only midnight. She would just be getting home from work about now.

She closed her eyes and willed sleep to come, but his satiny voice kept bubbling up in her brain. *A man could get lost in those seas.* The very words replayed over and over and each time, Megan felt the same excited rush hit her middle as when he'd said it the first time.

He said "fuck" a lot. Fuck, fucking, fucker. Foul language that Megan normally attributed to unintelligent people who couldn't think of an appropriate adjective. Or verb. Or noun.

Come to think of it, fuck was an amazingly versatile word.

Her brain must have gotten fried along with the rest of her because for some reason, it sounded like the sexiest word in the English language when Gabriel Law said it. *I'm going to fuck you, Megan, you sex goddess of my dreams, all fucking night...*

Oh yeah, that would work. Although, when she thought about it, that proper British accent and liquid silver growl could make anything sound sexy. Perhaps over breakfast she could get him to say, "The ferocious fucker of a rodent shat in my slimy fucking knickers", just to see if her knees buckled with passion. Megan giggled into her pillow.

Chapter Two

Monday

Gabriel heard Megan moving about in her bedroom so he knew she was awake. Probably the noise when the delivery company came with the piano, compliments of Ash. That was his lame surprise. He much preferred the girl.

He sat on the bench and ran his hand over the polished black surface. Not quite the standard of instrument he was used to but this little upright would do the trick.

Last night, before he'd had the pleasure of running his hands over Sweet Average Megan, he'd texted Ash a piece of his mind, and he had a reply waiting for him this morning.

Apologies, DA! Wasn't aware that G gave keys 2 M Frost. Last-min arrngmt.

Ash went on to suggest that Megan be transferred to a hotel for the duration of the week—which he would reimburse, of course, & *G says HANDS-OFF, she's a nice young girl who dsn't need corrupting!!*

The last line of his message was obnoxiously written in caps. *UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES ARE U 2 B DISTRACTED FRM YR WORK. Pls make clear 2 M Frost. Peter says hullo, ring him whn u can.*

Bugger. Every time he got together with Ash lately, Tracy Bonham's "Mother Mother" played in his head like a fucking soundtrack.

If I tell you what you want to hear, will it help you to sleep well at night...I'm losing my mind, everything's fine.

And as for Peter the Tool, sod him.

No distractions.

It was bloody hard *not* to be distracted by the sight of a naked woman lying on his floor—a tall, curvy blonde with an ass that he could not get out of his head. Even with

the streak of angry red flesh across the bottom of her luscious ass cheeks she was a fucking turn-on.

Gabriel flipped up the keyboard lid and his right hand immediately centered itself on the octave above middle C. His fingers played of their own accord, translating the tune that had been running through his head all night. The words of the chorus came to him as if they were being spoken into his ear...

Hands off, head down (can't take the action)

Step back, turn around (she's just a distraction)

'Cause she's not your average girl

No, no, no

She's not your average girl

He walked over to his twelve-string—he always composed unplugged—closed his eyes and plucked the melody out on his guitar. Just like old times, the words and music, arranged down to the last drumbeat, bubbled up through his brain like fresh, clear spring water.

He hadn't even seen her come out of her bedroom, he'd been so deep inside his own head. But there she was, standing in the kitchen in the most hideous tent dress he'd ever seen. It was shiny like satin and covered in pink paisleys.

He walked over to the breakfast bar for a better look.

"Good morning. Or should I say afternoon."

"Good afternoon," she said, meeting his eyes for a moment before going back to her task of spreading jam on a thick slice of bread.

"Plans today?" he asked as she turned her back and bent over to put the bread and jam back into the fridge. God, that ass. God, that dress! It had to go.

"I had planned on visiting the caves, but I'm afraid my sunburn has ixnayed the ansplay, so I'll probably just hide in my room with a book until the sun goes down.

You?" Back at the counter, opposite him at the breakfast bar, she brought the hunk of bread to her mouth and tore off a large piece with her straight white teeth.

"I've got to work. Songwriting..." He was watching her chew, mesmerized by her mouth, pale pink lips with softly curving edges, plump and perfectly ripe for kissing. He must have made her uncomfortable because she put her fingers in front of her mouth before swallowing.

"Did you want – ?" She pointed to her plate.

"Nah –"

"'Cause I could make you –"

"No, I'm cool." But he really wasn't. He needed to prolong this little tête-à-tête, get more out of her before she and her billowing dress hid away in her bedroom. "Yeah, all right then."

She retrieved the bread and jam from the fridge, teasing him with the non-view, the shadow of a shape of her ass. *Fucking hell.*

He couldn't help but notice her ringless fingers as she slid the knife back and forth through the loaf. She had clean, neatly trimmed nails and her long, delicate fingers made spreading jam on bread somehow elegant.

"I won't disturb you if I stick around the cottage, will I? 'Cause I can always take a taxi tour or –"

His mouth now full, he shook his head.

He tracked her with his eyes as she tidied up. Her movements were conservative, stilted, like she was trying bravely to move without showing any discomfort. Poor thing. Maybe he should offer to apply more aloe. Maybe this time he wouldn't get a hard-on while doing it.

Maybe this time, he'd get one and act on it.

"Can I listen?" He looked at her blankly, his mind trying to sort back through the horny haze. "To your song, the one you're writing?"

"Sure, if you'd like." He shoved the last bite into his mouth.

"I'd like."

He nodded and swallowed. "Madam, the studio." And with a mock bow, swept his arm toward the living room.

* * * * *

Gabriel Law had the sexiest speaking voice she'd ever heard, but when he sang, Megan's very soul left this earthly plane. Potent, expressive, raw, his voice evoked a physical reaction—the warmth flowed over her like water, invading every pore.

She sat quietly and listened as he ran over a few of his new songs before giving her a tour of GarageBand, a program on his computer that put all the pieces together, from voice to rhythm. It was a fascinating process and she couldn't resist plying him with questions before she began to feel guilty and finally left him to work in peace. He was so damn talented, she couldn't understand why he hadn't made it big yet. Poor guy, he so much as admitted he couldn't even afford a hotel room.

She took her book onto the patio and hid in the shade of the hibiscus. Eighteen pages later, he joined her and they lounged on their respective chaises in silence.

Megan was aware of every passing second, every minute, every breath. She propped the back of the chaise one more degree forward and tried to focus on her book. Tried. But if anyone was keeping score, they'd know she hadn't turned a page in the half-hour since he'd come outside. She couldn't help it. No matter how hard she stared at the page in front of her, trying to make some sense out of the string of words, she was far too distracted by the view in her periphery.

Gabriel lay flat on his back, a thin gleam of sweat covering his long, muscular limbs. He wore a pair of very short, hip-hugging, low-riding swim shorts. Even in his relaxed and reclined position she could clearly see a four-pack. No, wait. Maybe a six-pack, but she'd have to go in for a closer look later.

He wasn't very hairy—a dusting of dark hair on his lower legs and oh, those long, well-defined thighs! She could hardly breathe just thinking about running her fingers up the front of those muscles, playfully going to the center for a feel.

A tiny noise came from the back of her throat, completely unsolicited, forcing Megan to stage a cough and throat clear to cover it up.

His chest was bare but for that line that gathered around his bellybutton and headed down the center before disappearing...

Don't go there, Megan. Bloody fucking hell! Read the book. Read the book! I'm reading my book. Dum de de dum de dum, just reading my book. Where the fucking bloody hell was I?

Shit. Now her inner voice was speaking with an English accent. *Bloody fucking hell?* What was that? She had a potty-mouthed Queen Victoria in her head!

She couldn't stand it. Her eyes, shaded by the large brim of her hat, wandered sideways again. Holy Hannah, they just didn't come any hotter than Gabriel Law.

Megan had never considered body art a turn-on in the past, but hot damn if her opinion wasn't being changed. As in, complete one-eighty. He had a tattoo that covered practically his entire left shoulder and biceps—a silver-blue angel's wing, with a tarnished gold halo hanging off the curled wing tip. The image looked familiar. It had a Renaissance feel to it so maybe he'd taken it from a famous piece of art or something. If she could muster the nerve, she'd ask him about it. But if she asked, he'd know she was checking him out.

So what?

So what. He probably had women checking him out all the time. But Megan really didn't want to be one of those other women.

There were more tattoos—a staff of musical notes around his other biceps that she noticed when he lifted his arm to adjust his chair, and something across the back of his shoulder blades, but she had yet to get a close enough look. She would just have to wait

until he turned over. Then she would get to ogle that broad, muscled back and that amazing butt.

He had one of those lovely Mediterranean complexions that was bronzing up to a shade that reminded her of the caramelized sugar Chef used to make mini-sculptures Megan liked to call dessert art. The same color she'd hoped to be before her brilliant performance in Lily-White Canadian Girl Zonks in the Sun, not the best role of her career.

His hair, pushed back from his forehead with his sunglasses, shone like black onyx. The red streaks were gone—must have been temporary—as was most of the hardware, and he'd shaved off the soul patch, leaving her to focus on his pillowy bottom lip.

His eyes were closed, his breathing easy and steady and by the way his muscle-mag defined pecs rose and fell, rose and fell, rose and fell, she suspected he might be asleep. She found herself trying to match his rhythm, inhaling on his rise, exhaling on his fall. Within a couple cycles she felt like she was suffocating so she took a few deep breaths to refill her lungs. It was either that or pant, and she was *so* not going there.

She took a large breath of hibiscus-scented air and, deciding he was asleep, turned for a good long stare. A moment later, he lazily pulled his sunglasses down so they rested just above the bump on his nose and rolled onto his side to face her. Megan whipped her head back to the book and deliberately turned the page, eager to demonstrate that she was indeed reading and not thinking about the sexy vibes rising off him like heated air above a barbeque.

"Megan?"

"Hmm?" she said, turning slowly from her book, pretending she'd just noticed him.

Six-pack!

"Throw an old man a fucking bone and put your bikini on."

She could feel the corners of her mouth twitch. Trust him to come up with a line like that and make it sound sexy. "Musician *and* comedian?"

"And I dance," he said, low, husky. "Come on, girl. Bless me with your flesh."

"You've already seen my flesh, remember?" Her cheeks burned thinking about the way his gentle hands felt on her bum.

"Why do you think I'm asking for an encore? I only got the back view, but what I really want is the three-sixty."

"I dunno, Rock Dude. Don't you boys-in-the-band usually go for models and such? I'd be quite a shock to your overstretched eyeballs."

His laugh, deep and rumbling, bubbled up and spilled over her like hot tub water. He rolled onto his back, straddled the chaise and stood. "You're a treat, Average Megan."

"What? What's so funny?" Megan didn't know if he was laughing at her or with her.

"Yeah, I've seen plenty of naked models." He stretched his arms up and swiveled side to side, showing off the ripples on his stomach. Megan tried not to faint. "Nothing much to them. They look like sticks without their fucking bark."

She couldn't help the laugh that burst out. It was a giggle really, worthy of a crushing twelve-year-old. She bit it back and tried to compose herself back to Calm Casual Girl Who is Not Smitten. It was really hard.

"What's with the tent dress anyway?"

"I found it in the closet. It must be Gemma's," she said as she smoothed the material over her thighs. "It's cute, don't you think? And the satin is cool against my skin. It's the only thing that doesn't dig into me anywhere. Even my undies seemed to hit all the sensitive places so I had to toss —"

Oh shit, TMI.

Megan couldn't see the expression in his eyes through his dark shades, but she did see one black eyebrow — the pierced one — go up and realized that she'd just admitted to

being naked under her generous dress. She felt yet another blush creep into her cheeks almost before she finished the sentence.

He walked toward her chaise and stood over her. He reached out his hand. Megan didn't know what he was doing, but she took it and he tugged her up so she was standing in front of him. She couldn't see his eyes, damn it. Was he making fun of her? She reached up, noticing the tremor in her hand only as it lifted into her vision and pushed his glasses up into his hair.

Nope. Definitely not laughing at me.

His green eyes shone like gems. She could feel the heat, feel the depth of his gaze reach into her. His long fingers rested intimately against her palm, his thumb circling the back of her hand. His eyes dropped to her lips, then back to her eyes again. He sucked in his bottom lip in a quick motion, moistening it. He was going to kiss her.

Holy Hannah, Gabriel Law is going to kiss me.

As her eyelids began their feminine flutter downward, Gabriel tugged her hand and stepped away.

"Fancy an ice cream?"

"A what?" Megan's eyes popped open. It was like waking abruptly from a dream. He still held on to her hand, but the rubbing had stopped.

"Come on. I saw a place down the road. You can double me on your moped."

Megan stepped out of her bedroom wearing a sky blue tube top—she still couldn't bear bra straps cutting into her shoulders—and a flared, white eyelet-lace skirt that modestly touched the tops of her knees. Her strappy sandals, so cute she *had* to have them for the trip even though they were way overpriced, were not an option. The tops of her feet were covered in tiny water blisters that were going to scream if they broke.

She covered her legs, feet, shoulders and arms with sunscreen and met Gabriel outside. He was already straddling the Honda scooter, still in his black short-shorts,

long, roped thighs deliciously exposed, but had added a faded U2 *Zooropa* T-shirt. He watched her come down the stairs. Thankfully, she was no longer smoldering like an abandoned campfire. The aloe obviously worked its medicinal wonders overnight, calming the blazing red into blush pink. Any moment now she expected to peel like a damn onion. But knowing he was watching her was enough to make her straighten her shoulders and keep her head up high.

"Barefoot?"

"I have some annoying little water blisters on the tops of my feet."

"Ah. Shall I carry you?"

Yes! Take me in those massive arms so I can bury my face in your shoulder and breathe you in like cake flour! "No, I'm good." *Ouch, ow, damn stones!*

He was supposed to ride pillion, but she had no idea how they were both going to fit on the small motorbike. He took up practically the entire seat. And it would be damn hard for her to balance with him on the back.

He handed her a white half-shell helmet and secured the other on his own head. Oleander Cycles was written prominently across the top, just above the black plastic snap-on visor.

"Do I look as bloody ridiculous in this as you do?"

No, you look like a damn sex machine and I want you to ride me mercilessly.

"Absolutely ludicrous. Wish I had a camera."

"Thought so."

"Scootch back, Mr. Law. I'm driving."

"No. And don't argue, woman."

"Excuse me?" She pretended outrage, but the hot burst of lust that accompanied the way he called her "woman" threw her off balance.

"You're barefoot, you're lighter and you're not used to driving on the left-hand side of the road," he stated. "I'm driving."

"But I'm wearing a skirt!"

"Sidesaddle. You'll just have to hang on to me for support."

Megan tried not to look as eager as she felt when she planted her butt behind his and placed her hands on his sides. Rippled hardness beneath her light grip. She didn't wrap her arms around him like she wanted to, somehow managed to refrain from pressing her chest against his back and wrapping her arms as tightly around him as she could. Instead, she tried to maintain a nonchalant appearance, and hoped to God he couldn't hear her heart pounding over the putt-putt of the little engine.

She only wished she could sit astride so her inner thighs could snuggle up against his ass. *Danger, Will Robinson.*

"You may want to hold on a bit tighter," he said as they started up the rocky drive. He grabbed one of her wrists and pulled it around to his middle, then did the same with the other. "I don't want to lose you over a bump."

* * * * *

"Vanilla?" she asked when he came out holding two cones, the chocolate one for her.

"What's wrong with vanilla?" he asked, taking a seat beside her on a bench in the shade.

"Nothing, I guess. It happens to one of my favorites, but I'm surprised that you would pick something so," *unremarkable, boring*, "average, plain. I had you pegged as a mint chocolate chip kind of guy, or maybe rocky road." She purposely didn't order the vanilla lest she knock her average status down to mundane. There was simply no imagination in vanilla, or so she thought.

"There's nothing plain about it, Megan, and contrary to popular belief, vanilla *is* a flavor."

"Technically, yes."

“Vanilla is rich, pure, creamy.” He drew the last word out before running his tongue up the side of the rounded mound. His eyes, flashing a mixture of mischief and lust, locked on hers, sending her wicked thoughts of other mounds under that tongue. “And I don’t like to have to chew my ice cream. I like it smooth, so it melts in my mouth and slides down my throat.” His eyes grew dark as the corners of his mouth twitched up. His thigh brushed against hers.

Megan gulped, his innuendo was as clear as the cloudless sky. Heat pooled between her legs, making her sorry she didn’t wear panties. She squirmed in her seat, felt the slickness between her thighs.

“You’re dripping.”

Gah! How could he know? She was dizzy with excitement, embarrassment, and the feverish heat that began between her legs rose all the way up her body until her cheeks reddened in a full-on blush. She pressed her thighs tightly together. Maybe he could smell her. She inhaled deeply, searching for that telltale scent of arousal, but all she smelled was flowers, ice cream and him—his masculine, sun-touched skin, like a breeze from heaven.

“You’d better start licking,” he said, holding out a napkin. His eyes locked on her lips.

Megan glanced down. *Ah, dripping.* Her knuckles were covered in rivers of chocolate as the ice cream succumbed to the heat.

“Come, let’s go for a walk,” he said, rising.

They left the parking lot of Bailey’s Ice Cream, Megan carefully avoiding stones and keeping to the grassy patches. She walked one step behind him, madly licking her cone and staring at his backside.

I’ll take a scoop of ice cream and a cuppable ass, to go.

She stifled a giggle.

She followed his lead onto the sidewalk which was shaded by a row of evenly spaced, stubby palm trees. Gabriel's attention was on the rowdy party that was in full swing on the patio of a pub across the narrow street.

"Did you want to go over?" she asked from behind him.

"Sorry?"

"The Swizzle Inn." She flicked her chin forward. "Did you want to go hang out?"

She looked back at the party in progress and realized that a few of the revelers openly stared back at them. One of them pointed and said something to the others at his table and all heads turned toward them. Megan instantly looked down to make sure her tube top was in place. No wardrobe malfunctions here, thank goodness. Gabriel took the black wraparound sunglasses that hung on the neckband of his T-shirt and fixed them onto his face. He hooked his arm through hers and picked up the pace, positioning her between him and the road.

Ouch, ow, damn! Hot pavement. This wasn't a good idea.

As much as she liked the contact, her arm linked casually through his like lovers, the soles of her feet were taking a beating. She untwined her arm and skirted around the back of him so she could walk on the grassy embankment.

"Bloody hell. Sorry," he said, looking at her feet. "I forgot. There's a park just up ahead. Think you can make it?"

"No prob," she lied and dropped her sunglasses back onto her nose.

They walked in silence, Megan lapping up her ice cream before it started dripping onto her white skirt. If she wasn't so obsessed with watching Gabriel eat his ice cream, the way his tongue flattened itself against the cool mound as he twirled the cone with his long, tapered fingers; if she wasn't so obsessed with the way his cheeks hollowed when he used his lips—his luscious, archer's bow lips—to suck at the peak, all the while trying to keep her balance on the sloping grass; if she wasn't so obsessed with trying to keep up with his long-legged stride and thinking about those short-shorts only seen in

Italian *Vogue* hugging his tush, she might have noticed the patrons across the street snapping photos and shouting “Angel”.

They turned at the entrance into the park just as Gabriel popped the last of the cone into his mouth. Megan had never enjoyed an ice-cream cone more. It’s a pity she couldn’t even taste hers.

He took her hand, loosely holding her fingers, and they walked in silence, listening to the breeze ruffle through the trees and the call of birds she’d never heard before.

“Why do I get the feeling you know where you’re going?”

“I was here when I was a kid,” he said and led her off the path. They walked on a grassy decline toward a wall of bushes and trees. As they got closer, she could see that there was an opening in the greenery, and beyond, a small wooden platform that hung over the edges of a blue lagoon.

“They used to have a dolphin show here.”

The platform railings had built-in bench seats that went around three sides. Megan reluctantly dropped Gabriel’s hand and leaned across it to drop a few pieces of her cone into the water, delighted when little black-and-yellow-striped fish came from the depths to gobble up the crumbs.

“Sergeant majors,” she whispered, recalling the snorkeling trip.

“And wrasse, and those orange ones with the big eyes are squirrelfish,” Gabriel said from over her shoulder. When he spoke, so quiet and deep, the sensuous rumble of his voice sent pulses of pleasure down her neck and straight to her groin. Megan could feel the heat of his body on her left side, though they weren’t touching.

“God, look at this water!” she said, pushing her sunglasses up to the top of her head. “I’ve never seen anything so beautiful. How do you even describe this color?”

“Aquamarine,” he said, taking a step back and doing the same with his sunglasses.

“You think? I’d go more with turquoise.”

“Nope, aquamarine.”

“Musician *and* colorologist?” she chided, smiling up at him.

He placed his palm against the side of her face, his thumb caressing her cheekbone. His eyes darkened. “I know it’s aquamarine, Average Megan, because it’s the exact stunning color as your eyes. Crystal clear, with flecks of dark blue and a hint of green...” He held her gaze a moment before dropping his head, cocking it slightly to the side.

The press of his lips, still cool from the ice cream, was slow and sweet. Nothing like Megan imagined. This bad-boy rocker, so full of cocky confidence, exuding raw male sexuality—she half expected to be ravaged. But the delicate touch of his lips, a cool, tender pressure, almost respectful, was a complete and utter surprise.

He pulled back a fraction and whispered against her lips, “I don’t want to scare you.”

Megan’s eyelids fluttered open. His green eyes, inches from hers, seemed to be probing her very soul, sifting through her memories, gauging her desires, her needs. She swallowed hard.

She didn’t want him to stop and she certainly didn’t want him to hold back. She’d seen what those long, smooth fingers could do on his guitar and piano and damn it, she wanted those hands on her flesh. She wanted to be plucked and strummed, his intense focus dedicated to making her body sing.

Her gaze drifted to his mouth. Pillowed to perfection, those lips did naughty things to her insides when he sang, or talked, or ate, or smiled. The bottom, a bit plumper than the top, had a curving softness that belied the hard angle of his jaw. She wanted those lips on her, all over her, inside her. And she wanted to lick them, suck them, bite them.

She didn’t realize that the little groan she heard had come from the back of her own throat.

“Bloody hell,” he rasped, deep and sexy. His hands clutched her waist, his thumbs resting just under her breasts, and he hauled her against his solid chest. She

immediately felt the reason he didn't want to scare her. An enormous erection pressed into her belly, the hard shaft contradicting the gentleness of his kiss.

His tongue swept across her bottom lip before his mouth captured hers, hard, hungry and demanding. She latched on immediately, sucking his luscious lower lip into her mouth. She felt his cock jerk between them, jealous and needy.

He slid his hands around her back and down to her backside, cupping her ass, pulling her tighter against him. A flash of pain made Megan's muscles tense up and she pulled her mouth from his long enough to gasp, "Sunburn."

"Sorr—" he began, but before he could finish his apology she had his bottom lip between her teeth, sucking, biting, licking at it the way she'd fantasized since she'd seen him singing. Could a mouth possibly be that big of a turn-on? He tasted like a heady mix of mulled wine and sunshine. Spicy, masculine and intoxicating, like his aroma. She didn't know it was possible for male flesh to smell so erotically pleasing. She wanted to lick every inch of him, and please God, hoped he wanted to do the same to her.

His hands carefully made their way back to her rib cage. The thin, elasticized material of her tube top was all that separated them. The calloused pads of his thumbs caressed the undersides of her breasts. Oh, the tease! She wanted those hands higher, pinching her, owning her. Her flesh burned to be set free, her nipples tightening and peaking at the thought. His palms drifted higher, cupping her, rubbing her nipples against the flat of his palms until she arched her back and groaned against his mouth.

He trailed kisses across her cheek and down her neck, nipping at her flesh, leaving a path of molten fire as he drifted lower across her shoulder and down her chest.

He sat on the bench and positioned her in front of him, between his legs, so his head was level with her breasts. His tongue dipped below the band of her tube top and it was all Megan could do to keep from screaming, "YES!" Using his teeth, he tugged until her breasts slipped free.

Half-naked in broad daylight and her modesty switch didn't trip. In fact, she wanted to rip the rest of her clothes off here and now and press her body against him, feel his eyes on her nakedness, in this public park where anyone could stumble upon them. She wanted him to fuck her, not make love, but fuck her hard and fast. Take pleasure from her body as she would surely take pleasure from his, right here, right now, in the open, surrounded by nature. Let the whole world see that she was Gabriel Law's woman.

These brazen images created a rush of moisture between her legs, her pussy preparing to welcome him.

Gabriel flicked his tongue over her nipple before drawing it into his mouth, sucking and swirling, nipping and tugging. She grasped the back of his head, dug her fingers deep into the silky thickness of his hair and held him tightly against her. She was so wet, so ready, she practically vibrated.

Gabriel's hand slid down her skirt until he found the bare flesh at the back of her knees. The journey back up was made under the skirt. He caressed the back of her thigh gently, drawing higher until his palm skimmed across the curve of her butt. She felt him smile against her breast when he realized she'd gone commando. His mouth left her aching nipple as he stood up.

"Better not stand on any subway vents," he murmured before pressing a simmering kiss on her lips. His hands roamed her backside, carefully avoiding her sunburn. He rubbed his palms over her rounded cheeks, squeezing and kneading. Then he ran his middle finger lightly down the cleft. Megan squirmed. Nobody had ever done that to her before and who the hell knew that some ass touching could have this astonishingly horny effect?

He did it again but let his finger drift farther down, until finally, instead of stopping at the bottom of her ass, he pressed farther and slid effortlessly into her wet pussy. Megan's hips tilted backward, pushing her ass into the air and giving him better access.

It was his turn to groan. Gabriel slipped his finger into her creamy channel and swirled it around. Megan wound her hands into the sides of his shirt, gripped him and squeezed the muscles of her inner walls around him. Dripping with her juices, his finger slid back up her ass, using her moisture to glide deeper.

"You like that, Sweet Megan?"

Flustered, mindless, she choked out a "yes" and ran her tongue up the side of his neck.

"Good, because I'm going to make you come, right here, right now."

Megan nearly came just hearing his voice in her ear. His hand slowly circled 'round to the front and cupped her pussy.

Her hips rocked forward, pressing into the warmth of his palm. One finger pressed against the folds of her wet labia, teasing her but not entering. God, she wanted him. She wanted to come for him. She wanted to throw her head back and scream his name.

While their mouths bumped and nipped with hungry kisses, Megan slipped her hands under his T-shirt and roamed the hot, hard flesh of his broad chest and back. Gabriel increased the pressure on her mons with the heel of his hand, causing Megan to wiggle her hips and grind against him.

When his fingers finally slipped inside her, brushing against her throbbing slit, she nipped his bottom lip, not daring to release the breath that filled her lungs. Her body shuddered against him, the rush of sexual abandonment filling her completely.

They both began to pant, breathing the sea air deeply into their lungs as they explored each other with their hands.

"I'm sure I saw him turn in here."

Gabriel and Megan froze.

"Dude, stalking is so uncool."

Voices—and they were coming closer. Harshly yanked from their erotic dance, Megan and Gabriel stood stock still, their lips inches apart.

"It's not stalking. And we can pretend we're just, y'know, walking."

There were two guys on the path, moving in their general direction. Gabriel, his eyes toward the camouflaged entrance to the platform, dropped his hand from under her skirt, leaving Megan to hike up her tube top. She watched his face and saw his jaw clench, a flicker of annoyance then a mask of calm.

She was annoyed too, damn it!

"It's probably not even him."

"Oh, it's him. Trust me."

They waited, not moving an inch until the two men passed the turnoff for the platform.

"Who are they looking for?" Megan asked quietly. "You?"

Gabriel shook his head dismissively and shrugged. He leaned down, his jaw brushing against hers, and whispered in her ear, "Time to go."

Megan nodded against him, completely at sea. She went from near-orgasmic to zero in about ten seconds.

"You wait here, I'll get the bike." He turned and started to walk away, changed his mind and came back. Megan stood, stunned, not quite grasping what in Holy Hannah's handbasket was going on. "Second thought, wait a few minutes then come out to the road if you can, and I'll pick you up there." He bent and pecked her on her nose.

She watched him cautiously look around before sprinting up the incline, across the path and into the low scrub on the other side. He must be taking a shortcut.

Megan waited a few minutes and followed. Did he mean for her to cut through the bushes too? Or stay on the path? She looked down at her bare feet and decided to stick to the path.

Her mind was doing somersaults. Were those men looking for Gabriel? Or was Gabriel just trying to protect her from being caught in dishabille?

This was something for the travel journal. *Dear Diary, today I was felt up by some second-rate rocker dude in a public place in broad daylight when all of a sudden...*

"Man, this was a waste of time." The voices were behind her, just around a bend in the path. "Chasing fucking ghosts."

"No way, man, it was him!"

Without thinking, Megan made a dash into the low bushes and crouched down in a carpet of dark green leafy plants.

"Too many rum swizzles, dude."

"Yeah, like me and how many others spotted him?"

"Whatever. Let's just get back to the pitcher. And I'm warning you, if there's none left I'm going to kick your ass."

She waited until they were out of earshot before leaving her hiding place. Why the hell she was hiding in the first place, she had no idea.

Gabriel emerged on the path a moment later, still looking ridiculously sexy in his half-shell helmet. He handed one to her and waited for her to get on the back.

"Nuh-uh," she said. "I'm driving."

He shrugged and slid back on his long legs. She had to step over his calves to slide onto the front of the scooter.

"Home?" she asked. He nodded.

She pulled out into the narrow roadway and opened her mouth to ask him to explain their little game of hide-and-go-seek but stopped abruptly before any sound emerged.

Megan Frost swallowed a bug.

* * * * *

"This is delicious, Gabriel," Megan said, lifting another piece of barbecued tuna to her mouth. She closed her eyes and let the buttery smoothness of the perfectly grilled

rare steak melt on her tongue before letting her teeth get in on the action. There was a hint of citrus punctuated with a dash of cracked pepper.

“So how can a girl who manages one of the best restaurants in the world not know how to cook?” he asked.

Megan got that question a lot.

“I love food, went to culinary school, sucked big time, switched to hotel and restaurant management, and there started my climb within Gemma’s empire.”

“Go back to the part where you sucked.”

“Think of it like this—you can judge figure skating in the Olympics without ever having won a gold medal, right?”

“Correct.”

“You can handcraft the most magnificent guitar in the world, but it doesn’t mean you’re the best musician, yes?”

“Correct again.”

“Well, that’s me. I just don’t have the knack in the kitchen. My sauces broke and I burned everything I touched. To be a really good chef, you have to have impeccable timing and an innate sensitivity for blending, nurturing and creating. I had the desire but not ability. I have the rudimentary skills but no talent. What I *do* have is excellent business acumen and highly refined taste buds. I can spot a dash of coriander from a hundred paces, smell fresh tarragon from two streets away and have an impeccable palate.” She stopped to spear a tender shoot of young asparagus. “And this, I must say, is one of the best home-cooked meals I’ve ever had.”

Gabriel smiled and picked up his wine.

“Where on earth did you learn to cook like this?”

“I’m a picky eater and I like to eat well, so I had to learn.”

“Well, if this music thing doesn’t pan out, give me a call. I’ll hire you.”

Gabriel turned his head and spewed his wine, the accompanying laughter coming from deep inside. "And you, Average Megan, can sit at my table anytime."

She was so glad they were over the awkwardness that seemed to hover since they had arrived home from the park. The look on his face when they'd returned to the cottage earlier had not invited conversation. He disappeared to the loft, so Megan flopped on the couch with her book. After a while, he came down, showered and silently puttered around the kitchen until he called her for dinner.

Now that he was smiling again, she thought it safe to move on to regular conversation.

"You mentioned that you don't eat meat."

"Except for fish. And very little dairy."

"Vegan?"

"Not by choice," he grumbled.

"Explain?"

"Have you ever had a gallbladder attack?"

"No."

"I never want one again either and those two food groups seem to trigger one every time."

"Ah." She remained silent for a moment before asking, "What drew you to music?"

"Long, tragic version or short, happy one?"

"The true one."

"Well, let's see..." He picked up the wine bottle and topped up their glasses. When he began to speak she sensed his hesitation, like he was deciding how much to share. "My mother was a pianist and naturally had me studying piano, violin and any other instrument I showed any interest in. I knew from a very early age that I wanted to follow in her footsteps. But my pompous ass of a father decided that the arts was for girls and insisted — no, fucking demanded — that I follow in his footsteps."

"Which is?"

"My father is a jeweler. He owns some shops." Gabriel took a quick gulp of wine before continuing. "Anyway, he liked to belittle the arts, say things like men are supposed to be in business, they must be the breadwinners of the family, not some flighty, artsy-fartsy pansies twinkling their fingers across a piano. He's a real fucker, Megan, I promise you. He drove me pretty hard, got me into Eton, where I met Ash." Gabriel stopped and swirled the stem between his thumb and forefinger, his gaze fixed on the golden liquid which appeared motionless. She had the feeling that this little story hadn't been told in a very long time. Perhaps never.

"I probably would have become a concert pianist, but I purposely chose rock and roll because I knew my father would hate it. I wanted to pick a direction that would bring in a bigger paycheck than Daddy Dearest and his precious business degree. It was a gamble, but I had the arrogant confidence of youth driving me."

Megan stared at the arrogantly confident man who sat across from her and could feel his boyhood pain. She could imagine how difficult it must have been, never pleasing the one man who should have been proud of his son's talent. She reached across the table and placed her hand over his.

"You'll do it, Gabriel. You are so damn talented, I know you'll become a huge star one day and overwhelm him with your gift."

"Oh sweetheart..." He turned his hand so they were palm to palm and smiled.

As he brought his wineglass to his lips she thought he said, "I already have," but his words were lost in the goblet.

* * * * *

Megan lay atop the sheet, the ceiling fan slowly whirling around above her in the dark. She couldn't remember when she'd enjoyed a meal and dinner conversation more. After a dessert of fresh fruit, they had sat on the low wall just beyond their patio that overlooked the crashing waves of Bermuda's south shore. Gabriel had brought out his

guitar, sang a few ballads for her – she’d thought she recognized a few from the radio, but couldn’t recall what band did them originally.

She loved to watch his neck when he sang, the thick vein on the left that pulsed when he got to a particularly passionate verse. The way he sometimes closed his eyes and knit his brows – she liked those moments best. She could indulge and stare at his beautiful face, drink in every detail, every plane and shadow without him knowing. As long as she remembered to look away.

“Gabriel Law. Gabriel Law. Gabriel Law,” she whispered in the dark, in love with the way it rolled in her mouth. A strong “g” followed by the soft sounds of the “br”, “l” and “w”. Hard followed by soft, caramelized sugar on crème brûlée. Yum.

“Gabriel Law. Gabriel Law. Gabriel Law.” Her name was so harsh in comparison. “Megan Frost.” So cold. “Gabriel Law. Megan Frost Law.”

She inhaled deeply and let it out in a big sigh. After their interlude in the park, she’d assumed the games would continue but after a few close moments on the patio, he’d seemed in a hurry to get to the loft.

Maybe he wasn’t interested? No, she wasn’t getting that vibe at all. He probably thought she was looking for a boyfriend, or worse, marriage, when seriously nothing could be further from her intentions.

In her line of work, where every mealtime, evening and special holiday was spent slogging away making sure everybody else was happy and fed, she quickly found that guys lost interest. If she couldn’t go to dinner and a movie, how the hell was a guy supposed to date her?

She’d somehow have to make it clear to Gabriel Law that she was interested only in his fucking body. Or in fucking his body. She buried her face in her pillow to stifle a giggle.

Gabriel lay on his back staring at the beams of the loft ceiling. Fucking hell, he couldn't remember the last time he felt like a horny teenager around some bird. He was a walking fucking hard-on. But man, there was something about Average Megan that scrambled his logic chip.

The way she watched his fingers when he played guitar, the way she looked at him when he sang or closed her eyes to absorb the sound, it filled him with more creative energy, more passion for the music, than a stadium packed with ten thousand screaming fans.

And where was his head when he'd decided she was average-looking? Chalk it up to the long flight because tonight over their candlelit dinner, before she'd even blessed him with one of her radiant smiles, she looked fucking amazing. Throw-me-down-and-tie-me-up delicious. But when she did smile, Gabriel felt as if the sun came out to shine down on him and him alone.

Bloody fucking hell, he wanted her. He was going to end up pissing off Gemma and Ash, but he couldn't see how to avoid it. She was just as hot for him as he was for her. He knew if he went down to her room she wouldn't kick him out. Just the very thought of her lying alone on her bed, probably starkers, made his balls ache.

And yes, he wanted to fuck her mindless—but he also really liked her. She was so funny and sensitive, and obviously had a great work ethic. She was a normal girl and he didn't meet enough of them with his lifestyle. Did he want to send her home all used by some oversexed rocker? Gemma would be fucking livid if Megan went back to work heartbroken and moony.

What if he did corrupt her? Man, she was just a twenty-something kid...couldn't be more than twenty-three, maybe even twenty-two. If it was more than a ten-year age difference—no, fifteen... If there was more than a fifteen-year age difference, he wouldn't pursue her. If he was old enough to father her, he wouldn't touch her. Leave that shit to Rod.

Gabriel let his mind wander. He pictured her at a concert, waiting for him in the wings after his set. He'd be all sweaty but she wouldn't mind, she'd praise him with a time-stopping smile, reach her arms up and kiss him. They'd skip the backstage party and go straight home, make love all night and fall asleep all entwined.

He envisioned her sitting at the breakfast table of his London townhouse... No, sitting at the patio table of his farmhouse in Tuscany, eating a late lunch of bread and cheese, a glass of red wine. Her face, slightly golden from the southern sun, breaks into a beaming smile when he comes out of the house, still groggy from a sleepless night of sex. Behind her, frolicking on the lawn, are a golden-haired little boy and a black-haired little girl –

Fucking hell! Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. I, Gabriel Law, the Dark fucking Angel of Rock, did not just have a paternal fantasy. No fucking way. Fuck!

Gabriel wrapped a towel around his waist and hobbled down the stairs for his second cold shower of the day.

Chapter Three

Tuesday

He was up first, banging around the kitchen. She threw on her robe and tiptoed into the hall. His voice, rather authoritative for this early in the day, stopped her just before she got to the bathroom.

"I'm going to town. You need anything?"

"Um, no thanks," she said, hand on the door.

"You up for an outing?"

She turned. He was standing on the other side of the living room dressed in a pair of fashionable dark green shorts and a white polo shirt. He looked less like a rock dude and more like a suburban dad. But even from this far away, she could see that his expression was dark and grumpy.

"Sure, I guess."

"Great. Be ready at two o'clock. We sail at three."

* * * * *

"No, Megan," he said. "Absolutely not."

"What?" she asked, frozen in the doorway to her bedroom, beach bag over her arm.

"You are not wearing The Tent on the boat."

Megan looked down at the satiny dress. "It's the only thing that will completely protect me from the sun. I didn't bring anything with long sleeves or —"

He tossed her a bright pink bag with the word Calypso scrawled across the front. "I thought you might say that."

"What's this?" she asked, opening the bag and pulling out a bulky tissue-wrapped package.

"I had a horrible dream last night that The Tent caught a gust of wind and we sailed all the way to America."

Megan suppressed a smile and tore off the gold seal that held the tissue. On top of the bundle sat an azure blue sunhat with a white satin band and extra-wide brim. Beneath it was a matching one-piece bathing suit with delicate white piping on the square neckline and straps, and a thin white belt. She held up a gossamer robe-style cover in shades ranging from the palest of blues to emerald green. It seemed to capture every shade of Bermuda's waters, from the turquoise lagoons to the ocean's deepest blue. White leather flip-flops and an azure beach bag completed the ensemble.

"Gabriel, this is gorgeous!" she said. "Really, I'm...I...I just don't know what to say. Thank you doesn't seem enough!"

"Don't say anything, just go put it on," he urged, obviously pleased with her response. "Stella's already waiting outside."

She came out of the bedroom a few moments later feeling like a *Vogue* model. The swimsuit was made of the softest fabric, stretchy but not binding, and the white belt rode a fraction above her hipbones, giving her a chic retro look. The diaphanous cover-up had three small ties down the front but Megan left them unfastened, preferring to let the airy material swish around her calves when she walked. Long, flaring sleeves were cut on a slight angle so the undersides of her wrists were bare but the back of her hands were covered to mid-finger. The entire ensemble made her feel like the sexiest woman alive.

He could have picked a skimpy leopard print—what man wouldn't?—but this proved that her multi-pierced rocker dude had some class under those tats.

The look on his face when she walked out the front door of the cottage was beyond priceless. Gabriel was standing in front of the open sliding door of the taxi van chatting with the driver when he turned and watched her descend the stairs. An almost imperceptible lift of the eyebrows before that sexy grin spread across his mouth, showing off movie star teeth.

Those same teeth that tugged on her lower lip and bit her nipples.

Megan's heart started beating out a little calypso tune of its own as she walked toward him. The island, the outfit, the man, all brought out a confidence she'd never had. She felt as if she were dripping diamonds when she walked.

"Bloody hell, Average Megan," he said, taking her hand and kissing her cheek. "You need to break free of The Tent more often." He helped her into the backseat of the taxi.

"Perhaps I will."

Oh, real fucking witty, Megan. That's using a comeback opportunity.

The marina was located at the extreme other end of the J-shaped island. Their driver, Stella Maris, entertained them during the forty-minute drive with an almost constant stream of chatter. There was nothing about the island she didn't know and generously shared her knowledge on the flora, the unique architectural style of the pastel-colored houses and local legends.

"I've seen quite a few stone circles at the entrances to homes and gardens," Megan said as they passed yet another. "Is there some significance?"

"Ah, the Moongate. It's said that if people walk through a Moongate, especially young lovers or honeymooners, they are blessed with good luck. They're walkin' through the circle of life."

"That's so romantic." She stole a sideways glance at Gabriel but he seemed fascinated by the view out the van window.

"Yes, and weddin' couples like to pose for pictures standing in a Moongate. I wonder who gets custody of the photos when they all divorce!" Amused at her own wit, she let out a deep, robust, "Heh heh heh."

Her laughter faded and Stella Maris went quiet, giving Megan the chance to drink in the sideshow of gardens outside the large window. Cascading purple bougainvillea,

explosions of pink and white oleander, ruffled hibiscus in eye-popping shades of red and yellow. Her new favorite plant, introduced to her earlier by Stella, was the tall, lethally pointed Spanish bayonet that popped up all over the coastal road. She smiled, wondering how Audrey would feel if she brought that monster home.

Megan was just about to ask how long she'd been driving a taxi—she was sure the answer would have been in the multiples of decades if her appearance was anything to go by—when Stella Maris spoke up.

"I just been thinking on an old legend, long forgotten now, probably 'cause so few have experienced it." She paused, looking contemplative, then spoke in a strong, passionate voice that even made Gabriel fix his attention on her.

"A long time ago, we goin' back to the mid-eighteen hundreds now, a young Bermudian gal was in love with a fisherman, and bless her soul if he didn't love her just as strong. A week before they was to be wed, a freak storm blew up and that fisherman never returned. She waited on the dock every day, every night, cryin' an ocean full of tears but never taking her eyes off the horizon. Poor girl's heart was broke into a thousand pieces. So come the day of the weddin', at the exact time she would've been walkin' down the aisle of St. Peter's Church, she up and walked into the waves. Never was seen again. Reunited with her lover in the deep blue." Stella paused and Megan could see in the rearview mirror that a single tear was coursing over the old woman's plump, wrinkled cheek.

"Not all bad though, 'cause that girl sacrificed herself in the name of true love. Them sea gods took pity on her and turned her into a mermaid. Her tail was made of the thousand tears she cried, all turned into magnificent jeweled scales. According to the legend, when true love enters the sea, the mermaid offers a scale from her tail, a symbol of their destiny."

* * * * *

The Valentina was magnificent—long, sleek and powerful, with two naked masts soaring skyward, the foredeck awash in cables and riggings.

He had to give Ashley Wellington credit for pulling this off on such short notice. Of course, Gabriel had done what only an old and good friend could—he'd fucked with Ash's head. He'd played on his best mate's guilt over having to share his accommodations, making it sound like a nuisance rather than a bonus, and convinced Ash to make a few arrangements on his behalf.

Megan was given a hand aboard by the young captain, only recognizable by his nautical cap, otherwise he wore the common Bermudian uniform of khaki shorts and a white polo shirt. Next to him, two similarly attired crew members ogled Megan's shapely figure through her filmy cover-up.

He had to admit, she did look stunning. He'd chosen the perfect colors for her pale complexion and was inordinately pleased that the swimsuit matched her eyes. He'd toyed with the idea of a thong bikini but Megan had a modest air about her that he found charming. Perhaps it was because most of his groupies couldn't seem to get their clothes off fast enough.

Megan's body epitomized femininity—curvaceous hips, long toned legs and luscious breasts. He found it funny that she assumed he preferred skinny models. Bloody hell, what normal man would prefer fucking a bobblehead with plastic tits than a woman like her? His groin stirred just thinking about uncovering that ass again, running his hand up the curve of her hip, unsheathing her breasts, discovering the taste of her pussy.

"Welcome aboard, Mr. Law. It's a pleasure," said the captain, intruding upon his risky train of thought. "I have all your CD—"

Gabriel gave him a sharp look, a barely perceptible shake of his head and threw his eyes to Megan. The captain, a savvy fellow, abruptly stopped.

Megan turned around and caught them all staring at her.

"Is everything all right?" The crew chose that moment to scamper off to check the riggings, making them all look guilty as hell.

"Yes, darling. Why don't you store your bag below and I'll be along in a moment."

Darling. He cringed as he said it. That horrible, generic "darling" that his pompous, cheating bastard of a father called his mother. The catchall endearment that he himself used on hundreds of nameless, faceless females he'd slept with over the decades. Saved him from remembering their names or insulting them when he had no fucking clue who the hell they were.

He watched her duck her head as she went down the steps before turning back to the captain. "Did you receive my instructions?"

"Yes sir. Everything is exactly as Mr. Wellington requested."

"And there are no cameras or other recording devices onboard."

"No sir. And my crew was not informed of your identity beforehand, nor will they be allowed to make any phone calls until your return this evening."

"Thank you," Gabriel said, relieved. The last thing he needed was a helicopter or a fleet of boats with long lenses chasing after them. He needed to protect Megan from the madness that was his life. "Your diligence won't go unrewarded."

The captain gave him an understanding smile. "Bermudians are known for their discreetness, Angel—"

"I'd prefer Gabriel, if you don't mind."

"Not at all. As I was saying, Bermudians like to gossip, but we also respect the privacy of our guests. It's why the likes of Michael Douglas and David Bowie made homes here."

"Appreciate it, and yes, as per your request, Mr. Wellington will see that you get a personal endorsement for your brochure should all go smoothly."

The captain of *The Valentina* almost rivaled Stella Maris in storytelling abilities, offering fascinating commentary as they sailed. The islanders seemed to take great pride in their rock and he managed to answer every single question that she and Gabriel lobbed.

Except one.

Megan couldn't resist asking him about the mermaid's story.

"Can't say that I'm familiar with that one," he said.

"Maybe you should get Stella Maris to tell it to you sometime. It's a beautiful, heart-wrenching story. I'm sure your guests would love it."

"I know most of the taxi drivers but I haven't met her. I'll have to keep an eye out. Did you say her name was Stella Maris?"

"Yes."

"That's interesting. We have a church named Stella Maris in St. George's."

"She has a church named after her?"

"Not likely," the captain chuckled. "She was probably named after the church. *Stella maris* is Latin for 'star of the seas', and is another name for the Virgin Mary."

He offered them another drink and returned to the helm, leaving Megan and Gabriel to their own thoughts.

"How'd you meet Stella?" she asked Gabriel.

"She was waiting for me at the airport. I assumed Ash arranged it."

Something niggled at Megan, but she couldn't quite grasp it. It was like tasting a foreign dish and not being able to identify a certain flavor or spice, but rather than dwell, she decided to let everything marinate while she sat back and enjoyed the ride. This was her first time on a sailboat and she couldn't help marveling at the adept crew who handled the ropes and sails, swinging booms and jib sheets with practiced ease.

Gabriel lounged next to her, head back, wind in his hair, obviously enjoying the sun. He was quieter than usual and every time he addressed her, he called her

“darling”. No more Average Megan, and for some inexplicable reason, this bothered her. Something else for the stewpot.

And how on earth could her poor musician afford to charter a boat this magnificent, not to mention the new wardrobe for her? If he was trying to impress her so she’d welcome him into her bed, his efforts were unnecessary. Appreciated, but completely unnecessary.

“Gabriel?”

“Hmmm?”

“Can I ask you something?”

“You just did.”

“Don’t be a smartass.”

He lifted his shades and winked. “Anything, darling, though I can’t promise an honest answer.” His shades dropped back down and he turned his face toward the sea.

“Well, try.” Shit. Maybe she shouldn’t ask at all. But she felt guilty and should at least offer to pay for half. After all, she was getting just as much enjoyment out of their excursion as he was, if not more. But how to broach it without insulting him?

“How were you able to arrange...how could you aff— What I mean is, I’d like to pay for ha—”

“Ash.”

“Excuse me?”

“Compliments of Ash. For the mix-up.”

“Oh.”

He reached for her hand, twined his fingers with hers and gave her a smirk.

* * * * *

They sailed for about an hour before anchoring off the western shore of the island. It was blissfully quiet without the flap and snap of the sails and the captain calling out

orders. There was hardly a ripple in the water, barely a bob in the boat as the gentle breeze stirred the salty air around them. The sun was still strong at four o'clock, so Megan was sure to keep her cover and hat on, but ditched her sunglasses so she could appreciate the color of the surrounding waters.

She leaned over the side of the boat and peered into the clear blue. They were very close to a reef and she could make out the shapes of colorful fishes darting about.

The sound of an engine sputtering to life cut through the air, startling both her and the fishes. She turned to see the crew pulling away in the small whaler they'd been towing.

"Hey, is our captain leaving?" she called to Gabriel who stood at the back of the boat, obviously having just seen them off.

"He'll be back. He's just giving us a little peace and quiet for a few hours."

"Oh," Megan said. She turned back around and stared at the water but her thoughts were on the naughty. She and Gabriel Law, alone on a boat, in the middle of the water, no one to hear them or see them — this could be fun.

He joined her at the rail. "How old are you?" he said in a rush.

"Pardon?" Did he just ask her age? Not that she was offended — big deal about a woman's age and all that — but from his tone and the deathly serious look on his face, he might have been asking if she'd ever murdered anyone.

"Your age — twenty-two, three?"

"Uh, no. I turned twenty-eight a few weeks ago."

He beamed like someone just handed him a platinum record and looked up at the sky. Megan thought he mouthed the words "thank you", but she couldn't be sure.

"I'm thirty-eight. That's ten years."

"Musician *and* mathematician," she teased.

Instead of his usual quick comeback, Gabriel sidled up behind her. "You look positively delicious, Average Megan." He leaned down and nudged her hat aside so he

could place a kiss on the side of her neck. "I've been dying to do that since we left the cottage."

Megan tossed her hat onto the deck and turned toward him, offering her face up for a kiss. His arms went around her waist and hers found their way up his arms and around his rock-hard shoulders. He didn't have his sunglasses on for a change, so she could see the flame in his gaze.

Pure lust.

She heard his breath quicken as her hands twined into his hair at the back of his neck. Gabriel Law was staring at her lips as if he didn't know which way to approach them. Megan gave a gentle tug forward and closed her eyes just as his mouth came down, soft but urgent, tender but needy. He swept her bottom lip before taking it between his teeth, nipping, sucking, caressing it with the tip of his tongue. She opened her mouth wider and when their tongues touched, Megan's tummy clenched, leaving her breathless.

Gabriel sucked her tongue, drawing it into his own mouth, inviting her into his intoxicating playground. His taste was spiced fruit, his smell pure, clean maleness—vigorous and outdoorsy. This time, it was Gabriel's throat that ground out a groan. He slipped the flimsy cover off her shoulders and Megan let it slide onto the deck around her feet. Gabriel's hands moved up and down her bare back, kneading her blessedly painless flesh with his fingertips. He moved lower, over her swimsuit until he found her ass. He slipped his thumbs under the bottom of her suit and cupped the tender underside of her cheeks. She wiggled against him, loving the feel of his warm palms against her backside as he pulled her hard against him. She thrust her hips forward, grinding into his quickly hardening shaft.

Gabriel sucked in his breath. Dripping with desire, he rasped, "I want you, Megan. I want to be inside you."

Not the generic *darling*, but Megan.

His lips drifted from her mouth to her neck, trailing kisses and scraping his teeth along her jaw. He took her earlobe and sucked it gently. Megan slid a hand between their bodies, eager to touch him, stroke him into a frenzy, make his body sing for her. She ran her fingers over his abdomen, longing to explore the hard ripples with her mouth. She felt his muscles flex under her palm, his hot skin contracting, quivering. His hands dropped to her hips and he stopped kissing her. He stood immobilized as her fingers circled his bellybutton, traced the thin path of hair that stopped at his waistband.

She placed her palm over the front of his tented shorts, pleased and slightly alarmed at the size of his cock, thick and long and granite hard. Gabriel gasped and jerked his hips forward. That she could produce that kind of reaction thrilled her to her toes. His cock was eager for attention. *Her* attention. And she intended to deliver.

Megan planted kisses across his chest as her fingers massaged his erection, leaving a trail across the front of his shoulders. Her tongue found a nipple and she paused to swirl around the small peak. His flesh was smooth, sleek and he tasted so damn good, the perfect blend of salt and spice, that it made Megan want to lick every inch of him, nibble every ridge, tongue every groove. She bent her head, letting her mouth drift over his rippling abs, using her teeth to graze and skim his smooth flesh. She didn't know how far she'd go. Blowjobs weren't usually her cup of tea, but damn if she didn't want to devour this bronzed god inch by inch. Reduce him to human with her lips, her tongue, her hands, watch his face when he came. Taste him. Drink him.

With every inch lower her mouth went, she felt Gabriel tense. Under the growing pressure of her caresses, she felt his cock jerk and pulse, his butt tighten. By the time she laved his bellybutton he was a mass of quivering muscle.

Going down on one knee, she tugged on the drawstring of his shorts with her teeth. She stole a glance at him under her lashes. He was staring down at her with a frightening intensity, as if his mind were working out a math problem rather than

enjoying the anticipation of a blowjob. He broke eye contact and looked around at the empty sea, then over at the island, a mere mile or two away.

"Megan, stop," he growled, low and anguished. He bent down and took her upper arms, forcing her to stand. "Not here." He kissed her on the lips once, twice. "Let's go below."

He turned her around and pushed her in front of her.

"Was there someone watching?" she asked, looking over her shoulder for signs of a boat.

"You never know."

She did as he asked, though more than a little puzzled. There was no way they could be seen by anyone on land and she never would have pegged Gabriel for the shy type.

Gabriel's hand rested on the small of her back as he guided her down the short set of stairs to below deck. She stopped in the diminutive galley. How on earth were they going to have hot monkey sex in this small space? There was a table with a bench seat on three sides on one side and appliances and cupboards on the other.

"Megan," he said and she turned to face him. She couldn't help but notice his erection still very much intact and straining to burst out the top of his shorts. He pulled her into his arms and looked down at her. "There seems to be a bit of chemistry between us, would you agree?"

Agree? Holy Hannah, that was like calling a volcano a bonfire.

Her nipples were so hard she feared poking a hole in her new swimsuit and her pussy actually ached to be touched.

She nodded.

"And you're okay with..."

She nodded again.

"Even though I'm..."

"It's okay, Gabriel," she said, putting her fingers against his lips before he ruined this magical afternoon by reminding her he was some kind of rough-living, traveling musician who had no time for commitment, blah blah blah. "I'm not looking for a husband. Just some fun, like you. A vacation fling."

His eyebrows shot up.

"We don't have to pretend we'll keep in touch, or even admit we knew each other once this week is over. And no, I'm not going to go all awkward on you back at the cottage, and you'd better not either."

He nodded.

"We have some fun, enjoy each other's company and," she ran her fingers up his chest and down again until they brushed the head of his erection, "we have some great holiday sex. Agreed?"

After a sharp intake of breath, he nodded again.

He nudged her backward past the head, which she recently learned was nautical speak for bathroom, until her back was up against a door. Megan saw it earlier when she'd come down to use the facilities and assumed it was a storage area. He reached past her and opened the door, catching her so she didn't tumble in backward.

Not storage.

She turned and found herself staring at a luxuriously appointed stateroom, the size of the entire front half of the boat. It was filled with light from the portholes and two open air vents. The back wall was one huge closet with mirrored sliding doors. The bed that dominated the center of the room was covered with pink and red rose petals. Two crystal glasses stood next to a bottle of champagne nestled in an ice bucket.

She turned to face Gabriel, eyebrows raised. "Ash arrange this too?"

He shook his head. "All me."

One side of her mouth turned up. "Well done, Mr. Law."

"Glad you approve, Miss Frost."

He nudged her backward and turned her around so her back pressed against his chest and they could both see their reflections in the mirror.

"I've thought of touching you like this," he whispered as his hands ran down the front of her, skimming over her breasts and across her hips. He fanned his fingers across her pelvis, narrowly missing her pubic bone. Watching his hands so close to her core was incredibly erotic. She placed her hands on top of his, felt the heat from his palms leach into her abdomen, spreading warmth that shot straight to her pussy. He tugged her back hard, grinding her into his solid shaft.

He was a head taller so she had an unobstructed view of his face, could see the passion that burned in his eyes as he watched her body undulate against him.

"I want to taste you again, Megan, lick you, suck your nipples." He closed his eyes as he spoke, nuzzled her neck with his jaw, as if overwhelmed.

She reached her arms up and around his head, arching her back so her chest thrust out toward the mirror.

"That a girl," he cooed. His hands followed his eyes, skimming up over her tummy and cupping her breasts, his thumbs flicking across her tight nipples.

His hands journeyed up the tender undersides of her arms, sending delicious shivers that began at her scalp and sent a shower of tingles all the way down to her toes. Holding her wrists, he lowered her arms slowly, a languorous sweep, until they lay at her sides. He used the backs of his fingertips to caress a line up her arms, leaving gooseflesh in his wake. When he got to the top, he slipped the thin white straps of her swimsuit off her shoulders.

"Let me see you, Megan, kiss you." He pressed his mouth against her shoulder and pulled the straps down farther, taking the top of her suit with them. "Show me your breasts, baby."

After a moments' pause to admire his work, he continued, pushing the material down her waist, over her hips until it dropped to her feet.

Megan rested her head back against his chest and stared at their reflections. She should have been self-conscious but she wasn't. She was proud of the way his hungry eyes drank her in. Leaning her naked flesh against him, feeling his huge, ready cock pressing into her back, made her feel incredibly sexy. His hands traveled the front of her body, caressing her tummy, skimming her ribs before trailing the backs of his fingers over the sides of her breasts. Everywhere he touched sent beams of pure energy to her brain, where they exploded in a storm of white-hot sparks.

He cupped her breasts, squeezed them gently and teased her nipples with his calloused fingers. Megan couldn't control her body, couldn't stop herself from pushing her breasts against the warmth of his hands. She craved his touch, needed his flesh on hers.

"Bloody hell, you're a stunner, Average Megan," he growled in her ear.

A throaty moan was all she could manage.

"Do you like it when I do this?" His fingers grasped her nipples, squeezed and tugged with a gentle pressure that vibrated all the way down to her pussy.

"Yes." It was just a breath. A hot, tiny, lusty breath.

"They feel like little pearls between my fingers."

Megan's eyes felt heavy and she strained to keep them open. "Oh God."

"Shall I make you come? Would you like that?"

"Mmm, yes." She pressed her bum back and wiggled against his erection.

He groaned. "Keep that up and I'll be first."

One hand trailed down her front, making Megan's stomach muscles contract in anticipation. She wanted to close her eyes and throw her head back, give in completely to the sensations, but she couldn't take her eyes off his fingers, getting lower and lower toward her throbbing pussy. She could feel a trickle of moisture gather between her legs, beckoning his cock.

He used his knee to coax her legs farther apart and she complied, eagerly adjusting her stance. Her breath was coming in short huffs. She couldn't recall ever feeling this hot, this ready, this needy. His fingers fanned through her tight curls. One long, tapered finger slid into her slick labia and made immediate contact with her clit. Megan groaned and rocked against his hand. He explored her from front to back with his fingers, dipping into her for the source of her cream.

"That's it, Delicious Megan, show me your sweet secrets." He spread her labia open with two fingers, exposing her pink clit, glistening with wet need. She felt like she was watching a porn movie, with her as the star, and by God, it was turning her on. She tilted her hips forward, needing to thrust, to gyrate, to come. She reached up both arms and wound them around his head, rubbing the length of her body against him.

He wrapped one arm around her, his hand on her breast, supporting her quivering body while the other deft instrument continued the tempo below. She watched as long as she could, his fingers moving with increasing speed and pressure until she couldn't stand it, had to close her eyes and rest her head back against his shoulder, had to give in to the sensations, ride the ride. She squirmed, let her weight be absorbed by the iron-hard chest at her back.

Gabriel's hips were moving slowly, deliberately against her backside and she desperately wanted him inside her, sharing the pleasure, the energy. She could hear herself breathe through parted lips, faster, panting as the pressure built inside.

"Gabriel..." She wanted to tell him to put his cock deep inside her, she wanted them to come together, but all she managed to moan was "Yes!" as her body tensed and quivered and exploded into orgasm.

Gabriel kept his hand cupped over her sex as she shook with the aftershocks. He nuzzled her neck, kissing the column behind her ear and down her shoulder, using his tongue. Her skin burned with each damp stroke, each swirl of that hungry tongue.

"I need to fuck you, Megan."

Still not recovered, all she managed was an eager nod.

He waited for her breathing to return to normal before scooping her up and placing her on the bed. And then he undressed.

She watched, mesmerized, as his body was revealed. Completely. Every lean inch of Gabriel Law. Every long inch of Gabriel Law's cock. Jitters, butterflies, an armada of winged insects fluttered in her abdomen as he approached.

"Gabriel..."

A finger came to tilt her chin up, raise her head to meet his smoldering eyes. "You could eat a man up with those eyes."

Bold and maybe a little crazy from the sun, Megan curled a hand around his cock as she nodded. "And I can eat a man up with my mouth."

"Tease," he groaned, his cock twitching in her hand.

"Who's teasing?" she asked and bent to lick the head quickly. She looked up under her lashes to gauge his reaction. His jaw was clenched, his eyes practically glowing with lust.

He put his hand on the back of her head and said, thick and raspy, "That's it, Megan, take me into your sweet mouth."

It was all the encouragement she needed. Her mouth opened to take him in, tame the beast. His rigid cock slid over her tongue, filled her. His skin was smooth, warm and salty like the ocean breeze. She pulled her mouth back and circled the head with her tongue, tasting his pre-cum, sucking him deep inside her again.

Gabriel groaned as he bucked his hips against her, moving inside her mouth. She sucked hard, sliding up and down his shaft. She felt greedy, empowered by his reaction, by the sensation of him, raw and hot as he surrendered to her mouth.

"Fucking hell, woman," he whispered when she reached out to cradle his balls in her palm. He grabbed a handful of her hair and gently pulled her back. His broad, muscled chest heaved, nostrils flaring with each of his breaths. "When I come, I come inside you," he growled.

Weak with need, Megan let him press her down onto the bed, his mouth latching on to her shoulder then scraping up her neck.

"I want your pussy around me. Open up for me, Sweet Megan," he rasped.

She willingly obliged, spreading her legs and pulling her knees up to accommodate his long, hard body. She felt the tip of his cock at her entrance teasing, sweeping the length of her pussy from top to bottom.

"Gabriel, please," she begged, pulling him in with her knees.

He rose on his forearms, looked deep into her eyes and thrust hard, his entire length plowing deep inside her with one powerful plunge. Megan yelped, her eyes growing wide. He was so big, he filled her to practically the point of pain, but oh, the pleasure! She bit her bottom lip and tried to relax her inner muscles, give him some room to breathe, but before her tightness could be willed to ease he pulled out and plunged into her again, urgently, taking them both higher, closer to orgasm.

Between his low growls and her tiny moans of pleasure, they sounded like animals—two primal, mating beasts. Megan loved it, reveled in every little sound and every hot, hard thrust as they came faster and faster.

He reached between them and she felt his thumb on her clit, stroking in time to his thrusts.

"Come for me, baby. Let's do it together."

His voice, that growling plea alone was enough to send her over the edge, tumbling into a muscle-convulsing orgasm. She felt him tense at the same time, held on to his bulging triceps as he trembled and shuddered above her.

Gabriel pulled Megan with him as he rolled onto his side, legs and arms still entwined. He nuzzled her neck as their heart rates returned to normal. They kissed slowly, sensually, deeply, communicating a thousand tangled thoughts.

* * * * *

"You didn't go swimmin'?" Stella Maris sucked her teeth. "The water was glass today. You shouldn't have wasted it sittin' on a boat."

"Trust me, it wasn't wasted," Gabriel assured the old woman, but his eyes were on Megan.

The crew had returned to find them sharing a cold supper of smoked salmon on Paris toast, crab-stuffed mushroom caps and sliced fresh fruit. They'd sailed, fingers entwined, as the white clouds turned from pink to purple, until the blazing orange ball on the western horizon was gobbled by the ocean. They had returned to the dock to find Stella Maris waiting for them.

The taxi ride back to the cottage passed in silence, but much was communicated. In the evening shadows, while Gabriel's thumb made lazy sweeps and circles in her palm, she hooked her ankle around his and laid her hand on his thigh. Casual gestures, but in the language of lovers, volumes were spoken.

"Coffee?" Megan asked when they got back to the cottage. She couldn't decide if she wanted a glass of water or a shot of caffeine. If Gabriel accepted, she'd make a pot.

"I'd better not," he said, stifling a yawn. "I barely slept last night."

"Me neither," she replied, filling two glasses with water and handing him one.

"Yeah, I thought I heard you giggling. Were you reading?"

"No," she said, wiping the water that had spewed out of her mouth in surprise. *He heard me?* Had he heard her whispering his name over and over like a stuttering parrot? Had he heard her murmur "Megan Frost Law"? She watched him put the glass to his lips and decided to confess to the lesser of two evils. "I was...oh God, if you really must know, I was imagining all the naughty, dirty, illegal-in-thirty-two-states things I wanted to do to your body."

It was Gabriel's turn to spew.

"Fucking hell," he croaked between coughs. "I'm too old for this kind of teasing." He grabbed her around the waist and hoisted her up onto the breakfast bar so they

were eye to eye. Gabriel spread her knees and stepped between her thighs, leaning in close so their foreheads touched. "You should have called for me. I would have happily added my suggestions to your list."

"I gave you plenty of signals last night, Gabriel, but you didn't touch me."

"I was fighting with my conscience."

"Oh? Who won?"

"You did."

Chapter Four

Wednesday

Megan woke in a tangle of sheets and limbs. She'd had a restless night, despite all the healthy fresh air and mind-blowing sex. She slid out from under Gabriel's arm and managed to extract her leg from between his without waking him. Mindful of the water shortage, she kept her shower short when she would have liked nothing more than to stand under that cool spray and let it soothe her sore muscles. Her runner's legs weren't conditioned for an extended session of horizontal aerobics and her hamstrings hadn't been asked to accommodate the knees-over-the-shoulder move in some time.

And her ankles had been itching all night. The annoying tingling had started yesterday while they were on the boat but she'd managed to ignore it. Through the night they'd persistently bothered her so she rubbed them against the hair on Gabriel's legs, the sheets, or gave up and used her fingernails. She bent down to dry herself off and noticed the blotchy redness.

Perhaps a reaction to the sunburn?

She quietly dressed in a miniskirt and sleeveless blouse, stopping only to ogle his sleeping form—he was a sprawler—and write him a hasty note.

Gone shopping, xo xo

* * * * *

Megan was charmed by Hamilton, Bermuda's capital. She walked along Front Street, enchanted by the pastel buildings, flower boxes and rows upon rows of parked scooters. It was like a little storybook town. The businessmen strutted around unselfconsciously wearing colorful Bermuda shorts, matching knee socks, blazers and ties, swinging briefcases or talking on cell phones. Hoards of tourists spilled from the

cruise ships that lined the pier, many wearing the same shade of peeling pink on their shoulders as she.

After a visit to a pharmacy to get some cream for the rash that was breaking out on her ankles, she moseyed into the Louis Vuitton store, browsed the long, shimmering cases of jewels in Crisson's and flipped through racks of designer clothes in the upscale boutiques, but quickly found that practically everything was beyond her budget. She managed to find a funky T-shirt for Gabriel—the ones he had were so worn out, poor guy—shark tooth necklaces for her nephews and key chains and fridge magnets for her friends at work.

She popped into Goslings—a colonial-style building painted light blue with white shutters—to purchase some duty-free rum to take back home with her, and picked out a nice bottle of wine that she and Gabriel could have with their dinner. The very thought of spending an intimate evening with him made a hot wave of anticipation wash over her. Perhaps she could convince him to sing for her again...

"Is there an internet café nearby?" she asked the clerk as he was bagging her wine.

* * * * *

"Where have you been?" He actually looked worried, standing on the top step in the dark as she approached.

"You're *Gabriel Law*!" she accused with pointed finger. She pushed past him and stormed into the cottage. She rounded on him. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Well," he began, walking toward her slowly and gently as if she were an atomic bomb, "I believe my opening line was indeed, 'Hello, I'm Gabriel Law.'" He took the wine bag out of her hand and placed it on the counter.

"Yes, technically," she took a deep breath, "but you should have said, 'Hello, I'm Gabriel Law, better known as *Dark Angel*!'"

He winced. "Ah, sorry. I assumed you knew. Most people do."

"Oh they do not! How many people know Bono's name—"

"Paul Hewson."

"Or Sting—"

"Gordon Sumner."

"Damn you, Gabriel! Just stop it. You *knew* I didn't know." She wagged her finger at him. "You purposely deceived me."

She dropped her bags on the floor and put her hands on her hips. She felt so stupid! Stupid, stupid MEE-gan—brainless, naïve and completely gullible. He must be having the laugh of his life.

She took another deep breath and bit down hard, determined to stifle the tears that were making her throat tight. He reached out to rub the tops of her arms but she jumped back.

"Was this a game to you? Am I some joke that you and *Grinder* will have a good chuckle over?" She dropped her voice into a mocking imitation. "'Bloody hell, mate, she was seriously clueless. Wait 'til she finds out she's been fucked by a rock star.' Really, Gabriel, I'm so disgusted I could spit!"

Her chest was so tight it was hard to speak. Or breathe. She couldn't hold back the tears any longer so she ran to the bedroom and slammed the door. She barely made it before the sobs came. She held the pillow to her face so he wouldn't hear her.

Bad choice. The pillow smelled like him.

Oh God. The giant hollowness in her gut felt like it was consuming her. It hurt, and damn it, it shouldn't. He was nothing to her but a vacation lay. A quick-and-dirty screw. So what if he was some big-shot rock star? Really, she should be thrilled. What a story to tell her friends.

But none of those rationalizations dulled the explosion of pain, of disbelief.

When she'd typed his name into Google, she was shocked to see the header bar say "Results 1-10 of 25,300,000 for Gabriel Law".

That was the moment the dizziness began. Words swam in front of her eyes—*Official Dark Angel Fan Club, Rough Cut Concert Listings, Gabriel Law, the Dark Angel of Rock...*

Of course, his tattoo! The angel wing—and she'd been too thick to get it. She'd seen it on T-shirts and album covers, billboards! It was their trademark, like the Rolling Stones lips.

Megan spent two hours glued to the screen, learning more about her two-day lover on the internet than she'd ever known about all her boyfriends of the past combined.

From Wikipedia she'd learned that he was born in London in 1970 and by the age of ten was considered a music prodigy, mastering piano, violin, classical guitar and saxophone. He'd recorded his first demo while attending Eton, playing every instrument on the track. When Virgin Records offered to sign him in 1988, he recruited a band of studio musicians and Rough Cut was born. That year, the anthemic "Win or Die" won the band Grammys for Record of the Year and Best Rock Performance, and was still played today, twenty years later, at sporting events worldwide.

From a 1990 *Rolling Stone* interview, she'd read how Gabriel earned his nickname.

RS: Gabriel, critics and fans say your voice is a gift from heaven. Were you perchance named after the Archangel Gabriel?

GL: (laughing) I'm sorry, did you say arch angel or dark angel?

She'd clicked the link to the cover on that issue and seen a shirtless, skinnier Gabriel, his band mates standing behind him, over the caption, "Introducing the Dark Angel of Rock".

From an interview with Rough Cut's guitarist, Grinder, in *Guitar Magazine*, she'd learned that Gabriel single-handedly composed, arranged and produced all their songs and maintained complete creative control of their merchandising. "Yeah, that talented git's coattails are a comfy, profitable ride," Grinder had quipped.

The overwhelming out-of-body feeling turned into a knife-point of pain in her gut when she learned from *People Magazine* – “The Sexiest Man Alive” issue, no less – that Gabriel has been romantically linked to two of the Pussy Cat Dolls, a *Baywatch* bimbo and a few dozen other actresses and models.

Pussy Cat Dolls! Don't you wish your girlfriend was hot like me...

The very thought brought a fresh round of tears.

But the bitter icing on the burnt cake came when she'd clicked on the TMZ gossip site, updated just that morning. The headline read, “The Dark Angel of Tennis?” followed by pasted-together, side-by-side pictures of Gabriel and some gorgeous blonde.

Rough Cut's Dark Angel was sighted in Bermuda! An eyewitness says he saw Angel getting on a sailboat yesterday with a blonde woman that may have been Anna Kournikova. Tennis anyone?

Megan would have laughed if it hadn't hurt so damn bad.

It was after six o'clock by the time she'd left the café with a handful of printouts. She hadn't wanted to go back to the cottage, couldn't bear to face him, so instead wandered up and down the streets of Hamilton, past the empty offices and closed shops.

Megan had made her way toward the water, to the cruise ship pier across Front Street. She'd sat on the grass and stared at the dirty harbor water as the sun began its slow descent behind her.

She had lost track of time as the same answerless questions circled her mind. Why? Why had he kept his identity from her? What game was he playing?

And really, why should she care?

At first she'd thought it was in her head, the soft sounds of jazz, a bluesy trumpet, a moaning sax. Then she had realized that it was coming from behind her, carried on the breeze. She'd looked across Front Street, scanned passed the rows of parked scooters and evening strollers until her eyes had found Hilly's Jazz Club.

Before wandering over, she'd torn the printouts into tiny pieces and watched them flutter into the water. She'd read enough. She didn't want to know any more about this man, didn't want to absorb any more gossip about pussy cats or tennis players, actresses, lovers.

She'd sat in Hilly's for hours, letting the soulful music temper her feelings. She didn't know why she was mad or sad or hurt. Really, he meant nothing to her. So why did it feel like she'd swallowed a sticky lump of wet flour?

"Megan, can I come in?" Gabriel called through the door, breaking her out of her thoughts.

She quickly sat up on the edge of the bed and tried to swallow but the lump was still lodged at the base of her throat, making her sound like a frog. "No."

"Bloody hell," she heard him murmur behind the door. He came in anyway.

Damn Ash and Gemma for not having locks on their doors.

"Look at me."

"No."

"You're crying."

"No, I'm not." *Duh!* He was standing in the room. He could see the damn tears. "Well, yes, but not because of you."

"Why then?"

She lifted her legs and swiveled her ankles, showing off the attractive pink rash. "Poison ivy. The pharmacist said I have poison ivy, probably from hiding in the bushes at the park, and it's itchy and I'm miserable." She put the pillow to her face and let out another sob.

Damn plants. Damn Gabriel.

He got on his knees in front of her and took the mashed, wet pillow out of her hands.

He lifted her chin with his finger so they were eye to eye. She was surprised to find her pain reflected in his tourmaline eyes. She sniffed.

“Please let me explain, Megan.” He slid his hands up her thighs, but it wasn’t an erotic gesture—more like one of a man clinging to the side of a lifeboat. “I was ecstatic that you didn’t realize who I was. A little shocked, sure, I mean, I do have an ego—quite a huge one, in fact. But if you had recognized me, I would have had to leave.”

“Why?” she sniffed.

He let a few moments pass before answering, his eyes on his hands sliding up and down the outsides of her thighs. He took a deep breath and looked at her. “Megan, I’m tired of all this. I’ve been touring and partying and trying to maintain an image for twenty years. I’m burnt out and I desperately need a change. I don’t want to be Dark Angel anymore. Do you know how long it’s been since anyone has called me Gabriel? Just plain old Gabriel? Even Ash calls me DA. If you knew who I was, if you were some moon-eyed girl, imagine how I’d have had to act, the barrage of stupid questions I’d have had to answer.

“I don’t want the paparazzi following me around anymore and I don’t want to deal with the hangers-on. I don’t want to be romantically linked to every hot young thing that I happen to have a conversation with, and just between you and me,” he broke eye contact for a moment and took a breath, “I’m tired of playing loud music.”

They exchanged a smile at the irony—the Dark Angel of Rock, sick of loud music—before he grew serious again.

“Megan, I’m sorry if you think I deceived you, but in all honesty, this has been the best vacation I’ve had since I was a kid. And I’m not just talking about the sex. I like hanging out with you. You make me smile.” He tugged the sheet she’d been gripping and took her hands in his. “Please don’t be sad, Megan. Please, let’s not let this change our rela...change *us*.”

His eyes pleaded with her. She could only imagine how crazy his world must be for him to find solace in a few quiet days with average her. It seemed to mean so much to him.

"I just feel so stupid, you have no idea. And I'm not a stupid girl, Gabriel. I'm quite bright, I promise you, and when I read all that stuff about you on the internet... You have a Grammy —"

"Twelve."

"And dated the Pussy Cat Dolls."

"Not all of them." When she raised her eyebrows he quickly added, "And really, without the makeup and costumes, well, you'd be surprised."

She averted her eyes. "You asked if I liked Rough Cut, like a test or something. I don't remember what I said at the time," she looked into his eyes, so he would see her sincerity, "but I do like your band."

"Thank you, but it doesn't matter. And for the record, I only asked if you heard of them, not if you liked them."

"Well, hello! That seems like a pretty good opportunity to mention you're the lead singer!"

He shrugged. "We went on to other topics. I would have brought it up, eventually."

"And you said you couldn't afford a hotel."

"I said I couldn't afford to be *seen* in a hotel."

"And I was trying to say encouraging things about your music, your voice, thinking you hadn't made it big yet."

"I *did* say you made me smile." He brought her fingers to his mouth and kissed them.

"So...I'm upset with myself, really. I feel like a silly twit."

"You shouldn't. My silly nickname doesn't change what's between us."

"How can you say that? You're...you're...the Dark Angel of Rock!"

"Megan..." he began, and pulled her into an embrace.

She looked up at him through damp lashes and swallowed her tears. "You're not just a rock dude, you're a famous celebrity."

"Yeah, so I've heard," he said, tightening his embrace.

"And I'm...well...I'm nobody."

"You're not *nobody*, Average Megan," he said, kissing her hair. "You're a charming, delightful woman who at the moment has me quite firmly wrapped around her little finger."

"At the moment," she murmured into his chest. *But what if I want you wrapped around my finger forever?*

"Did you want more?" he asked. "Because I thought —"

No. She wouldn't look like more of a fool to him, so she shook her head quickly, wrapped her arms around him and buried her messy cry face in his neck before she said something stupid about wanting to bear his children. He held her in an embrace so complete, she felt a part of him.

For some reason, her vacation fuck had turned into something more—a complicated emotional mess. Her stupid pussy pulled her dopey heart along for the ride.

"Here," he said, pulling back and handing her a tissue. "Blow your nose so I can kiss you."

Damn Gabriel Law for making her feel foolish. Damn him for being sexy and sweet and understanding. Damn him for burrowing into her heart.

* * * * *

"So I read that you name each album and subsequent tour after a gemstone and your explanation for that was, and I quote, 'I like pretty shiny things'. That's a load of crap, Mr. Law."

He laughed and set down his fork. "Very astute, Miss Frost. Half the things I say in interviews is a load of fucking rubbish. Between the tabloids, talk shows and celebrity mags, they'd have my very soul laid bare if I let them."

"And the real reason?"

"What do you think?" Gabriel watched as she pushed her empty plate away. She seemed to enjoy his cooking as much as he enjoyed cooking for her. Not a morsel remained of the barbequed wahoo and the skewers from the vegetable kabobs were picked clean. He loved that she had a healthy appetite. He'd been with too many women who feigned satisfaction after a sip of lemon water.

"You're having a dig at your father."

"You are indeed a bright girl, as promised."

"And how long will this digging continue?"

"Until he apologizes for being a fucking asshole, or until I retire." Gabriel took a sip of his wine. Just thinking about the bastard made him want to guzzle an entire bottle. "I have a feeling he's going to win that round."

"I assume the red streaks in your hair were remnants of —"

"The Ruby Tour. Yes. I made a guest appearance prior to catching the plane over."

"So what will you call your upcoming tour?"

"I had no idea, until divine inspiration struck me earlier today." Earlier today when she'd had the shimmer of tears in her eyes, making them dazzle like polished aquamarines.

"Oh? Wait, let me guess." She looked up at the night sky and screwed up her face. "Hmm, no...poison ivy isn't a gem." She turned back to him with an exaggerated shrug. "I got nothin'."

Gabriel laughed. "Just for that, I'm not telling you. You'll have to wait until the rest of the world finds out in a few months' time."

"Aw, come on, I was just *having a go*."

“And now you poke fun at me!”

“But it’s okay if you poke at me?”

“Depends what I’m poking with.”

She was so easy to banter with, so easy to be around. And that smile that seemed to come from within, lighting her like a beacon. It was infectious. Like she was sharing her happiness, making him feel her pleasure. “You’re a gift, Average Megan.”

“Oh, that reminds me,” she said, leaping out of her chair. She ran through the patio doors and into the bedroom. He took the opportunity to refill her wineglass. Not that he was trying to get her drunk or anything. No. He just wanted her relaxed and happy. He wanted the smile to shine on him all night long. He wanted her to completely forget their misunderstanding.

When she’d walked through the door earlier that evening upset and ranting, he’d felt like the bottom had dropped out of his world. Fucking Google almost cost him a few more days of bliss. Except for the six-a-day text messages he was getting from Peter and Ash demanding progress updates—to which he answered “fuck off” every time—he hadn’t been lying to Megan when he’d told her this was the best holiday he’d had in years. In fact, it was *the* best holiday he’s had *ever*. And it was only Wednesday. Megan didn’t leave until Friday so they still had a day and a half to play house. Then he’d have another day and half to finish his songs.

She came back to the patio with a bright yellow bag. “I bought you a present.” Megan tossed it at him.

“You did?” He peeked in the bag. “And to what do I owe the honor?”

“Well, I thought the slogan was fun and I thought maybe you’d think so too—and the color will look nice with your eyes—and I thought maybe you’d like a souvenir of your trip...” She paused, like she wasn’t sure if she should continue. “And it was bought before the *big reveal* when I thought your other T-shirts were tatty because you didn’t have much money.”

He pulled the green stonewashed shirt out and held it up. On the left breast there was a small Jolly Roger with “Bermuda” written underneath. On the back was a pirate ship with huge sea chest spilling gold. The caption read, “I scored some booty in Bermuda”.

It was funny. Very funny, but for some reason, he couldn’t find his voice. He flipped it back and forth a few times, stalling to collect his thoughts.

“If you don’t like it, it’s okay,” she said. “No biggie. I can send it to my brother.” She looked away, toward the crashing waves beyond the low stone wall, her face a mask.

He stood up, pulled off his Pink Floyd shirt—she was right, it was ratty—and tugged her gift over his head. “How do I look?” He did a pirouette to crack the tension.

“Fine,” she said, smiling, but it didn’t reach her eyes.

“Megan.”

“Hmm?”

He took her hand and pulled her to her feet. “Thank you. I really don’t know what to say.”

“I’m glad it fits,” she started hurriedly. “I thought maybe the XL would be too—” He put two fingers over her lips to quiet her then used them to caress her cheek.

“No one has ever bought me a T-shirt before.” Not even his mother. She only bought dress shirts.

Megan ran her palms across his chest, smoothing out the invisible wrinkles. “Surely someone must—”

“Never. I get them from promoters, in swag bags, fans send them to me and throw them at me on stage, but no one special to me has ever, to my knowledge, gone to a store, picked a perky slogan with me in mind and bought it simply because they wanted to make me happy.”

He met her eyes and he saw they were filled with compassion. Not pity, but concerned bewilderment. His heart did a syncopated beat a fraction of a second before the blood rushed south. He had to have this woman. Now. He bent down, grabbed her around the knees and flung her over his shoulder.

"Gabriel!" Her hands gripped the back of his shirt and she tried to straighten up. "What are you doing?"

He pushed her back down and gave her a firm but playful slap on the ass. "Argh! I be takin' possession of me booty, wench, so relax and enjoy the ride."

Gabriel flipped her off his shoulder and onto the bed then pulled her forward so her skirt rode up to the tops of her thighs and her legs were hanging off the end. After drinking half a bottle of wine, all the tossing was making her head spin.

"Not a word, me hearty, or I'll take the cat-o'-nine-tails to yer backside." Gabriel's pirate speak was sending rivers of heat to her core. The very thought of him taking a discipline tool to her bum made her squirm. Her naked ass, thrust out and exposed as he did magical things with his talented hands. She'd never craved pain before, but from him, she'd take it. From him, she'd take anything.

He kneeled in front of her and pushed her miniskirt higher, until it was bunched around her waist and all that stood between them was her white satin underwear. She wished now that she'd worn the cotton ones. Cotton breathes better and she definitely needed to breathe.

She didn't suffer long. Gabriel slid his hands between her bottom and the mattress and yanked them down to the tops of her thighs, then moved to the front and slipped his finger under the top of the lace panel. He pulled them down achingly slowly, brushing her slit on the way down. Megan gave a throaty moan.

"By the powers," he mocked, though his voice was lower, rougher. He drew her damp panties down her legs until they fell off her bare feet. "I'd be a scurvy dog if I didn't go in for a closer look. Ye ne'er know where treasure can be found."

She squealed in surprise as he pushed her knees apart and tucked his hands under her ass, lifting her, exposing her. She clutched the sheets, wrapped the cool cotton around her fingers and waited.

And waited.

The anticipation of his touch made her shiver. She heard his breath quicken as he watched her, explored her with his eyes by the dim light of the bedside lamp. She felt wetness trickle down between her cheeks and whimpered. At this rate, she'd come before he even touched her.

And then he did. His tongue, hot and flat, swept up her slit. She pictured him eating the ice-cream cone and tensed her muscles. He did it again, a long, slow sweep from bottom to top, but this time, he burrowed in over her clit. The surprise contact made her buck. He gripped her bum tighter and flicked his hard tongue around her nub, then licked and sucked.

Megan's legs went numb, all the blood in her system rushing to her core. He pushed her knees up to her chest then pushed them apart. Her labia opened like a flower and he groaned. He swept her again with the flat of his tongue, lapping her nectar, drinking her desire. He tongued her channel, pushing the hard tip into the opening until she squirmed and cried, "Yes, please!"

He growled deeply as he replaced his tongue with his finger, then two, fucking her while his tongue continued its assault, circling but not touching the place she needed it the most. He scraped his teeth along her labia, sucking in the soft flesh. Her clit was aching with need and she wiggled against him, trying to divert his attention.

"Tell me what you want, Megan."

"Please."

"Please what?" he demanded, lifting his mouth from her and stilling his fingers.
"Do you want to come?"

"Yes," she cried, bucking against his fingers, tightening her inner muscles around them.

"And how shall I do that, Megan. Tell me what you want me to do."

Oh God, she couldn't believe he wanted her to say the words. She was so close to orgasm she was vibrating.

"Lick me. Please. Please, Gabriel, lick me."

He bit her inner thigh then swept it with his tongue. "Here?"

"No!" She pounded her fist against the bed as her body trembled, crying out for release.

"Here?" he said, flicking his tongue up her labia.

Damn him. Damn his games.

"No!"

"Tell me, baby. Say it out loud."

"My clit, Gabriel, please. Suck me, lick me, make me come!"

He laid his hand over her pubis and pressed his mouth to her before she finished begging. The hard tip of his tongue flicked against her clit and she moaned her approval. He swirled and sucked faster, harder, in perfect rhythm with his thrusting fingers.

Megan's muscles tensed, from her toes to the fingers that had a death grip on the sheets. She was panting and keening, her head turning from side to side as she hovered on the brink.

When the first wave of her orgasm began to build he latched on to her small nub and sucked hard, driving her to the shattering peak. When she began her decent he turned his fingers over, crooking them forward to drive into her G-spot. Megan cried out, never having felt anything like it before. She'd heard of the G-spot but never knew how it worked, where it was or what it did.

Gabriel obviously knew.

She writhed under his skill until moments later, explosions of pleasure racked her body and she gave in to her second orgasm, an orgasm of such intensity, her very sanity was threatened.

"Oh God, oh God, oh God," she repeated, trying to catch her breath. "What the hell just... Oh my God..." She was incapable of a complete sentence. She tried to prop herself onto her elbows but her muscles were still convulsing so she flopped back.

Gabriel patiently stripped her of her garments while she recovered.

"Oh, Gabriel," she breathed, watching him undress. "All that for a T-shirt? Holy Hannah, what would you do for a pair of pants?"

"I'm a thirty-six long, in case you ever want to find out," he said, his voice husky with desire.

He picked his new tee off the chair where he'd tossed it and threw it to Megan. "Put it on."

She raised her eyebrows. "Because," he answered, "when I wear it tomorrow, I want it to smell like you, like you smell during sex."

He stood at the foot of the bed—the sight of his cock made her breath catch—and watched her pull the shirt over her head. It pooled around her waist.

"Lie down on your stomach," he instructed. He leaned over her, brushed her hair to one side and nuzzled her neck.

"Mm, that's nice."

His tongue tickled the back of her ear before he playfully gripped her lobe between his teeth. He let go long enough to whisper, "Get up on your hands and knees," before continuing to dot kisses down her neck and shoulder.

She did as she was told and he pulled her backward, pressed her against his hard shaft.

"Mm, that's nice too."

He pushed his knee between hers and nudged her legs apart. He ran his hands over her ass, down the backs of her thighs and up the center, grazing her pussy. She pushed down onto his hand but it had already begun to journey up.

She felt something prod against her back entrance.

"I...Gabriel, what are you doing?"

He leaned forward, his muscular body engulfing her until his mouth was at her ear. "Feeling my way."

"Your 'way'?" she repeated and felt the length of his cock press against her backside. "Your way into..." Her eyes went huge. Oh no. He wouldn't dare. *It wouldn't fit!*

Her heart picked up speed again, a combination of panic and excitement, fear and craving.

"No, Gabriel, you're too big. I've never done —"

"Trust me, Megan. Just let go."

She leaked a little moan when she felt his fingers slip back between her legs and cream her back entrance up with her own juices.

"Let's get you primed."

She'd been primed since he walked in the door four days ago, but she couldn't think, couldn't talk, could barely breathe properly in anticipation of what he was going to do to her body. One finger was circling her anus, spreading her slick cream. He added pressure, pushing against her opening. Her thoughts were warring, half of her yelling, *No, stop!* and the other yelling, *Yes, do it to me, hard and dirty!* She was about to explode.

"Relax," he ordered, making her knees quiver. The moment his thumb penetrated the tight barrier, easing into her, stretching her, heat rushed to her middle, drenching her pussy. She tried to take a relaxing breath but she couldn't inhale deeply enough. Her body tensed with anticipation.

Gabriel reached under the loose shirt with his other hand and caressed her breast, pinching her nipple, tugging it gently, and she felt her limbs lose strength.

"Yes," she whispered. "Touch me."

"Where, baby?"

"There. You know..." Megan couldn't say it. He made her beg before, not this time. She reddened at the thought.

"Your pussy, Megan?" Oh God, the way he said it! She wanted to hear it again. *Pussy*. That sensuous voice alone could make her come, but when he chose that moment to graze her clit, the combination was dangerous.

"Say it. Say 'touch my pussy, Gabriel'."

God damn you, Gabriel! "Just do it, please," she begged.

"Tell me where you want it."

How could she *not* say it? She was dying here. "Touch my pussy, Gabriel," she breathed. And for good measure, "Please!"

He thrust his middle finger deep into her.

"Where else, Megan, where else should I touch you?"

"There. Yes," she panted as she felt his thumb thrust inside her anus again.

"Do you want me to fuck your ass, Megan?"

She groaned and pushed back against his hand.

"Say it."

She was not going to say that. All she could do was groan, "Yes," and it cost her dearly.

He growled at that breathy word, removed his thumb and clamped his hand on her waist, rooting her to the spot as he claimed the booty.

She squealed when he pushed inside, his cock long and hard, urging its way into her ass while his fingers dipped into her dripping sex.

He held still for a moment, letting her get used to the feeling of him deep inside her. He drew back a fraction and drove forward. They both began to pant as he quickened his strokes. Megan tried to bite back her cries—pain, pleasure, total freaking ecstasy. As the intensity grew, he found her clitoris, used his calloused fingertips to pluck it until Megan began keening and pumping her hips. As soon as she started coming, he drove his fingers into her center.

Her body tensed, muscles quivering with her release. Her heart pounded in her chest, threatening to bruise the inside of her rib cage with its velocity at the incredible sensation of being full. Both ways.

Not an Average Megan now.

* * * * *

Megan woke to the soft sounds of the piano—a tune so lovely, so haunting that she thought she was dreaming it. She reached for Gabriel but he wasn't there. Of course, he was playing.

Still wearing his T-shirt, she got out of bed and quietly crept into the living room. Barely visible in the dark, he was hunched over the keys, his back to her. Beyond him, through the patio doors, the inky blackness of night was just beginning to give way to a smoky gray in the east, the merest whisper of dawn.

She stood just out of his peripheral vision, riveted by the music, not wanting to interrupt the magic that was seeping from his fingers. She let her eyes drift close, let the melody surround her, flow through her body, her soul.

The piece was in a minor key, making it sound melancholic, heartrending, longing. It evoked the memory of Stella Maris' legend—a lonely girl waiting on the beach for her lover, her sobs muffled by the rhythmic surf, her tears mingling with the sand.

As the lower register notes became more prominent, her mind's eye clearly saw the distraught young woman as she stood and faced the ocean—a merciless beast that stole the life of her beloved.

Megan felt her resolve, her determination to join her fiancé in death. She could picture her slow, unwavering steps, the sand depressing under her footfalls, bearing the weight of her heavy heart as she walked toward the surf.

She could feel the song winding down, coming to an end, and she wanted to cry out to Gabriel to play on, to let the girl live, but the final strains of the music grew fainter, slower, until the sound melted into the stillness of dawn, like the girl melting in the deep blue.

Megan felt her own tears sliding down her cheeks. She was afraid to speak, afraid to disturb the silence that somehow seemed part of the piece.

He turned, noticed her standing there. "Sorry. I didn't mean to wake you."

"That was so beautiful," she whispered and wiped her cheeks. She came up behind him and laid her hands on his shoulders.

He reached up and pulled her hands forward, so they were around his neck. "Did you like it?"

"Oh Gabriel, I don't know what to say." Megan sat on the bench beside him, her back to the keyboard. "I don't have the right vocabulary to even describe how much I loved it. It...it... I'm sorry, I can't find the words, but I didn't just hear it, I felt it. Here," she said, placing her hand over her chest. "And in my throat and my knees and my tummy." She couldn't make out his features in the dim light, but she saw him nod. "What's it called? Where is it from?"

"It's not from anything. I wrote it and you're the first person who's ever heard it. It doesn't even have a title." He leaned forward and gave her a peck on the lips. "Perhaps I'll call it 'Waking Megan'."

"Don't joke." She gave him a breathy laugh. "It sounded like background music for a sweeping epic—a love story, a hero's journey, that kind of thing."

"Interesting you should bring that up. It's been a dream of mine to score a movie."

"Why don't you?"

"Maybe when I finish being a rock star," he chuckled.

"Can't you do both?"

"Peter would have a cow if I dropped everything to follow my personal dream."

"Why? He's your manager. Shouldn't your interests be his?"

"I wish it were so, Insightful Megan, but Peter's focus is and should be on Rough Cut."

"Why do you call him Peter, anyway? I thought his name was Jackson."

"It is. His name is Jackson Hewitt and the reason I call him Peter is because Ash won't let me call him Slimy Little Fucker to his face."

"I should think not," she laughed.

"Jackson is a knob, Megan, a total fucking douche. But he leaves me alone, for the most part, and is great at schmoozing, dealing with the record label, the press, the PR people, all the slimy, phony shit I can't be bothered with. He does what I tell him and never sticks his nose into the creative side. He's everything I'm not."

"Still doesn't explain the 'Peter'."

"I started calling him The Tool, and Ash chastised me for being rude, so I called him Peter instead. As in Peter O'Toole."

"With no disrespect to the actor, of course."

"Of course."

"I like it." Megan's lips curved at the thought that was forming. "You know, I think I'll refer to our more difficult customers as 'Peters', give the waitstaff a bit of a laugh when they're under stress. Do you mind?"

"I don't, but Peter might," he laughed.

"So Peter the Tool will have a cow if you venture off and do your own thing?"

"Until this album is finished, until the tour is over, until all my Rough Cut obligations are finished."

"But that won't be anytime soon, will it? I mean, you're at the pinnacle of your career. Everything you wanted."

"Everything I wanted? Maybe. Everything I *needed* to prove my father is a fucking asshole. Absolutely." He took her hand in his. "Don't get me wrong, Megan. I know I'm living a life most young men fantasize about, but truthfully, it's not quite what I had in mind. It just sort of got away from me."

"So when is it time for your dream, Gabriel? When is it time to stop trying to win the approval of your father? Because ultimately that's what you're doing, isn't it? Waiting for him to say, 'Right, boy, I was wrong, you did good, I'm bloody proud of you. Let's have a gin and tonic!'"

Gabriel laughed at her stuffy British accent. "Restaurateur *and* psychologist?"

"And I can work a blowtorch," she added, squeezing his hand. "Seriously, Gabriel, when is it time for your dream?"

"I don't know, Megan. I just don't bloody know. I do know I'm getting tired of bouncing around the globe, but there is still so much to do. I can't even think beyond this album and tour, and Peter and my lawyers are, as we speak, in negotiations with the record label for another two albums." His thumb made small circles in her palm. There was so much feeling in the small patch of flesh, it was like he was stroking her entire body.

"But I can tell you this much," he continued. "I want out of the rock scene before I become a monologue joke for Leno. I'm just waiting for the day he calls me the Gray Angel of Rock."

It was her turn to chuckle.

She laughed a lot with this man. There was such an easy interaction between them, a comfortable rapport. She was going to miss it when their week was up.

"And you, Sweet Megan. What do you want to be when you grow up? What are your dreams?"

"Interesting that you should bring that up, Mr. Law, because during the few moments I haven't been ogling your ass, I've been scheming my own future."

"Really? Just my ass?"

"Your ears are rather nice too," she said, leaning in to flick his earlobe with her tongue.

"Mmm, don't start. First I want to hear about your plot for worldwide domination. Or were you simply going to open a plant nursery?"

She rewarded his sarcasm with a bite to the lobe. "Can you imagine me surrounded by hundreds of Audreys? I'd go mad!" She pulled away from the heavenly smell of his neck before she devoured him whole. "Actually, I think I'd like to open my own restaurant." It was his turn to squeeze her hand in encouragement. "Stepping into the executive manager's shoes for all those months was exhilarating beyond belief. Gemma already told me that I'm a shoo-in for the position when Jean-Louis retires, which is only a couple years away, but the thought of having my own place is beginning to light a little fire in me."

"I think it's a wonderful dream, Megan," he said.

"It's a good distance off, but I can start saving, come up with a business plan so that when I'm ready, I can jump in."

Without hesitation, a moment's pause to consider it, he said, "I can always—"

She put her hand up to stop him. "Don't say it, Gabriel. Please." She had to stop him before it got awkward. The last thing she needed was a loan from her vacation fling, something to bind them together past this magical week. Tempting, yes, but it would just be too weird. It was very sweet of him to even attempt an offer, and for that, her esteem was sealed. But wisdom, maybe a hint of pride, couldn't let her walk that path.

"Will you play some more?" she asked, eager to move on.

"Any requests?"

“Amuse me.”

“Inspire me.”

Megan turned and tilted her chin up, parting her lips as they pressed against his. She slipped her tongue inside for a teasing swirl, a swift, intoxicating taste of him. He inhaled deeply and she withdrew. She swept the tip of her tongue across his bottom lip, enjoying the warmth, the soft plumpness. His hands came around her waist but she batted them away. This was her show.

She nibbled then sucked his lower lip into her mouth. He moaned, deep in his throat. She kissed him again, lips slightly open, but instead of deepening the kiss she whispered against his mouth, “That inspiration enough?”

“Mmm,” he hummed, their lips touching softly.

“Can I touch you while you play?” she asked, tearing her lips from his and rising to stand behind him.

“Sure, but I can’t be responsible for any errors.”

With the familiar opening chords of Beethoven’s Fifth, Megan let her hands roam the expanse of his broad back, across, down and up the center, spreading warmth with her light caress.

In the growing dawn, she could just make out the intricate pattern of the tattoo that adorned his upper back, the lines and swirls growing from a center symbol that looked like the fleur-de-lis, extending across the back of his shoulders. It had a heraldic feel to it, like it could have surrounded the coat of arms of a king.

She dipped her head and used her tongue to trace every thread, every contour, every swirl, feeling the muscles of his shoulder blades bunch and stretch under her wet mouth as his fingers danced across the keyboard. He switched from classical to jazz, treating her to Duke Ellington’s “Satin Doll” and “Mood Indigo”.

Her kind of music, her kind of man. The taste of him, hot, smooth and hard, was intoxicating. Megan dragged her mouth across his flesh, using her tongue, her teeth, her lips, even her fingers to explore every inch of him.

She could feel the stirring in her center, the fire beginning to burn deep inside her. But she needed more, more contact, more of his heat. She pulled the oversized T-shirt off, letting it drop to the floor. She leaned her body against him, pressing her breasts against his back. Her nipples tightened, puckering on contact, sending vibrations to her pussy. She'd had him only hours ago, and though she should have been content, she felt hungry, achy for more.

She nuzzled the back of his neck, nibbling and kissing the long, corded column as he continued to play, hypnotizing her with the sounds she loved. She recognized this tune from Miles Davis' bluesy period. This rocker knew jazz and he was making her mindless with lust. Each keystroke accelerated her heartbeat as she inhaled his scent, savored his taste, absorbing the passion of the music through him.

Her arms wrapped around his middle, fingertips drifting over the ridges and dips, willing him to turn around so she could follow with her tongue.

He drew in a breath when she fingered the dark circles of flesh, captured his nipples between her thumbs and forefingers. She plucked them, pinched them, her own breasts aching as she rubbed them into his back.

Her fingers glided lower, over his rippled abs which contracted on touch. But there wasn't a missed note. Not so much as a skipped beat. It was like a challenge.

She put a finger in her mouth, getting it hot and wet before she used it to circle his bellybutton. She felt his muscles tremble when she dipped it into the cleft, heard his quick intake of breath. And still he played. Nina Simone's "Feeling Good". *Oh Gabriel.*

It had to be done. She dropped to her knees and laid her cheek against his back so she could hear his heartbeat, every breath. She slipped her hand into the waistband of his shorts and captured his very erect cock in her fist. Over the music, she heard it, felt it—his heart pounded in double time. Her own heart rammed in her breast, pumping

hot, heady lust, making her body weak but strengthening her purpose. His cock pulsed in her hand, in rhythm to the need that zinged through her pussy.

She inched her hand higher to the satin skin of his head and torpidly circled the slit with her fingers, spreading the pearl of pre-cum that seeped out the thick tip. The muscles of his thighs tightened and he groaned, low and deep within his chest, a sound sweeter to her ears than the melody he played.

Again she fisted him, applying pressure as she slid down to the base and back up. He was so wide, so powerful, just holding him in her hand made her dizzy. She slipped her other hand in his shorts, reached low and cupped his balls. They were heavy, gathered tight, and as she exerted pressure he faltered, his fingers tripping on the chords.

That'll teach you to defy me. She smiled against his back and gave his scrotum another squeeze.

"Fuck it," he said and slammed the keyboard shut. He grabbed her wrists and swiveled around on the bench, capturing her between his legs. Hoarsely, he whispered, "I got you."

But he let go to slip his shorts over his hips and to the floor, revealing the massive hard-on she was responsible for. She grinned up at him, a point of pride. His eyes were dark, burning with need, drinking in her nakedness. She could feel the flush—from her middle, her core—a flash of heat that radiated out like a lava flow, consuming her.

He grabbed her shoulders, pulling her forward, but she knocked his hands down.

"My show," she whispered, and pushed him back so he was leaning on the cover of the keyboard. She pushed his legs farther apart so that when she leaned in she could press her tummy against erection.

She slithered up his body so she could start on his neck, that hot little area under his ear, and use her tongue to trace the bottom angle of his jaw. Down she went, hungrily laving as she skimmed his shoulders, his chest.

"You're making me so hot, baby," he growled. He tilted his hips, pressing his cock against her ribs, the tip reaching just beneath her breasts. Her tongue found a pebbled nipple and she flicked it, sucked it, bit it until he writhed against her. He groaned, hissed out a breath with a barely audible "Fuck".

Her mouth finally found the ripples of his abs, that six-pack she'd thirsted for since her eyes first drank in his shirtless form.

She felt his cock inch higher and adored the feeling of his satin steel rubbing between her tender, hypersensitive breasts. She cupped herself, squeezing them together to envelop his length.

"Megan, you're killing me," he said through clenched teeth. He rocked his hips, watching greedily as he slid his cock up and down between her breasts while she feasted on his rock-hard abs.

She followed every groove, every striation, laving, tonguing, devouring. She wanted his taste in her mouth forever. He was tight and oh-so solid, but the contracted tissue quivered beneath her lips. She felt a hot wave of desire between her legs, drenching her pussy even more.

His breath was coming hot and fast. Where the room had previously been filled with music, now it echoed with their fast, shallow pants.

It was time.

Near the point of fever, Megan got up and straddled him, her knees on the piano bench on either side of his hips. His chest was rising and falling rapidly as she gripped his shoulders. In one hasty movement she impaled herself, all the way down to his balls. He groaned at the same time she gasped, the initial shock of him filling her, stretching her, pleasing her beyond decent. She moved slowly, drawing herself up to the tip of him before slamming back down.

"That's it, fuck me, Megan. Fuck me," he urged, gripping her hips and guiding her movements as he rocked beneath her. She rode him hard, pumping up and down, squeezing her inner muscles around him.

"Your pussy is so tight. So fucking tight." He took her hand from his shoulder and guided it to her pussy. "Touch yourself. Show me how you do it."

"I..." Her hesitation lasted only a second, her need winning over. She grazed her clit with the tip of her middle finger, shyly whispering, "Like this."

"Is that how you touch yourself, Megan, how you masturbate?"

"Yes."

"Do you put it inside you, do you fuck yourself with it, with your finger?"

Her head fell back with a breathy, "Yes!"

He grabbed her breasts, brushing her nipples with his thumbs. "I want to see you come."

Megan's eyes closed. She could no longer think, only feel, his cock plunging, his hands squeezing her breasts, her finger circling. "Yes, God, yes!"

"Come with me, love."

Megan, blind with ecstasy, the pressure gauge at critical, slid a finger into her wet folds and rubbed her clit as she bounced up and down on his shaft.

"That's it, baby, let it go, let it go." His voice was tight, controlled. He waited until her body tensed, every muscle stiff and quivering before thrusting up once more, hard, powerful, potent, their cries of release perfectly synchronized.

Chapter Five

Thursday

"I'm afraid I've consumed your entire holiday," Gabriel said after a languid session of wake-up sex. It was already after noon and Megan had twenty-four hours before she was back on a plane to Toronto.

"Yeah. Worst vacation of my life. All sex and no sightseeing." He gave her a squeeze for her sarcasm. They lay side by side, her arm thrown across his chest, their legs intertwined. The very smell of her hair, her skin, sweet and fresh, made him breathe deeper, wanting to become saturated in her scent. He could happily lay like this for the rest of the day, for the rest of his life. But he had an album to finish.

His last tour had ended over six months ago. After taking a month off to do nothing but sit by the pool of his house in Malibu and work out to get his body bulked back up—touring always left him on the skinny side—he'd given himself plenty of time to nail down some new sounds. But for the first time in his career, neither inspiration nor motivation came. He struggled with every word, every note. It began sounding formulaic, old, done.

Frustrated, he let himself get caught up in a deluge of distractions—award shows, parties, guest appearances, more parties, collaborating with a few other artists, still more parties. Time flitted faster than one of Grinder's riffs. And now he was at a critical point. It was no fucking wonder Ash and Peter were on his ass. If he didn't finish, the band couldn't lay down the tracks and start rehearsals for their fall tour. And he still needed to work with his director on the video storyboards. It was his own fault he was so adamant about maintaining creative control over every fucking aspect. Maybe Peter was right. Maybe he should be letting the guys play a bigger role, Peter included.

But it had always been him and him alone making every critical decision. He ran an extremely tight ship, keeping his band tuned and well oiled, like a machine. Other artists took months in the studio. Not Rough Cut. They were famous for putting together twelve-track albums in as many days. Gabriel didn't fuck around, nor did his band. That's why he chose professionals all those years ago to back him. Since their first album, Gabriel had gone into the studio knowing exactly what sound he wanted. On the road he kept the tour schedule tight—no more and no less than six months were devoted to touring, major cities only.

For the first time since his first album, the machine wasn't running smoothly. It didn't feel right anymore. Maybe he was tired. Or maybe he was just done. But he couldn't be. Not yet.

"I'm going to jump in the shower and try to get some work done," he said, planting a kiss on her head before untangling himself to rise. "Why don't you call Stella Maris and see how many of those sights you can hit before dinner?"

"I'm okay just to hang out here. Maybe read, go for a walk." She rolled onto her tummy, her legs bent at the knees, her feet in the air.

"I absolutely insist, Megan." He felt his cock quiver at the sight of her gorgeous ass. The gentle curve from the small of her back continued into a perfectly rounded hump, high and firm. Delicious. He desperately needed her out of the cottage or he wouldn't get any work done. And he wanted to work on a new song that was blasting around his head, a ballad inspired by her aquamarine eyes.

"Do you have any idea how much trouble I'll be in with Gemma if she finds out I hijacked your holiday? That I practically kept you prisoner, my own personal sex slave?" He gave her a playful slap on her ass. "Shall I tell her how you begged?"

"You wouldn't dare!" She rolled over and sat up. "Gabriel Law, that would be most un-angelic of you."

He took hold of her wagging finger and brought it to his mouth, sucked it hard and deep before letting it drop. Bad move. He could feel the blood rushing south. Again.

"Oh, but I would," he said with a smirk. "I'm a fucker that way." He walked out of the bedroom toward the bathroom. "Stella's number is by the phone," he shouted and turned the nozzle to frigid.

Megan heard the horn and quickly finished spreading the pharmaceutical cream on her ankles to ease the itching of her rash, then gathered her guidebook, sun hat and sunscreen and shoved them into her bag. She ran out of the bedroom dressed in white Capri pants and a sleeveless navy polo.

She was glad he'd insisted on this tour. Yes, she would have been quite content to hang around and ogle his chest, his bum, his long, talented fingers as he played the piano, but she really did want to see more of the island. Bermuda wasn't cheap so there was a better than good chance she wouldn't be back.

She found Gabriel standing at the open window of Stella's taxi having a chat. He was wearing navy shorts and another white polo. She looked down at her own choice of clothes. Creepy.

She came up behind him and waved at Stella. When Gabriel turned, she expected a peck and goodbye, but instead got a full-body embrace and a lingering kiss.

He pulled back a fraction. "Be back for dinner?"

"Depends," she said, drawing in her eyebrows. "What's on the menu?"

"Fish sandwiches with mango salsa."

She looked off to the side, pretending to be deep in thought. "Dessert?"

"You."

"Mmm...then I'll be there."

He gave her a deep, masculine chuckle and kissed her again before helping her into the front seat of the van. His gaze softened and he took a deep breath. "Take good care of my girl, Stella."

My girl? Megan felt a swell of emotion overtake her. *Gabriel Law called me his girl.*

“That goes without sayin’, Mr. Law,” Stella said and pulled out.

He regretting sending her away the moment the taxi was out of sight. Now he wouldn’t be able to sneak glances at her when she wasn’t looking, catch a flash of that brilliant smile that made him feel like he’d just had a hit of speed. He missed her already.

Fuck. He used to roll his eyes when his girlfriends got moony-eyed and gushed about how they’d miss him when he was only stepping away for a piss.

Gabriel shook his head and took the steps two at a time, slammed the door of the cottage and flopped onto the couch. He picked up his guitar and put it down again, walked into the bedroom, straightened up the bed, picked up Megan’s book and set it down. He headed for the kitchen and plugged in the kettle. Took out teabags, put them back. Took out the instant coffee, put it back. Filled a water glass and unplugged the kettle, drank the water in three large gulps and slammed the glass against the counter.

He looked at his guitar. He needed to focus, get to work, but his mind was a cascade of conflicting thoughts. His heart seemed settled, but his head had serious reverb.

What the hell was wrong with him? How could this girl have burrowed so deeply into him in five short days? He’d spent ten hedonistically sex-filled days in Majorca last year with The Twins—they weren’t really sisters but they looked so much alike that he thought of them as such—and they had never crossed his mind again until today. Once they were out of sight—boom, gone, out of his mind.

Even his last long-term relationship, if you can call seven months “long term”, didn’t make him act like a horny love-struck goat. And Bella was a gorgeous creature, even if she did run a smidge shallow. The press had loved them together. They couldn’t go anywhere without photographers hounding them, asking if there were wedding bells on the horizon, if his latest song was about Bella, if they’d be doing a movie

together. Bella loved it, as did countless other starlets and models he'd slept with over the span of his career.

He couldn't do that to Megan. Sweet, normal, average Megan. He couldn't ask her to be part of the madness that was his life. He couldn't ask her to wait while he toured twelve countries over the span of months. And if she was willing, could he promise to be faithful? He'd not gone an entire week his adult life without having someone in his bed. He wouldn't *intend* to, but what if he *did* betray her?

What would it be like if their roles were reversed? How would he react knowing she'd be gallivanting the globe with a bunch of groupies throwing themselves at her, men sneaking into her room just to steal a piece of her—a pair of knickers, a lock of hair from her brush. How would he feel knowing she'd tried every drug, taken part in orgies, fucked anything that looked good?

A hard, poisonous knot formed in his gut.

She was too good for him, for his sordid past. Megan Frost was too nice, too pure to be witness to his freakish lifestyle. She'd be far better off with a nice accountant, someone with less baggage, fewer complications.

Even if they both agreed to see where a relationship would take them, she'd be ripped apart by insensitive tabloid journalists. And Gemma would have his arse on a platter if the paps were to station themselves outside her restaurant to get candid of Dark Angel's alleged lover. Bloody hell, what a mess—a big, bloody fucking mess.

* * * * *

Megan returned to the cottage just after six o'clock, completely exhausted from her island tour but exhilarated to see Gabriel. He hadn't left her thoughts for more than a few minutes all afternoon. At the aquarium, the angelfish had made her think of her Dark Angel.

Fort St. Catherine, with its underground stone tunnels and dark, dank rooms, made her think of dungeons, which led to sex slaves, which led to begging Gabriel for his touch.

St. Peter's Church brought her thoughts back to the mermaid's tale, which made her think of the sailboat and their afternoon of passion, her first time with Gabriel.

And finally, the clear pool deep in the pit of Crystal Caves made her think of the dolphin pool at the park, which led to their first kiss. Not to mention what the thick stalagmites did to her imagination.

The front door had barely closed behind her when she was tackled.

"I missed you," he said, trying to keep her upright from his assault and trailing kisses across her cheek and down her neck.

"Really? Because you didn't cross my mind all day," she replied and got a sound smack on her ass for her lies. "If that's foreplay, it's working."

"You're insatiable."

"No, what I am is exhausted. Stella took me all over the place and I only saw this end of the island!"

"There's a glass of wine and some hors d'oeuvres on the breakfast bar," he said, dancing her over.

"You are a treat to come home to," she said, unwinding his arms so she could enjoy the spread. "You'd make a terrific little wife."

"Does that mean I get the bottom tonight? I wouldn't mind taking it easy."

Parry, thrust. It was her turn. "Easy? Only those who can extend their ankles to their ears need apply."

"Ouch."

He had no idea. "If you'd like an audition, I'm happy to oblige."

"I may need a demonstration first."

"Okay, but I'll need a volunteer from the audience."

His hand shot up and they both laughed at his eagerness.

"You're not joining me?" Megan asked, raising her wineglass.

"No. I'm getting our dinner ready. We're going on a picnic."

"Our last night together and you want to go to a park and eat on the ground?" she asked bemusedly.

"Just you wait, my pretty." The gleam in his eye sent heat straight to her loins.

* * * * *

Friday

The reflection from the glow of the full moon cut an undulating silver path through the center of the dark water, catching the tops of the waves as they broke over the reefs a few hundred feet from shore. Gabriel opened the picnic basket, drew out a chilly bottle of white wine and two glasses and handed them to Megan. He made a small nest in the sand, pulled out a thick candle, lit it and placed a glass hurricane lamp over the top. The flame cast a soft circle of yellow light around them.

"I can't believe we have this stretch of paradise to ourselves," Megan said as she twisted the corkscrew. "Where is everyone?"

"The fact that it's after midnight probably has something to do with it," he said. "Not really a good time for tanning. Well, maybe for you." She laughed, but not without giving a lock of his hair a tug.

He set out a plate of fish sandwiches—pan-fried rockfish on fresh rolls—a tub of strawberries, a hunk of farmer's cheese and a bunch of grapes.

"Madam," he said, accepting the glass of wine she held out. "I hope you find the menu to your taste."

"I assure you, kind sir, my expectations have been exceeded."

They clinked glasses and sipped, adrift in the moment.

They ate their meal to the hypnotic soundtrack of the ocean—the rhythm of the water pushing and pulling against the sand. Their banter wasn't quite as easy, their laughter not as forthcoming, both of them hyperaware that every moment left in their brief affair was passing too quickly.

She stole a glance at Gabriel. He was watching her.

"Take your clothes off."

"What? Out here?"

"We're going swimming."

"Well then, it's a good thing I have my suit on under my outfit."

"Take it off too."

"But I thought you said —"

"I should have been more specific," he said, peeling his shirt off and stepping out of his shorts. "We're going skinny dipping."

He stood there in all his naked glory, his body bathed in the blue light of night. Oh yeah! She jumped up and stripped, waiting for a surge of modesty—she was in a public place, after all—but it never came. There was something about being naked with Gabriel Law that stripped her of her inhibitions.

She twined her fingers with his, their palms molded together, and they walked down the deserted beach toward the water. Megan stopped when she felt the warm surf tumble over her toes. Suddenly, looking at the inky black water, she didn't think it was such a good idea. Surely they could find a pool somewhere? With chlorine and no living things lurking in the depths?

"Come on, we won't go in too deep," he said, tugging her hand.

"We should wait at least thirty minutes after dinner before going swimming," she said as the water licked her ankles.

"Thanks for the PSA, but we're not actually swimming and I don't think standing, wading or bobbing qualifies." He tugged her forward a few more feet.

"What if I get a cramp?"

"I'll save you."

"What about sharks? They usually feed at night. I saw that on a documentary." She dug her feet into the wet sand, the cool sea swirling around her knees.

"There are no sharks this close to shore. Didn't your guidebook explain that to you?"

"No."

"I remember that from my last visit here. The island is surrounded by a huge circle of coral reefs that act as a barrier, like a giant fence so sharks can't really get through unless they're small or exceptionally crafty."

She hesitantly walked a few feet farther and gasped as the water hit the skin of her bare tummy. Gabriel looked at her and chuckled.

"What's so funny?"

"You. You needn't be shy. The fish don't care if you're naked."

Megan looked down at her arm protectively covering her bare breasts.

"It's not shyness. It's to keep them warm in the water."

He circled behind her, pushed her arm down and wrapped his large, muscular limbs around her. She leaned back into his broad chest, taking pleasure in his heat, his touch, his steadiness in the undulating sea. "Oh sure. Now the crafty sharks get me first."

"That was my evil plan all along."

He used his weight to push her ahead until she was submerged to her chest. She turned in his arms to face him.

"Stella was right."

"About?"

"She asked me again if we'd gone swimming yet. I told her I'd already been snorkeling, but she insisted that we must come together, that it was the most romantic thing in the world to swim with your lover."

"She said that? The part about the lover?"

"Actually, she was far more delicate. I believe she said 'with your man'."

"Am I your man?" He leaned in to press his lips against her mouth in a brief but promising kiss.

"At the moment," she replied, paraphrasing his sentiments from their day on the boat, though she desperately wanted to scream *YES, YES, YES!*

She stood on tiptoe and met his mouth. There was a hungry desperation to their kiss, a need to communicate their passion as the moon began its march across the midnight sky and the clock ticked closer to her departure.

Megan's arms went up around his neck and she tangled her fingers into his thick black hair. A moan formed in her throat as Gabriel stroked her back from her shoulder blades to her bottom. Her heart kicked against her chest, speeding up as her internal temperature rose.

What was she going to do without him? How could she possibly go back to her humdrum routine, face each day without him? The thought of never seeing him again gnawed at her, leaving her hollow and achy.

She used to be content, satisfied with her average life, but now that she'd tasted Gabriel Law she wanted more. Opening her own restaurant would satisfy her career goals, but she also wanted love, marriage, children—and she wanted it all with Gabriel.

This was supposed to be a vacation fling—a raunchy affair to be experienced, enjoyed and quickly forgotten. Instead she'd gone and fallen in love with a rock star who was so totally out of her league it was embarrassing. He was worldly, rich, talented and drop-dead gorgeous. She should be grateful they'd had this amazing week

together. To expect anything more was just foolish. After she left tomorrow, he would get on with his exciting life, rock the world and date more Pussy Cats.

"What's the matter, love?" he asked, breaking the kiss.

"Nothing, why?"

"I sense you drifting away."

"No, I'm fine," she said, forcing a smile. The bright moonlight cast half his face in shadows, but she could see the puzzling concern in the other half. She would not screw this up, their last night together.

Get with the program, Megan. He doesn't want melancholy, he wants sexy and eager.

She laid a palm on his cheek, stroked the prickly day's growth, "I was just thinking how lovely this week has been." *Damn it, no melancholy!*

"A lovely week with a lovely girl." *Gel.* She was going to miss that.

Was it coincidence that they both managed to use the word love in their bland statements?

He dropped his forehead onto hers. His voice low and serious, he asked, "What's really on your mind, Megan?"

"Why aren't you calling me Average Megan anymore?" she asked, desperate to change the subject.

"Because you're not average. In fact, you're so off the mean curve I'm tempted to call you Magnificent Megan. Amazing Megan. Stellar Megan." He punctuated each with a forehead kiss.

"You know, you don't have to sweet-talk me into putting out. I'm already naked."

"Magnificent Megan," he laughed. How she would miss that masculine rumble that sent shivers racing up and down her spine. "What am I going to do without you?"

"You're going to pine away to nothing, Gabriel. You'll be so helpless you won't have the strength to pluck your guitar."

That's right, girl. Keep it fun. Keep it light. And for heaven's sake, don't cry.

"You're probably right, my love," he said matching her own melancholic tone. Megan could feel the tightness in her chest spread to her throat and tightened her grip around his neck so that every inch of their flesh pressed together. She bit the inside of her cheek to stave off tears. This was not how their last night together was supposed to happen. They were supposed to be bantering and enjoying each other's company. Instead she was being a pathetic sap and from the way he clung to her, she was bringing him down too.

Come on, Megan, lighten up. Have some damn fun. Don't let Gabriel's memory be overshadowed by your pathetic self.

"Have you ever had an underwater kiss?" she asked, pulling back so she could see his face.

"Not that I recall."

"When I was snorkeling the other day, this honeymooning couple took their snorkels out underwater and kissed. It was so sweet."

"Come on then," he said, playing along. "On three. One, two—"

"Wait! Do we count three out loud and then go down? Or do we go down on two and kiss on three?"

"We say three, then go down and kiss."

"Okay, I'm ready."

"One, two...wait a minute. Do we open our mouths or is this just a lip kiss?" he asked.

"I would think just lips, otherwise we'll end up swallowing salt water."

"Right. Here we go with one, two, three."

They submerged, bumped noses before finding each other's mouths and came up laughing.

"I have a better idea," Megan said with a wicked grin. "You stand still, close your eyes and count to three."

"I don't have to do anything? Just close my eyes?"

"And count."

"And count," he said and closed his eyes. "One..."

Megan never heard him reach three as she dove under the surface, but she felt his body jerk when she took his semi-hard cock into her mouth. Within seconds, it grew enormously stiff and hot against her lips. She held on to his thighs to keep from floating upward and swirled her tongue around the engorged head until her lungs were bursting. She slid her breasts up his cock and abdomen, teasing him as she surfaced. She settled against him with her arms around his neck and her legs wrapped around his hips, his rigid cock pressing into her pussy.

"Fucking hell, Megan," he said thickly. "Do you have any idea what you're doing to me?"

"I hope I'm turning you on. I hope I'm making you hot, horny and ready to fuck me before the sun comes up." She went in for a kiss, but captured his bottom lip between her teeth instead. Gabriel blessed her with one of his masculine, throaty growls.

Ata girl, Megan, keep it fun, flirty, sexy. Leave him smiling.

"I'm going to take you back to the beach and fuck you *until* the sun comes up," he said, his gravelly voice dripping with sex. "I'm going to make you come so many times you'll be limping to the plane."

A cascade of white-hot desire coursed through her. "We'd better get started then," she said and slid down the front of him until her feet touched the sand. "You've got less than ten hours."

She found his hand under the waves and, clutching it, turned toward shore. She took three steps before she realized he wasn't moving. She dropped his hand.

"Megan, I..."

She turned to look at him. The silver moon was behind him, leaving his face in complete shadows. She couldn't see what his eyes held, couldn't see the intensity of his

expression, but she heard it in his voice. She was just about to urge him to continue when she felt something brush her leg, something long and slippery. She stood perfectly still, hoping it was just her imagination. It wasn't. She felt it again but this time a tendril wrapped around her calf. She screamed, shook her leg and stepped back.

"What's wrong?" he said.

"Something's got my leg!" More tendrils, scratchy, slimy worms, wrapping around her, latching on to her skin. "Gabriel, it's got me!" she cried. She jumped toward him, resisting the pull of the creature. She clung to his neck as she shook her leg and kicked her feet. Whatever it was had her calf in a death grip and wasn't letting go. What the hell kind of creature had so many arms?

She felt a strong pull and yelped before realizing that Gabriel's arm had come up under her knees and he was lifting her.

"Get it off!"

"Hang on, baby," he said, his voice powerful and reassuring as he pushed against the heavy water to get her ashore as quickly as possible.

Her heart was pounding frantically. She was sure the tentacles of a giant octopus were wrapped around her calf, or maybe a lethal jellyfish, though she didn't feel any biting or stinging. She was on the brink of hysteria, swallowing the screams that kept bubbling into her throat. Despite Gabriel's body heat, goose bumps broke across the surface of her skin. Maybe the thing was sucking her blood?

She closed her eyes as their bodies broke the surface of the water, too afraid to look, afraid to see the sea creature.

She buried her face in his neck, trying to stave off a full-blown panic attack. "What is it? What is it?" She squirmed and bobbed her leg up and down. Whatever it was, it wasn't letting go.

"Relax, my love. It's no beast."

"What?" she asked, her leg slowing its frenzied attempt to shake the thing off.

"Seaweed. You probably stepped in a little eddy and seaweed wrapped around your leg," he explained calmly, lowering her onto their picnic blanket. He grabbed a towel and wrapped it around her shoulders, then took another to wrap his waist. He positioned the candle for better light and knelt in front of her.

"That's quite a mass," he said, poking the thing. It looked like her lower leg had been swallowed by a green basketball. "It'll take me a few moments to untangle this bloody mess," he said, pulling off bits of sargassum.

"Plants hate me," she muttered, watching his deft fingers work the knot of scratchy, branchy, slimy seaweed.

"Really? Land plants or just the sea variety?"

"Both. When I piss off a phylum, I don't discriminate. Ficus, hibiscus, aloe vera and now sargassum, all in cahoots to make Average Megan look like a complete and utter doofus."

"Or maybe you swallowed too much seawater?" he chuckled.

"Nope. It's a conspiracy. Trust me."

He worked quietly for a few moments, pulling bits away from the mass. It was probably just a trick of candlelight, but she noticed his hands were shaky.

"Megan, I know it wasn't your fault but please, don't ever fucking scare me like that again." His tone was light, but when he tilted his eyes up at her, she saw his jaw tighten.

"As long as nothing in the deep dark water tries to consume me ever again, it's a deal."

"I can't believe what a mess this is," he muttered. "And it's heavy. Do you feel the weight?"

"Why do you think I was making my girly sissy noises?"

He gave another sharp tug but only made it tighter. "Hand me the knife."

Megan reached behind her, opened the picnic basket and dug out the serrated cheese knife. "Be careful."

"Don't move."

He sawed at the clump, meticulously loosening pieces from the tangle. All at once it split open, as if it lost its grip and gave up.

Something glinted briefly in the candlelight before thumping onto the blanket.

"Fucking hell, no wonder it was so heavy," Gabriel said and held up a chunk of colored glass. He turned it in his palm a few times and handed it to Megan.

She held it between her thumb and forefinger next to the candle. The stone was the size of a plum but had more of a softened teardrop shape. It was smoothly curved on one side and magnificently beveled on the other, cut into a hundred angles that caught the firelight and refracted its brilliance into a thousand shades of greenish blue.

"It's gorgeous. It looks like some kind of gem."

Gabriel took it from her and held it next to her eyes. The look on his face flashed from astonishment to recognition and when he finally spoke, he said only one word.

"Aquamarine."

Her eyes flitted to the stone. "Someone must have lost..." She looked at Gabriel then over his shoulder toward the dark, mysterious water. When she looked back at him, she could tell by the expression on his candlelit face that his mind was tripping over the same thing hers was.

Stella Maris' legend.

When true love enters the sea, the mermaid gifts a piece of her tail, a symbol of their destiny.

* * * * *

Megan shook the sand from the blanket and beach towels and laid them over the loungers. Instead of going back into the cottage, she stood outside and looked in

through the patio door. Gabriel was in the kitchen, cleaning out the basket and dealing with the remnants of their picnic supper. They hadn't exchanged a word since he'd tossed her clothes at her and added a curt, "Let's get out of here."

Back on the beach, holding the warm gem in her hands, it had felt so surreal, like she was watching a movie, a romantic fairy tale. Of course, had it been Hollywood, the lovers would have fallen into an embrace, declared their undying love and cut—roll credits. But this wasn't a cinematic event and Megan knew it couldn't possibly end with hearts and roses. As much as she liked being around Gabriel Law, maybe was even a little in love with him, it wasn't real.

Two people sharing a cottage for a week in isolation did not constitute a relationship. As soon as the outside world poked in, they would probably find that they didn't suit each other at all. She worked every night of the week, long hours, and had little time for socializing—hence her current single status. And when she wasn't working, she favored quieter pursuits—running, reading, watching old black-and-white movies. She could never keep up with him. She probably wouldn't want to.

He was a rock star, for heaven's sake. A bona fide celebrity. Her mother would have kittens if she brought him home. Imagine him sitting down to Christmas dinner with eyeliner and red-streaked hair, showing off his tattoos to her nephews, who would no doubt find Gabriel to be the coolest creature on the planet. Her brother too. Her brother loved Rough Cut.

Megan gave her head a little shake.

Finding that gem was just a coincidence, a bizarre happenstance. Stella Maris had probably told that tale to hundreds, maybe thousands of people over the years. Somebody obviously lost the stone from their necklace and the eddying seaweed picked it up and wrapped it around her leg. That was the only explanation.

Gabriel pulled the stone from the bottom of the picnic basket, held it in his palm for a moment then set it on the counter. His lips formed a tight line. He glanced up at her, then back at the stone.

Surely he couldn't think she'd staged that? That she would try to manipulate his feelings with an old legend. She stepped over the threshold and pulled the slider shut behind her. "If you're thinking I had something to do with that, I didn't," she said, hating that her tone sounded defensive.

He came around the breakfast bar and moved toward the piano, eyes still not meeting hers. "'Course not." He plunked down on the bench, opened the cover and fingered the keys. "Why don't you take a shower, rinse the salt off."

It may have been disguised as a suggestion, but there was an unmistakable command in his voice.

"Yeah, maybe I will." The air was so thick with unspoken feelings, questions, perhaps even accusations, that it was good to get out of his presence.

As the hot spray hit the back of her neck, she dropped her chin to her chest and watched the water circle the drain and spill through the silver grate.

It was hard not to be consumed by emotion, to give in to the sense of anxiety that was building, inexplicably, in her gut.

No, Megan. We aren't going there. We're not going to get weepy over this, we are not. We are going to go back out, smile, go to bed, catch a plane and get on with life. We have a business plan to create, a restaurant to imagine and, and...

And that was it?

There was Audrey to prune.

Despite her bravado, she wished just for one tiny moment that Gabriel would have acknowledged what the stone meant.

When two people who are destined to be together step into the sea, the mermaid gifts a piece of her tail.

The moment of dawning, the very second she realized the gem could be the shape of a mermaid's scale was the instant she knew Gabriel had arrived at the same

conclusion. But where her heart had given an excited squeeze, he'd shown an entirely different reaction.

She'd quite literally watched the light go out in Gabriel's green eyes, like a curtain coming down signaling the end of the act. The shock, dawning, surprise—all the emotions leading up to that moment—had been instantly replaced by self-consciousness. He'd thrown the gem in the basket—a hot potato, an insignificant chunk of glass.

Or maybe it wasn't insignificant. Maybe, somewhere in those blue glinting facets, he'd recognized their relationship, a union refracted into a thousand parts—their backgrounds, interests, friends, their worlds—separated and journeying in different directions, contradictory paths.

God, what was happening? Her sugarcoated adventure, exhilarating and indulgent, had just dissolved into a thick puddle of sticky syrup that they were both trying to sidestep.

The moment he heard the shower turn on, Gabriel grabbed his BlackBerry.

"Who is Stella Maris?"

"DA, is that you?"

"You know fucking well it's me. Now who is Stella Maris and what kind of games are you playing?"

"Jesus Christ, Gabriel," Ash said, his voice sleepy and confused. "What are you going on about?"

"The taxi driver you sent. Did you put her up to this?"

"What... Who... It's barely five o'clock in the morning. Can't this wait?"

"No."

"Right," he sighed. "Start again. What are you asking me?" Ash must have put his hand over the receiver because the next words were muffled. "It's okay, darling, just Gabriel on a rant. Go back to sleep."

Gabriel took a deep breath. He wanted to scream at Ash for fucking with his head, but he didn't want Megan to hear. "The woman you sent to meet the plane, to take me to your cottage. Who is she? Where did you find her? And did you put her up to this legend charade?"

"First of all," Ash said, matching Gabriel's controlled tone, "I have no idea what you're talking about. I didn't send any driver to meet you. Christ Almighty, Gabriel. You're a big boy. You can get your own fucking taxi."

"You *must* have arranged it. I didn't even give her your address. She was waiting for me and took me straight to your place."

"You'd better stay of the drugs, mate."

"I'm not on any fucking drugs," Gabriel said through clenched teeth. Ash knew better.

"Maybe Peter arranged it then."

"Oh really? And how the hell would The Tool get your Bermuda address?"

"Good point, but... What the hell is going on, DA? Are you in some kind of trouble? Did you sleep with her? Is she trying to blackmail you?"

"Fucking hell, no. Ashley, listen to me. Something strange just happened and I need your absolute word that you did not have anything to do with Stella Maris."

"I had nothing to do with Stella Maris," Ash said. "Hey, isn't that the Virgin Mary?"

"Never mind, Ash, just never mind."

"Well, since I've got you, why haven't you returned any of Peter's messages? Have you finished the album? Are the new songs—" Again, Gabriel heard muffled voices. "Gemma wants to know how's Megan?"

"She's—" Amazing. Magnificent. Perfect. "Fine. Megan's fine. She's leaving tomorrow."

"You haven't shagged her, have you?" Ash chuckled.

Gabriel was silent.

"Oh shit. Please tell me you haven't—"

"Goodbye, Ash. See you Monday."

Gabriel tossed his BlackBerry aside and picked up the small blue business card next to the cottage phone. He didn't believe in fairy tales or legends, so he needed to get to the bottom of this, even if it meant waking the old bird up in the middle of the night.

With the receiver of the cottage phone cradled against his neck, he punched in the numbers on Stella Maris' card—36910. After a moment's pause he heard a recorded voice.

"I'm sorry, the number you have dialed is incomplete. Please hang up and try again."

He did. Twice. Each time he got the same recording.

Something wasn't right. He'd called this number three or four times since he'd arrived and it had worked fine. Megan used it once with no problems. He dialed information services and relayed his problem to the local operator.

"Sir, you must be mistaken. Bermuda switched to seven-digit exchanges over twenty years ago. But if the number you have begins with three, it's probably a Smith's or St. George's number. Try putting two-nine in front of it."

"Thanks. One more thing please. Do you have a listing for Stella Maris?"

"The church?"

"No," he said, trying not to scream. He closed his eyes and gave an exasperated sigh. "She's a person."

"You want the phone number for the Virgin Mary?"

"No, the taxi driver."

"I'm sorry, sir. We have no listing for a person called Stella Maris, but I'll connect you to Island Cabs. Maybe they know of her."

"Thank you."

Bloody hell. This could not be happening. He was confused and Gabriel detested being confused. He was far more comfortable when he was in control, and right now he felt anything but control. His game was completely thrown off. And he was inexplicably angry at...at...he didn't know what, which was half the problem.

While he was waiting for the dispatcher of Island Cabs to check the roster, he held the card up to the light and saw that it was embossed with the faint outline of a mermaid.

Why was he not surprised?

He heard the shower turn off and quickly completed his inquiry. Megan emerged from the bathroom just as he replaced the phone. She looked at him, her eyes full of questions. He wished he had answers.

"I ordered you a cab for the morning."

"Thanks," she said, holding the lapels of her robe tightly shut, and went into the bedroom.

* * * * *

Megan heard the taxi's horn and opened the door to wave to Stella. Except it wasn't Stella. A middle-aged man in a plaid golf cap emerged from the van. He lowered his sunglasses and smiled. "Need help with your bags, ma'am?"

"Yes, please. They're just inside the door here." She turned to Gabriel who was still sitting at the piano, plunking notes and furiously scribbling on a tablet of staff paper, just as he'd been all night.

All night, while she lay in bed, awake, waiting for him to cuddle up beside her, make love one last time. Instead she lay listening to the notes, the melodies, his struggle

for the perfect sound, while her own emotions tumbled and tossed from confusion to sadness to anger. With the gray glow of dawn, she finally found a comforting numbness and gave in to sleep.

"Where's Stella?" she asked, just loud enough to be heard over the music.

His fingers stopped, hovered over the keyboard. "Good question," he replied without turning around.

"I...um..." Megan swallowed. She had assumed he'd arranged for Stella. Megan wanted to tell her about the stone, ask again about the legend. And where *was* the stone? It wasn't on the breakfast bar anymore, but she couldn't work up the nerve to ask Gabriel. What if he'd tossed it back into the sea? "I wanted to say goodbye to her."

"I couldn't reach her," Gabriel said, turning to face her. He looked worse than she felt—his jaw dark with stubble, his eyes red and rimmed with exhaustion—yet somehow, he still remained the most beautiful man she'd ever set eyes on. He stood and came toward her.

"All loaded up, ma'am," the taxi driver called from the doorway.

"I'll be just a moment," Megan replied, her heart rate increasing with every slow step Gabriel took across the tiled floor. He reached into his pocket and withdrew the stone. It was encased in some sort of metallic netting.

"What's this?" she asked.

"I made it into a necklace for you." He held it out to her but she was too stunned to take it from him. Gabriel lifted it and placed the loop over her head. The aquamarine, more brilliant in the light of day than it had appeared last night, dropped heavily against her chest. "Guitar strings. Point-twenty-three millimeter, phosphor bronze. The best."

The anger and confusion that formed a hard knot in her chest melted as she looked down at the stone, nestled in her cleavage in its delicate bronze cage. Before the misery could bloom she quickly replied, "A rock star *and* a jewelry designer?"

"And slayer of sea creatures."

"My hero." She tried to lift the corners of her mouth but the tightness began to gather in her throat, the pressure of tears behind her eyes becoming impossible to ignore, so she quickly turned around, preparing to walk out the door and never see Gabriel Law again.

She'd almost made it. Almost. She swallowed, but there wasn't any saliva in her mouth. She had to ask.

"What happened?" she whispered without turning around.

"I don't know, Megan," he replied. He sighed deeply. "Real life, I suppose."

"Are...are we okay?" She bit her bottom lip to stop it from trembling, glad he couldn't see her face.

"We're okay." He came up behind her and placed his hands on her tense shoulders. "Any regrets?"

She shook her head and concentrated on his touch, the warmth of his fingers and palms instantly calming the anxiety that was building. She longed to turn around and hold him, and be held, and kiss and nuzzle his neck and inhale his intoxicating scent. She was aching to tell him how wonderful he'd made her feel, how much she'd miss him, how she'd do anything to rewind the clock back to Sunday night and do it all over again. "No regrets."

Gabriel hands slid down her upper arms and he let go. Megan let one foot drop onto the stairs, then the next, then the next, each step forward like a suffocating squeeze to her lungs, another brick added to the weight pinning her chest.

Oh God, please don't let this be the end.

"Goodbye, Average Megan."

Chapter Six

Seven months later

Once she realized that the persistent banging wasn't part of the song, she hopped off the bed, cranked the volume knob to nothing and shuffled down the hallway. "Coming!"

Megan pressed her eye to the peephole and saw Alfonso, the building super, wearing a plaid robe, his gray hair standing up on one side, standing next to a young-looking cop.

Shit. It was another noise complaint. She needed this like she needed a fork in her chest. Damn it, she should have used her iPod, but no, Pathetic Megan wanted to be surrounded by his voice. She wanted it to vibrate over every inch of her skin.

She took a deep breath and opened the door a crack, mentally prepared to grovel, offer a humble apology and hurry them on their way before her ice cream melted.

But when she stuck her head out, the only thing that melted was the jagged chunk of ice that had settled in her gut seven months ago.

"Are you Miss Frost?" the policeman asked. She mutely nodded in his direction, but her eyes were riveted to the figure leaning against the wall a few feet from the door. She didn't expect this, not him, not here, not now. Her stomach tumbled, freefalling through her body until she was sure it landed in a heap between her feet. Her heart was about to follow.

"We're sorry to bother you, Miss Frost, but Mr. Law was led to believe you might be ill, possibly unconscious."

"No, I'm fine." She flicked her eyes from Gabriel to the super. "Sorry you were dragged from your bed, Mr. Alfonso."

He shrugged. "If you don't need me then." He pocketed the bulky ring of master keys and shuffled back toward the elevator.

"Thank you, Officer." It was Gabriel who spoke – a voice she hadn't heard for seven long, lonely months but through her speakers. At full volume. And even after all that time, three little words from his mouth made her insides feel like an aviary. It was raspier and deeper than she remembered.

He was dressed as if he'd just come off the stage – thick black eyeliner and wild, blue-streaked hair. In addition to the gold bar in his eyebrow, he had a row of brilliant clear blue studs in one ear.

Aquamarines.

Her hand went immediately to her chest, to the stone that rested warm and heavy between her breasts.

"No problem, Angel," he said, shaking Gabriel's hand and grinning like a sixteen-year-old with Dad's car keys. "And thanks for the, um, autograph." He turned his baby face toward Megan and at least had the decency to look embarrassed.

Gabriel wore low-cut black leather pants that hugged his thighs so intimately that she envied the cow who gave it up. The lace-up fly bulged suggestively. An evocative strip of skin flashed between his pants and black shirt, showing off his rippled abs and muscled hips. His arms were bare, bulging and powerful.

God, he's so beautiful it hurts.

Megan was struck with her own shabby appearance. Her worn, tattered Leafs shirt that barely covered her panties, severe bed head, her face au natural and pale as winter snow, highlighted by lovely red-rimmed eyes, compliments of the cry-fest she'd indulged in for the past five hours. He waited until the cop walked away before pushing into her condo.

"Darling, aren't you glad to see me?"

The emphasis was on “darling” and she somehow understood that she’d just been insulted.

Megan’s throat tightened. That was the problem with crying. Once you started, the tears seemed to hover just below the lids. *Damn it.* She managed to go almost a month without drenching her pillow and he had to come back and mess with her head. She bit the tremble out of her bottom lip before speaking. “Hello, Gabriel.”

He walked into her living room and looked around, carefully avoiding eye contact, which was fine with her.

“How are you?”

“I’m good, thanks,” she lied. She glanced at her bedroom door, standing slightly ajar at the end of the hall. If he saw in there, he wouldn’t even have to ask. It was evidence of just how *not good* she was. “You?” she asked.

“Never better.”

“You...um...you look good.” Heartbreakingly good.

“Thanks. You lost weight?”

“A little.” If fifteen pounds was considered a little.

They stood in silence for a moment. “Aren’t you going to offer an old friend a drink?”

“Gabriel, I’m sorry, but this isn’t a good —”

“Because I came straight here from the show and haven’t had so much as a sip of water.”

“Of course,” she said and walked toward her kitchen. No wonder his voice was edgier. He’d belted out songs for the past three hours.

It was all so damn uncomfortable. How could she maintain this friendly line of chatter when all she really wanted to do was throw herself at him, feel his body pressed against hers, have his perfectly shaped lips touching hers? But their awkward farewell those many months ago was still fresh, still biting raw.

He followed her into the tiny kitchen, making her feel claustrophobic. She handed him a glass of orange juice and watched him gulp it down, a flashback to their first night in the cottage, except this time it wasn't accompanied by the sting of embarrassment, it came with an aching jab of hunger.

She couldn't take the close proximity. She tried to skirt around him, get back to the living room where there was more air, but he stepped sideways, blocking her escape.

"Missed you tonight." He said it casually, like she'd skipped out on happy hour, but the air was thick around him, charged with tension. When she didn't reply, he continued, "I assume you got the invitation?"

Yes, she got the tickets, the VIP backstage pass and an impersonal note saying, *Ms. Frost, we hope you can join Rough Cut for their after-show party.* They were sitting on her bed with a box of balled-up, soggy tissues.

"Sorry. I had to w—"

"I know you weren't at work," he interrupted, slamming his glass on the counter. He turned to her, bore into her with blazing green eyes. "Because when you didn't appear for the driver, despite the fact that he stood at your buzzer for fifteen minutes, I sent Peter to Gemma's. Apparently, you booked the night off." His jaw was tight, his lips a thin line and Megan could see the challenge in his eyes.

The lump at the base of her throat prevented her from speaking, but even if she were able, how the hell was she supposed to explain this to him? How could she tell him that it would have torn her apart to watch him surrounded by screaming girls, watch them cry as he sang, as if his voice was theirs alone? Like he once sang for her.

She stared at her bedroom door, clearly visible over his shoulder. The memory of her Gabriel, the one she fell so stupidly in love with, remained hidden away where she could pull him out and submerge herself in sorrow.

She didn't like that the world owned him. God, it would have eaten her alive to see groupies dripping off him at the after-party, or worse, what if he had a date, a girlfriend? A Pussy Cat Doll?

She bit the inside of her cheek, hard, until she regained a thread of composure before meeting his eyes.

"Something came up, Gabriel." She pushed past him with her shoulder, not letting her fingers get near his flesh. He followed her into the living room.

"Something," he said flatly.

He was right. It was lame. Megan stole another glance down the hall, thinking of the lame, pathetic "something". She forced a smile, a quivering curve, and continued, "I'm sorry. It was...unavoidable."

Suspicion drew in his brows, clouded his eyes as he looked over her attire, her messy hair, then down the hall to the slightly open door. He took a slow step toward the hall, toward her bedroom. "Ah. *Something*," he said as if he'd come to some conclusion. "I thought you were looking a bit tousled. Tired, even."

"Gabriel," she said, trying not to show alarm. She positioned herself between him and her pitiable shrine.

"Something important?" he said sarcastically, stepping around her. "What could be more important than seeing an old friend? Your holiday fuck?" His emphasis on the last word was harsh, stripping the tenderness, the emotion out of their brief tryst and making her insides tangle like that clump of seaweed that laughably predicted their destiny.

"Gabriel, do not go in there!"

"Hiding something, Megan? Or *someone*," he growled and took a step farther. "Perhaps you had little vacation right here at home tonight?"

Pain, panic clawed at her chest. She struggled to breathe. How could he even think— “How dare you!” She grabbed his arm and tried to pull him back but she couldn’t budge him. He reached her bedroom door and turned to her.

His voice was barely a whisper, a tight exercise in control. “I foolishly expected our reunion to—” He stopped, looked away. “I thought...” He pursed his lips, shook his head and pushed her door in.

A wash of humiliation flooded her as he took in the scene—all of Rough Cut’s CDs spread out on her bed, every special edition, compilation album and their greatest hits—and above her bed hung a gigantic poster. Of him. A *poster*, for God’s sake, looking over her as she slept! She had a stack of old and new magazines, everything she could dig up that made mention of him—including the latest *Hello* that speculated about his reunion with former lover Bella something-or-other—and a little red satin treasure chest, opened to revealing her Air Canada e-ticket, the Bermuda guidebook and VIP pass. And would he recognize the pillowcase, the bright blue slip from Gemma’s cottage pilfered for its lingering scent?

The stunned look on Gabriel’s face sent her running into the bathroom. She slammed the door and fumbled in the dark to turn on the bathtub faucets, the running water needed to drown out her pitiable bawling. She slid onto the cool tiled floor as the tears of humiliation spilled over her cheeks, pouring out of her along with every ounce of dignity she possessed. She tried unsuccessfully to swallow the sobs that came from deep within her soul, bleeding her of everything that was sacred and special about her time with Gabriel on the island. It was over. Her fantasies shattered, her beautiful memories tarnished.

And still she loved him.

God, what he must think of her! Stupid, stupid, stupid girl. She couldn’t stomach the thought of him standing in her bedroom, surrounded by her childish symbols of her obsession. He was probably laughing, or worse, feeling sorry for her.

Over the sound of the running water, she heard music coming from the other room. He'd found her CD player, turned up the volume and discovered — *who else?* — himself. It was the ballad "Lost in You", their first release from the *Aquamarine* album. When it went to number one on the charts, Perez Hilton speculated the song was written for that Bella bitch. The picture of them together was burned on her retinas. She felt a gnawing jealousy burn her gut. Gabriel was probably thinking of her right now, how his darling Bella would never be so ridiculously pathetic.

Her body began to shake, an inner chill gripping her so hard she felt physically sick. Any chance she'd had even for a normal friendship with this man was now wrecked, damaged beyond repair. She would never survive the shame. She wouldn't be able to stand his pity.

"Megan," he called through the door.

Go away. Please just go away.

"Megan, please. Let me in."

"N-no," she croaked, though it was so soft she didn't think he heard.

"Bloody hell," he said, and opened the door.

Damn me for not locking the door! She grabbed a towel and buried her face.

He reached over her, turned off the running water and sat beside her in semi-darkness. He tugged the towel away.

"You're crying."

"No, I'm not," she sobbed and hiccupped. *Duh.* "Well, not because of you."

"Audrey die?"

She couldn't help it. With so much high-anxiety emotion bubbling through her, she burst into a nervous combination of laughter-sob.

"Oh Megan...I've missed you." He draped an arm around her shoulder and pulled her toward him. She desperately wanted to melt into him but her body remained stiff.

"Really? You hardly crossed my mind."

It should have elicited laughter, chipped away at some of the ice, but a very large elephant, complete with posters and soundtrack, was trumpeting from the next room.

"Care to explain?"

She stared hard at the dim grout lines on the tile floor, willing them to crack open and swallow her whole. How could she do this? How could she bare her soul to this larger-than-life man? The man she'd dreamed about, fantasized about, whose name she spoke over and over each night until she fell asleep with him on her lips.

It just could *not* get any worse. She couldn't feel any lower – so she decided on the simple truth.

"Oh Gabriel, I'm sorry," she sobbed. "I really wanted to go...to go to your...but I just couldn't. I did a really stupid, stupid, stupid, pea-brained thing," she said, balling her fists, not bothering to wipe away the tears that coursed down her cheeks. "I...I...I know we agreed not to pursue a...a...relationship," she hiccupped, "and we'd just stay...stay..."

"Friends?"

"Yes, but I...I...I went and fell in lo...in lo-ove," she choked on a sob, "with you!" She turned into him and buried her face in his chest and bawled.

She felt his arms curl around her and he rocked her slowly, like a parent soothes a child. She could hear his heartbeat, strong and even, and found comfort in the steady rhythm. He was such a decent man. Anyone else would have run away in terror after seeing what he saw, her obsessed-psycho-bitch-from-hell shrine. Instead, her dark angel offered her comfort, warmth and understanding. He cradled her until her sobs eased and her breath stopped hitching.

"Shhh, everything's going to be all right," he said, and kissed the top of her head.

"Except for the part where you think I'm a lunatic?" she asked, her words muffled against his wet shirt.

"No, Megan, I don't think that at all." He put his hand on her forehead and smoothed her tussled hair back from her face. "In fact, it will save me a great deal of embarrassment when you see my house in London."

London? She wasn't going to London. She gave her head a confused shake.

"Yeah, I've got you blown up in my bathroom, right across from the hot tub. It's a pretty grainy enlargement but it's unmistakably you, the blue sunhat pulled low over your brow, looking out at the sparkling blue ocean. It perfectly captures your brilliant smile."

Megan lifted her head and stared at him through watery eyes.

"And I've got an entire series of you sprawled on Gem and Ash's bed, your lovely ass peeking from the bottom of my T-shirt. Those are plastered all over my gym. The duplicates are in my guitar case."

He used the pad of his thumb to wipe the wetness from under her lashes. "My BlackBerry takes photos," he answered her questioning eyes, "but I was kicking myself for not bringing my hi-res digital."

"I don't understand," she said. "What are you say —"

"I'm saying, Sweet Megan," he put a finger on her lips, "that I fell hopelessly in love with you too. Head over fucking heels. I'm saying that you've not been out of my head, or my heart, since you left me alone and desperately horny on that damn rock. I'm saying that I worked like a dog to get all my obligations out of the way so that I could come to you as plain old Gabriel, not the Dark Fucking Angel of Rock." He stopped, dropped his eyes to her mouth and swept her bottom lip with his thumb. "And if you had come to the concert tonight, you would have heard me announce that this was our farewell tour."

Megan's eyes widened.

"I'm saying that I want us to be together," he hooked his finger under the chain around her neck and lifted the aquamarine stone, "for always, like we're fated to be."

She wanted to scream, she wanted to laugh, she wanted to... No. She'd already cried enough. There was no quiver to the smile that broke across her face. She sniffed and reached for the roll of toilet paper. "I have to blow my nose."

"Well that's one hell of a response to a declaration of love," he laughed.

Another sob-laugh. "I don't want to be snotty when you kiss me."

"Sweet, Magnificent Megan." He stood and pulled her up with him. He ran his hands up and down her arms. "I know I come with a lot of baggage, but in a couple weeks the tour will be over and – I need you. I need to make this work."

She watched his lips form every word, every syllable resuscitating her broken heart, yet she found herself speechless. Not from a lump in her throat or a breath-stealing tightness in her chest. Megan was overcome with love, like she had just stepped into a shaft of bright light after months of being in the dark, like being instantly transported to a tropical beach from a February snowstorm. Never had she felt so whole, so finished, so utterly complete. She desperately wanted to tell Gabriel *yes*, they would make it work. The aquamarine around her neck, growing warmer by the minute, said so. It was their destiny.

He tipped her chin up with his fingertip. "What if I promise to cook you dinner every night?"

"Depends," she smiled. "What's for dessert?"

He pushed her up against the doorway and held her face in his palms, his eyes dark with lust. "You."

The next breath his lips were on hers, crushing, hungry, demanding. He thrust his tongue into her mouth, searching her, drinking her, loving her.

With the first taste of his heady masculine flavor, every synapse in Megan's brain fired, flooding her nerve endings with white-hot electricity. Her itching fingers wrapped around the back of his head, eager to get lost in his luxuriant black mane. Her neck grew hot, burning for his kisses. Her breasts tingled, impatient for his mouth, her

nipples ached for a flick of his tongue. Her legs quivered, keen to wrap around his hips, and her pussy craved his driving, hard cock. She felt the moist slickness pooling, saturating her panties.

She pressed her body tightly against his, flattening her soft breasts against his solid chest, forcing her belly into his erection. She moaned and his lips left hers.

"I have to have you now, Megan. I need to taste you, be in you."

"Yes," she said, barely a breath. "Yes!"

He dropped to his knees in front of her, reached under her T-shirt and tugged her panties down until they landed around her ankles. She stepped out of them and inhaled sharply as he pushed her shirt up around her waist, bunching it, exposing her, his eyes inches away from her pussy.

Gabriel made a growling sound from deep in his throat and placed a kiss on her hipbone. He trailed his lips across her abdomen, licking, kissing, lingering over her skin as he made his way toward her center. Each touch set off a wave of pleasure, but when he circled her bellybutton with his tongue, her tummy constricted and a tidal wave of heat shot straight through her. Megan grabbed the back of Gabriel's head and wound her fingers in his hair.

He grabbed her calf and pulled one leg up and over his shoulder. Weakened and panting, she leaned back against the door and looked down just as the top of his head moved forward, gasping when his tongue entered her. She sucked in a breath, the hot, silky feel of his tongue stroking her slit sending tiny curls of pleasure through her. He moaned against her, the sound of contentment, of pure carnal gratification as he feasted. "So good, baby. So fucking good."

Megan rolled her hips forward, undulating against his mouth, seeking more. Her breath was coming in short, hot puffs, her heartbeat speeding as he circled her clit with the tip of his tongue. When he struck her clit with his tongue, her body quivered and she cried out, so close to orgasm already. Just the feel of his hands on her, cupping her

backside, holding her tightly against his hot, wet mouth, held her on the edge of a spectacular fall.

He slid his long finger inside her and her inner muscles immediately clenched, gripping him as he thrust inside her. She was so wet, so ready and she desperately needed to come, needed his cock inside her. She tried to pull him up, she wanted to hold his solid length, guide him into her, but he latched on to her clit, that volatile nub of pure bliss, and sucked, drinking her.

And she began to fall—her hands spasmed, clutching and releasing handfuls of his hair, his shoulders, his T-shirt. Her vaginal muscles contracted around his finger, trying to pull him in farther, deeper. She cried out his name as the surge of orgasm broke over her.

He stayed there and drank as she came, lapping up her juices, quenching himself with her essence.

He sounded pained as he came up. “Come here, baby, I’m not through with you.” He lifted her in his arms and in three long-legged strides had her on the edge of the bed. He swept it clean of all the memorabilia with one flip of the bedspread and in an equally efficient move, tugged Megan’s T-shirt over her head.

“Lie back.” She did as he asked, feeling sexy in nothing but her sparkling blue gem and a smile.

He tore off his shirt, revealing the broad expanse of muscles, the dips and ridges she fantasized about licking, her tongue eager to map every square inch of that luscious topography.

His eyes roamed her body, lingered on her breasts as he tugged at the bulging laces of his pants. When he got to her hips, he sucked in his bottom lip, moistening it.

“Bloody hell, woman, you’re more gorgeous than I remember.”

Feeling naughty, she dragged her hand over her breast and circled her nipple. Watching him as he watched her, his eyes growing dark and heavy-lidded, was an

incredible turn-on. Almost as much as seeing his hard cock spring free of the restraint, almost as much as watching him struggle to pull the tight leather down his powerful thighs.

She pinched her nipple and he groaned.

"I'm going to fuck you hard, woman. Hard, rough and fast." He sat on the bed and kicked the leather off his feet. But his eyes never left her breast. "Is that how you want it, Megan?" His voice was deep, hoarse with need. "Tell me."

"Hard," she said, sliding her hand down her abdomen.

"Rough," she continued, her hand skimming over her pubis.

"Fast," she finished, and letting her knees drop open, she slid a finger into her wet pussy. "Come and get it."

Gabriel muttered something that sounded suspiciously like a prayer and mounted her. He rose on his elbows and twined his fingers with hers. He looked deep into her eyes as he drove his cock into her with one powerful thrust. His eyes smoldered with fire. They moaned as their bodies merged with perfect harmony. Her back arched off the bed and she whimpered with pleasure as her body stretched to accommodate him. Megan linked her ankles around his hips and held him, wanting to prolong the feeling of fullness. Her body quivered, her inner muscles convulsively pulsing around him. She rocked her hips, pulling him in deeper until she felt his tight balls against her.

"Fuck me, Gabriel," she said and caught his lower lip in her teeth.

He grunted, pulled back and fucked her mercilessly.

Megan had never experienced anything so primal, so raw. He thrust hard, rough and fast, as promised. He guided her legs up over his shoulders for deeper access, making her eyes widen with each stab, a volcanic tide of hot lava erupting with every plunge.

They were both panting as his hips bucked against her, Megan whimpering "yes" in answer to his fierce grunts.

“Come with me, baby,” he said, increasing his speed. Megan could feel the pressure building, gathering momentum, threatening to blast. The moment she felt Gabriel’s hot seed spurting into her, she let go, succumbing to the burst of pure white flame that engulfed them.

Fucking awesome. So fucking *perfect*.

Gabriel lowered her legs but stayed inside her, his cock still semi-hard. Seven months of abstinence. *Seven fucking months!* Unless you counted jerking off to her picture on a nightly basis.

Since his seventeenth birthday, he couldn’t ever remember going for more than a week without a woman in his bed. And touring was particularly challenging. He’d walked away from more than one naked girl in his dressing room.

He worried that he might have a tinge of regret, a moment’s pause when he announced their farewell tour, but even the sea of flickering cell phone lights didn’t affect him. Even the mixture of boos and shouts of disbelief that eventually swelled into deafening applause didn’t waver his decision.

And now, looking down at her with her eyes closed, dark lashes resting on alabaster skin, exhausted from their passionate lovemaking—he was sure. This felt so right. Megan was the one. It was like he’d been living on pure malt scotch for the past twenty years, thinking it was bliss, then discovering a pure clear glass of water—something he’d dismissed before but finally came to realize was exactly what he needed, what he craved. This average girl, beautiful beyond the façade, the inspiration for his platinum-selling “Lost in You”.

He couldn’t wait to slip the ring on her finger. He’d intended to right after the concert, but it was probably better to wait. She’d need time to adjust to being his angel of light.

His fingers found hers and they linked like a lock tumbling into place.

“Tell me again, Megan,” he whispered, waiting for her eyes to flutter open. He wanted to see her this time. He wanted to see her face, her eyes clear of tears, open and honest. Of all the times he’d heard it from the “darlings”, the hundreds of meaningless times it had been thrown at him by crowds of screaming fans, it was only her words he desperately craved. Only hers could fill his heart completely.

She smiled in such a way that he knew she understood his appeal. Her face softened and she put a hand against his cheek.

“I love you, Gabriel.”

The End

About the Author

Wylie Kinson grew up cold in Northwestern Ontario, Canada. Longing to ditch her parka, she moved to Bermuda and spent seventeen warm, wonderful years basking on the pink sand beaches and frolicking in the turquoise surf. When scuba diving on ship wrecks and riding her moped down hibiscus-lined roads grew tedious, Wylie packed up her husband and two children and dragged them back to Canada. Thanks to global warming, the weather isn't nearly as bad as she expected.

A multi-published author, Ms. Kinson keeps herself warm by writing erotic romance and shopping the big box stores at an aerobic pace.

Wylie welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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