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Jade Rivers

Del Fantasma: Sea Breeze

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Aspen Mountain Press

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Aspen Mountain Press

PO Box 473543

Aurora CO 80047-3543

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Sea Breeze

Cassandra Jacobs got tired of listening to the other surfers whine about the dismal waves breaking off the point lately, and moved closer to the fire. Her stubby, callused toes were chilled to the bone, and no amount of rubbing seemed to work. They'd taken years of punishment from the pounding surf and razor sharp coral, but Cassie's ugly toes were her bread and butter. She could move them all independently; they served as the first and last line of communication to her board—a vintage Hobie Tri-fin—though she'd long ago resigned herself to the fact that she'd never wear open-toed shoes anywhere but the beach. Cassie had dominated the women's pro class at the Mexican Pipeline a month previously, and in doing so she earned enough to support another year of bumming on the beaches of California and Hawaii.

Her grandmother's beach cottage in Vista Loma was her favorite place to winter. It was the only time of year the waves were big enough to matter, actually. She loved the diversity of the community. Her grandmother's new age bookshop did a brisk business and it was right across the street from Hava Necklace Jewelry—a shop that specialized in ornate Judaica made from sea glass, owned by her grandmother's best friend.

Cassie noted how high the moon had climbed, and knew her grandmother would be worried. She slipped her cell phone out of the waterproof pocket of her pullover and flipped it open.

“Hi Nana... No, I’m fine. Yeah, it was ok, nothing curling but some fast late-bloomers.” Her grandmother has picked up Cassie’s “surfer code” over the years, and employed it in conversations with her Jewish friend, much to Cassie’s amusement. “Oh, no, I forgot about the ceremony! No, no, it’s ok, my board is fine, I haven’t had any serious wipeouts this year, and I can wait another three months. Really! No, don’t go to any trouble. I’ll pick up something to eat in town. You go ahead, Nana. And don’t forget to take the gown that keeps tripping you up and knocking down knick-knacks in the shop.” She laughed at her grandmother’s response. “Go! I’ll be home later.”

Cassie yanked her board out of the sand and waved a friendly good-bye to the rag-tag group of die-hard surfers huddled around the small bonfire. Her cheerful, “See you morningside!” was answered with a chorus of grumpy mumbling, but she knew they’d all be out for more punishment in the sub-arctic Pacific currents at the butt-crack of dawn.

She gently wrapped the board in its protective cover and secured it to the roof rack of her bright orange Honda CRV. Sliding her arms inside her red pullover, she wiggled free of her wetsuit and grabbed a ragged pair of cutoffs from the front seat and pulled them on. After sliding her sandy feet into a pair of ratty Reebok sandals, she jumped into her truck.

Cruising the main strip, Cassie discarded choices quickly. She wasn’t in the mood for fish and chips, which was available just about everywhere. She hadn’t eaten red meat in almost ten years, so the steakhouse was out. The smell of a perfect, rare filet mignon was too great a temptation. She remembered a friend’s recommendation for the Lobster Queso at the Del Fantasma, and decided to give it a try.

Walking into the deserted bar, first through a chipped, painted door, and second, through a clicking curtain of wooden tiki beads, Cassie almost changed her mind...until the smells wafting from the back reached her nostrils and wound their way down to her

growling, empty stomach. Crossing to the bar, she decided her first impression had been dead wrong.

Where first she'd seen a cheesy reproduction of a surfside café, now she felt the welcoming familiarity of a comfortable surfer hangout. Scattered around the tiny dining room, she noticed the long plank tables set for ten or twelve. This place was the real deal. Surfers were only lonely on the wave. Out of the water, no one was ever a stranger. She studied the crazy, tribal signatures scrawled and carved on every available surface, and her grudging respect was replaced with quiet awe. "Noli Lihani!"

"Fine lady, fantastic surfer."

She jumped at the voice coming out of nowhere.

"Sorry, didn't mean to startle you."

"No, it's ok." She studied the man in the dim light of the bar. He was well built, and had the look and carriage of a great surfer. But his sandy brown hair was a shade *too* dark, as if it never saw the sun.

He wiped his hands on a towel and extended a hand. "Cody Warren. And you're Cassandra Jacobs. Vista Loma's pride and joy."

Cassie narrowed her eyes and took his hand. "Follow the circuit some, do ya?"

He nodded then laughed. "Even if I didn't, I'd recognize you from the posters the widow Jacobs forces me to hang every time you land another endorsement deal." He nodded at the wall behind the jukebox, and Cassie's cheeks grew warm.

"Oh my God! Really, you don't have to leave those up. How embarrassing! I mean...my friends eat here!"

"Yeah, they do. They're here all the time. Which brings up the question, 'Where have you been all my life?'"

Cassie relaxed. "That was cheesy. I couldn't tell you, Cody. I've been...around. I usually have a Power Bar for lunch and my Nana is the best cook in Point Loma, so I don't go out very often."

Cody motioned to the stools barside. "You might as well sit over there and keep

me company. It's stone dead tonight and I'd feel weird waiting a table for one."

Cassie laughed and slid onto one of the high stools, propping her elbows on the bar. "Got any carrot juice?"

Cody groaned and shook his head. "Oh man, not another health freak. Tell you what, since it's your first visit to Del Fantasma, your drinks are on the house tonight. I'll surprise you."

Cassie pursed her lips, then nodded. "As long as it's not too strong, and there's some kind of juice involved to cut the alcohol. I don't like the taste."

"So what'll it be? The grill is yours, milady."

"Umm... My friend Destiny recommended the Lobster Queso?"

Cody nodded. "Best thing on the menu. I serve it with toasted blue corn tortilla chips and a side of ranch style black beans. Sound ok?"

Cassie's eyes were nearly crossed with hunger. "Sounds divine, I only hope its fast!"

Cody nodded and served her a tall glass of ice water garnished with an orange slice. "Best not to drink anything stronger on an empty stomach. I'll be back in a few minutes with your dinner."

Cassie could see him working by peeking over the swinging shutter-style doors into the kitchen, and sighed with pleasure as tantalizing smells wafted into the dining room. In less than five minutes, he was back with her plate.

She gasped. Huge, tender chunks of lobster tail swam in a dish of melted Mexican queso fresco, cilantro, poblano chili, tomatillo, and paprika. The aroma made her mouth water, and when the first morsel hit her taste buds, she moaned in ecstasy.

Chewing slowly, she savored every texture. The crispy chips against the succulent lobster, surrounded by that heavenly sauce... It was almost orgasmic. "Wow. I mean, holy mackerel! This has got to be one of the best things I ever tasted."

Cody pulled a black sharpie from his pocket. "Then you'll sign my bar?"

Cassie laughed. "Well, if it'll make you happy." She grabbed the sharpie, and quickly scrawled her signature alongside famous names from ranks of surfing royalty.

“Are you kidding? Maybe now I can get Nana Jacobs off my back! She’s crazy about you, you know. She wants me to name a sandwich after you.”

Cassie blushed again. “Please don’t!”

Cody laughed. “Don’t worry, I’m not into gimmicks.”

He stepped back and grabbed a tall Collins glass from the shelf under the bar, filling it so quickly Cassie didn’t have time to notice the ingredients.

She stared suspiciously at the drink before taking a tentative sip. “Hey, that’s pretty good! Cranberry juice? I like it, not too sweet. What’s it called?”

Cody smiled. “I didn’t think you’d go for the frou-frou stuff. It’s called a Sea Breeze. Makes you think of the sea. Cool and seductive... There’s a story, actually more of a legend, really, that comes to mind. My father used to put me to bed with it when I was a kid. Supposedly it’s connected to Point Loma.”

Cassie took another drink and waved a chip in invitation. “Please, take a load off. Have a few chips and tell me the story. I *love* crazy local folklore. I can take the story home to Nana for some major brownie points.”

Cody hesitated, then shrugged. Well, it’s not like there’s anything else happening tonight...”

Cody slid a high round stool from behind the cash register, placed it directly across from Cassie, and settled into a casually intimate pose, his crossed arms resting on the bar. “I can’t tell you when the story got started, or what really happened, if anything. I think my dad was just a kid...”

As a child, Arryc was often black and blue about the ears, from the frequent flicking and twisting of his parents’ impatient fingers.

Precocious and sensitive, Arryc realized at the tender age of six that he was very different from his simple, hard-working parents. He was enchanted with every stray whistle and click that drifted through the high windows of the sweltering kitchen of The Salty Skillet, his parent’s busy fresh-catch café. He helped his father by stacking the plates and trays to load into the hulking dishwasher that belched steam almost hot

enough to poach his young fingers and nose. In the lazy lull between lunch and dinner, he stepped outside and wove cozy baskets from the tall sea grasses that grew over the dunes. He took them home and entertained dozens of songbirds while learning to mimic their tunes, before sending them home to the treetops.

He didn't speak for the first five years of his life, and his first words were communicated in song. When he entered the kitchen singing a cheerful nursery rhyme in a strong, clear voice, his mother dropped her best china to the floor in shock and clasped him to her breast, offering silent and heartfelt thanks to the Goddess that her adopted son wasn't entirely mute.

Arryc minded his parents as best he could, but he listened more attentively to the songs on the wind, and frequently didn't hear their demands. He was always sternly admonished to "get his head out of the clouds."

The family lived in a comfortable apartment loft above the Salty Skillet, just steps from the sea, though neither knew how to swim or ever bothered to teach Arryc.

The wild-eyed fishermen who brought their choice catch to his father's door in the dim light of dawn told haunting, tragic tales of seductive sirens of the deep; who enticed men into their watery embrace when the harvest moon shone full and bright, and never surrendered them back to the light of day.

No one knew exactly where these men disappeared to, the fishermen hazarded a guess that they were taken to hidden underwater caves, magically enslaved by the lyrical and malevolent maidens, but the fisher wives who collected the torn and discarded nets that washed ashore after a storm knew different, many a fisherman was unknowingly clad in the stiff leather leavings they picked from the nets, sometimes with decaying portions of the doomed men still attached. The women never spoke of these grizzly discoveries; an ancient primordial connection to the daughters of the moon compelled their silence.

Arryc sometimes imagined he heard the sirens' song, sliding down the beams of the full moon through his open window. The notes circled round his head and soothed his stinging ears, a tenderly enchanting lullaby to the melancholy lad.

* * * *

Serai escaped her sisters' clutches and darted to the ocean's surface, eager to touch the sparkling coins that rippled there. When she reached out to capture a shimmering golden disk, it flickered and disappeared. She was bitterly disappointed, and pouted as she drifted down to rejoin her sisters.

Her mother gently stroked Serai's soft blue mantle and led her in search of a snack. They passed the cave of the wailing moon, and she overheard her sisters practicing the songs in the ancient tongue. Serai's throat had not developed yet, and she was expressly forbidden to sing. She was warned that vocalizing without training could cause illness or even madness in humans.

Daughter of the deep, heir to the Queen of Sirens, the power of the song young Serai suppressed, swelled in her soul and burned her gullet. When the moon was full, Serai floated on the surface, ever-so-softly chanting the slow, sweet harmony of her heart, unaware that her notes rose and were carried by tempestuous ocean breezes through the open window of a sensitive young musician.

Seasons passed with excruciating slowness, as Serai dared to creep closer and closer to shore in her nocturnal explorations. Her fascination gave way to longing, and she dreamed of the night she would finally answer the call of the moon and fulfill her destiny. Worlds apart, but almost close enough to touch, a similar longing ignited and flared in the soul of a romantic young man.

* * * *

Arryc hugged the wall beneath his lover's bedroom window like a shadow, stealthily seeking the freedom of the rolling dunes.

When the winsome and nubile Amanda's husband had returned from a long naval voyage unexpectedly, Arryc was forced to flee in silence.

Hastily, he tucked his shirt into his worn Levis, leaving it unbuttoned. Running a hand through his shaggy brown hair, he shook off the adrenaline rush, relieved at having avoided discovery and averted disaster, *again*.

The flat sand was the soft gray of an overcast sky, reflecting the cool glow of the solstice moon, while the dips and ridges dropped softly into the night. Here and there, prickly tufts of sea grass stood, cantankerously puncturing the occasional zephyr.

Slick as a serpent, he crept from shadow to shadow over the dunes and beyond, to the jagged shoreline. Two stones' throw from the ancient loblolly pine, he found the tide pools, and dropped to a crouch beside the largest.

The sea crashed against the other side of the huge rock that sheltered the crystal clear pool, occasionally showering him with icy spray. The sand around the pool was cool and soft, peppered with the shattered and abandoned dwellings of clams, oysters, and sea snails.

He carefully examined the sides and bottom for crabs or sea anemone, then stripped and waded into the chest deep water, still warm from the scorching afternoon sun. Stretching out on his back, he floated, gazing at the stars.

Young Arryc had no knowledge of astronomy or the constellations, but he sensed great power in the stars. He imagined a noble sorcerer inhabited the moon, guarding the magical lanterns that guided earth's navigators.

Completely relaxed, it took several moments before his mind registered the seductive melody drifting on the ocean breeze, wrapping about him body and soul like a silken shroud.

He was completely paralyzed with painful longing, unable to escape the hypnotic clutches of the siren's song.

When it finally ended, Arryc found himself fighting for breath, having sunk like a stone to the bottom of the pool. Rushing from the water he lay gasping on the sand, the tranquil, poisonous notes of the haunting melody still echoing in his mind. Hastily, he pulled on his clothes and headed for the welcoming light and warmth of Salty Skillet.

* * * *

Serai crooned softly to herself as she combed slippery tentacles through the long silvery tendrils that drifted around her proboscis like liquid silver. She felt the pull of the moon in her core, and sensed her body's transformation before it even began.

She was in her seventeenth season, and could no longer resist the lure of the moon. Milky beams penetrated to the ocean floor, caressing her soft skin, stirring passions she was powerless to resist. Giddy with anticipation, she awaited the changes her mother had spoken of, teaching her the words to describe the new form her body would take.

First, her *hair* had sprouted. She felt the silky-soft spikes with her tentacles and delighted in the new texture. It grew steadily, until it was nearly the span of a human, swirling around her like a silvery mist.

When her hair stopped growing, she could feel four of her tentacles begin to tingle and slowly fall asleep, as circulation was re-routed to her other extremities. Even as the four tentacles began drawing up into her body, the remaining four took on new abilities and definition. Her *arms* and *legs* drifted gently in the current at first, then came to life with jerks and spasms as she learned how to manipulate her new limbs.

Tiny digits sprouted from the ends, and she giggled as she wiggled and tested them. Her new *fingers* were curious and difficult to operate: lumpy and hard, not soft and pliant like her tentacles had been.

She ballooned her mouth to filter nutrients from the briny seawater and choked, when new muscles in the back of her *throat* constricted and swallowed for the first time. She delighted in the wondrous, form-sculpting changes wrought by the moon.

Suddenly, silvery hair obscured her vision, and she realized that her eyes moved differently. She had excellent vision, but in this form, the water distorted her perception. Puzzled, she sank to the sandy ocean floor in order to regain her bearings. She tentatively explored the planes of her face with her fingers, pushing and pinching soft full lips, poking a new finger into her nostrils.

Things felt similar, meaning her nerves understood what she was feeling, but they felt different, because she'd been fully re-formed. She examined her muscular arms and legs in amazement, entranced by the beautiful pattern of veins beneath her milky-white, translucent skin. Her blood glowed beneath her skin, a fiery aquamarine that pulsed like a beacon at her throat. The little dip in her new collarbone was glowing like a radiant opal, full of color and life.

Though Serai felt as if her body had begun preparing to display mating signs, she also worried that these might signal her vulnerability to predators.

Her sisters swarmed around her, weaving sea grass and pearls into a decorative protective cover for her new skin. When her sister's tentacles brushed across her abdomen, which was curiously flat and free of the usual indentation she had observed in the humans who sometimes swam on the surface, it tickled and fluttered with new sensations. For the first time, Serai felt curious stirrings of lust between her new legs.

Serai reached for her sister, grasping her tentacles in confusion, but her sister gently brushed away her hands and continued working on her new garments. Serai trembled with lust, her new skin fiercely sensitive. Every pinch, every tiny caress of her sisters' soft tentacles sent daggers of pleasure to her core. She barely controlled the urge to take one of those tentacles between her new legs and thrust it deep within the breeding chamber. She clamped her tingling thighs together in a Herculean effort to restrain herself.

* * * *

By the light of the full moon, Serai emerged head first from the water and waded through the shallow tide onto the beach.

A wrenching pain claimed her chest and she threw herself to the sand, retching seawater. Initially, her tongue tasted bile, and she shuddered at the sour tang. Wiping at the trickle of water that oozed from the corner of her mouth with her hand, she climbed unsteadily to her feet.

Without the support of the water, her limbs felt awkward and ungainly. She could hardly lift them, and fought the temptation to rest awhile in order to gather strength.

Gentle ocean breezes buoyed her spirits and gave her comfort. Foreign smells drifted on the breeze, like nothing she'd experienced before, smoky, but not oily, mixed with the ripe, pungent odors of life and death. Slowly, she rose to her feet and followed the strangely familiar scents, determined to find their source.

Odd buzzing sensations assaulted her head and neck. A raucous shout pounded her tender, virgin eardrums, and she threw her hands up instinctively to cover the openings at the sides of her head. Serai winced as she realized she was sensing sound waves, hearing them without the buffer of water for the first time.

Serai slipped cautiously into the shadows as a group of pale, hairy creatures stumbled by on the path, weaving from side to side in a strangely stilted gait.

She looked up, noticing that the moon was low and large in the sky. She had only until daybreak to find a mate.

If she failed, she would remain trapped in this awkward human form. Sometimes her sisters stayed on the surface, when one didn't return; the tribe mourned her passing as if it were a death, although a few had undoubtedly *chosen* to live as humans.

Serai shuddered at the thought. Already, she missed the company of her sisters. She was thirsty, too. Her thirst was deeper than any human could ever know, and her heart yearned for the still, gentle comforts of the ocean's depths.

She stepped bravely onto the path and waited, keeping an ear to the wind. Merry voices drifted from a wooden enclosure further down the path, and she discerned this was also the source of the strangely intoxicating aromas.

Unable to resist, her feet pulled her toward the ramshackle building perched at the edge of the dunes. As she approached, a small, furry creature slunk into the shadows and whined, the hair around its neck and along its spine raised in fear.

She approached it and reached out her hand, feeling the sensuous velvety skin of its muzzle. The creature sniffed her hand and craned its neck, seeking more attention,

but she stepped away, drawn to the contents of a vehicle parked in the shadows.

A hooded jacket lay discarded in the back seat, thick and warm. Even though it scratched and irritated her baby-soft skin, she knew she must cover herself somehow before entering the building. The humans would be frightened by the garments she wore, and even more so by the delicately wrought pattern of veins and vessels beneath her skin, glowing faintly like a turquoise tattoo.

Serai braided her hair and tucked it into the hood, then pulled it up over her head to shade her eyes. Thankfully, the jacket was long, dragging below her knees. Hopefully no one would notice her bare feet. Just in case, she scuffed dirt over her pearly white toes and shins, so they wouldn't glow in the shadows.

As she reached the door, a man heaved himself through it, stumbling and lurching into her drunkenly. He barely took notice of the form beneath the coat, muttering a slurred apology beneath his breath before climbing into the back of the car.

She pegged him as the owner of the jacket, and gave a sigh of relief that she wouldn't have to worry about him causing a stir. Curious, Serai crept to the side of the car and observed his sleeping form.

It would be an easy matter to drag him to the seashore, entice him into the waves, and claim his seed. He was large; his fleshy corpse would easily provide the nourishment she needed to sustain her through gestation. She needn't spend another hour on the surface.

With a honking cough, he exhaled roughly into her face. Stale odors of rotting cheese, sour mash, and sickness washed over her, making her gasp for fresh air. Choking and gagging, she deserted the car and fled for the inviting warmth of the building.

Her mother and sisters' half-human instincts and memories came to her in a flood as she crossed the threshold, taking in the cramped room at a glance. She walked familiarly across the floor to a discreet table in the back and signaled the waitress with raised fingers.

After a moment, a plump woman dropped a tall glass of water on the table and

cocked her hip, waiting for an order. Serai placed a medium-sized opal on the table and waited. The woman picked it up and held it to the light.

"This is gorgeous; it must be worth a fortune! Are you trying to barter?"

Serai nodded her head and pointed to the glass, not yet trusting her throat and tongue to form words.

The plump woman laughed heartily. "Well I'll be! Cat got your tongue? Alright then, I'll keep it coming, and bring you the catch of the day with a side of slaw and hush puppies."

She raised the glass to her lips and emptied the contents in one long draught. The cool fluid soothed her dry throat and gave her a feeling of contentment.

Drawing her coat close about her, Serai settled into the shadows to watch for an appropriate mate.

Surfers and fishermen crowded the small dining room from end to end, telling tall tales and singing bawdy limericks over the clatter of plates and glasses. Here and there an isolated soul peppered the festivities, usually what her sisters would have called *deep into his cups*. The only women she spotted were the waitress and hostess; both too busy keeping the customers happy to take much notice of the strange newcomer in the corner.

Oddly enough, the men paid her no mind. Careful not to draw attention to herself, Serai sat quietly, raising her glass when the crowd cheered a first-rate singer, her fingers tucked tightly into the folds of her cloak. If she drank more water than the average customer, the waitress seemed to take no notice, distracted as she was by the constant petting and pinching of the rowdy crowd.

Across the room, at a round table surrounded by large, round men, a beautiful young man expertly coaxed tunes from a tin whistle. His companions were a jolly bunch, and generous with their appreciation. At each song's end, they toasted his health and filled his hat with coins.

She watched him choke on his beer when a rough hand clapped his back in the middle of a swallow, and had to stifle her laughter. She wasn't sure what sounds

would emerge from her new throat, and didn't want to alert anyone to her presence.

She listened to his music with her heart and sensed an alluring vulnerability. His passion shimmered like fire through the murky mist of simple souls between them. She forgot her thirst and watched him with singular anticipation, impatiently waiting for an opening.

One by one, the men fell away from the table, some falling into a companionable, drunken slumber in the darkened corners of the tavern. The laughter died down and drunken melancholy overtook the remaining patrons. The young man packed his coins and whistle into his pocket, and exited into the pitch-black night.

Serai dropped another, smaller opal on the table and stood up to follow him at a discreet distance.

He followed the path toward the beach for a short distance then took another branch that ran parallel to the shore. After a few hundred yards, her legs began to ache, and she hastened to put an improvised plan into action.

Running silently alongside the path, she quickly overtook him. Casting aside the coat, she threw herself prostrate in the path, and affected an air of feeble vulnerability. As he approached, she tested her new vocal cords and moaned softly.

He rushed to her side and knelt to examine her. At the sight of her skin, the icy blue sheen of blood pulsing through her veins, he gasped and tried to withdraw. Her hand clamped around his wrist in a viselike grip, while her eyes pleaded for merciful assistance.

She panted. "Pleasse..." The word crept from her throat like a dying bird, almost lost in the wind.

As he gazed into her eyes, a spark of desire flamed to life, and his chivalrous nature took over. Wrapping her arm around his neck, he gathered her in his arms and cradled her to his chest.

"Where should I take you, sea nymph? What manner of creature are you? I can almost feel your heart's longing in my own. I will not have you die here, on the path. It isn't far to the shore."

Serai smiled and caressed his jaw with her fingers. "Yessss. Sssea. Yesss."

He held her close and climbed over the dunes with surprising strength, hardly breaking a sweat before his boots hit damp sand on the seashore. With exaggerated care, he lowered her to her feet, a hand clamped on either side of her waist to keep her from falling.

Serai pretended to lose her balance, stumbling into his arms. She breathed her gratitude in a sigh, the words caressing his ear like silken fingers. "My sssavior."

His chest swelled with pride. Trembling with desire, he gathered her up again and waded into the warm water, the coral reflection of the harvest moon floating on its surface.

Serai gasped at the welcome embrace of the sea, wriggling away from him to fully submerge. The top of her head slowly emerged from the water, her hypnotic blue eyes gazing at him, just above the surface. With an elegant finger, she beckoned him deeper.

Shedding his sweatshirt and throwing it to the sand, he followed her, reaching for her with lust beyond his wildest imagination. Struggling in the churning surf, he almost came to his senses. He briefly fought the urge, panic blooming in his chest, and scrambled to find purchase in the shifting sand below.

She called on the primordial power of her sisters and softly intoned the ancient song of seduction. Her soft crooning rippled through the water and fueled his lust into frenzy, urging him to surrender to the sea's embrace.

With a moan, he acknowledged defeat and swam to her, kicking off his waterlogged boots in his haste to reach her.

Serai enfolded him in her arms and kissed him deeply, tasting the salty human secretions of his skin. She lapped and sucked at the soft skin of his neck, biting gently at the muscle beneath. Groaning with pleasure, she tore at his remaining clothing with her fingers, wanting to feel the soft curves, hard ridges, and flat planes of his body. She delighted in the firm feel of his chest and erect nipples. With unerring instinct, she pinched and twisted them lightly, calling them to life under her nimble fingertips.

Gently, Serai lured him past the waves, until they hovered like spirits above her

aquatic domicile. She sensed the silent approval of her sisters as her body responded to the human's touch. Almost imperceptibly, her pulse quickened and the skin of her abdomen softened as she felt the entrance to her breeding chamber contract and expand in preparation for conception.

Seawater churned and flowed around them, binding their intertwined bodies tightly. He hungered for her in a way that wasn't human, but almost superhuman. Like so many rags, his clothes fell to the ocean floor, as she swirled and stroked her fingers over his flesh. His eyes widened as he reached for her breasts, tracing the patterns of her veins with his fingers.

Like delicately wrought silver, her veins glowed with an even, soft light. She gasped as his mouth closed over her aureole, his tongue whirling madly about the sensitive bud. Arching her back, she pushed her breast further into his hungry lips, blindly feeding both of their passions. She felt his fingers slide between her thighs, and shouted with unrestrained pleasure.

At her shout, his fingers unfurled and plunged deftly into her core. He marveled that the silken wetness of her womb was molten heat, while the rest of her body was chilled fruit and cream. The heat of her desire spurred him on, engorging his helplessly aroused member even further. His penis felt like the floodgates, holding back a surging tide of seed.

She spread her legs and clamped them around his back, grinding herself against his smooth shaft, rubbing it exquisitely against her mound. With a mangled growl of impatience, she impaled herself on him, pushing herself down until her chamber encompassed the entire, glorious length of him.

When her neck arched toward the moon he devoured it, sucking and biting the exposed flesh. Tiny luminescent pools of blood formed under his tongue, just beneath her skin. His eyes glazed over with pride, and he bent to pull the same pattern from her breast.

She chuckled at his lust and rocked her hips in an ancient rhythm, caressing his shaft with the muscles of her breeding chamber. She rotated her hips, urging the

human to plunge deeper, faster, and harder. She felt his moan of pleasure vibrate her breast and responded to it, murmuring hypnotic tones of seduction to quicken his desire. Groaning softly, she felt the warm rush of fluid between her legs that signaled the end of their copulation.

Grinning madly, he hummed a cheerful tune and abandoned himself to the rhythm of their joining, twirling with her in a watery waltz.

Startled at this human display of sentiment, she fought the urge to claim his seed and pushed herself up and off of him. He should have been entranced, yet he seemed merely enchanted. Wide eyed with wonder, she traced his lips with her fingers.

He returned her stare.

She choked hoarsely on her question, "Why do you sing?"

He smiled and kissed her tenderly. "Love. My first and only Love, my shimmering blue lady of the sea. You sang to my soul, you raised my spirit to the moon. You kindled my love."

A pearly tear traced its way down Serai's cheek. "But - I musst..."

He laughed. Gently, he positioned her above his organ and lowered her body back down, "Yes, you most certainly must."

She shook her head, fighting the crippling wave of desire that threatened to send her over the edge, back to the primal necessity that was her legacy. If they created a child, he was lost. Love was lost. She would revert back to her marine form and consume him. His life energy was implicitly necessary for the conception process, and his body would provide sustenance for the fetus during gestation.

She shoved at his arms, but desire sapped her strength, and she could do nothing but cling to him weakly, her arms about his neck. "Please, you musst... We musst wait for the sssun."

He gently treaded water and pressed his forehead to hers in aggravation. "But the sun is only moments away. Look how low the moon is in the sky. See its blushing, coral hue? It will be dawn in a matter of moments."

She gasped as a sudden wave of pain tore through her abdomen. Wrenching

inexorably from his grasp, she quickly sank below the surface, unable to swim through the excruciating cramps blossoming in her breeding chamber.

With a shout, he dove, tangling his fingers in her hair just before she sank into the murky black depths. He struggled to haul her to the surface, but her body was caught in a riptide, and he felt the silky strands slipping through his fingers yet again.

She choked on a mouthful of seawater, and surrendered herself to death. She knew she would drown like this, in human form. Her marine form was forever lost to her without the mating ritual. With sad acceptance, she drifted toward the ocean floor.

Warm bodies surrounded and embraced her. Miserable, they wept over her still form, combing the silvery hair back from her still-human face. They accepted her choice, even as they mourned her passage. Together, her sisters gently lifted her, carrying her to the surface, where they placed her in the arms of her grieving lover.

Wading to shore with Serai in his arms, the young musician wailed his tortured lament to the rising sun. He ached to join her in death, making his torn heart whole again. Swearing he would breathe his last this autumn morn, he bent to kiss her pale, cold lips.

With a spluttering cough, a surge of briny seawater exploded from Serai's throat. She gagged at the bitterness, vowing never to taste it again.

He watched in fascination as the glowing blue veins disappeared, leaving behind healthy, pink skin. Her hair took on a golden, rather than silver hue, and warmth flooded her eyes, turning them a rich, forest green. Her flesh warmed under his fingers, and she laughed as she felt the thirst finally subside.

He pulled her into his arms in a crushing embrace, and hoarsely choked on the question. "How?"

She smiled. "Love. My first and only Love, my beautiful, earth-bound Love. You sang to my soul, you raised my spirit to the sun. You kindled *my* love."

He lowered her softly to the sand, and they consummated their union of souls. In the soft circle of her arms, while her hips rolled and opened in invitation, he felt the tide crash through the floodgates, rushing through her womb to seek out life.

She felt new life, human life, blossoming within her breeding chamber.

Serai grinned, as she realized she was incredibly hungry—for the catch of the day.

Cassie reached for her napkin and wiped away tears. “That was just beautiful! I feel so silly for crying, but it was just so romantic!”

Cody reached for her glass and refilled it. “I’m glad you liked it. My dad left out the sexy parts, of course, but I can’t help myself. I can’t just say, “They made love,” and leave it at that. It doesn’t have the same—effect.”

Cassie laughed. “No, you’re exactly right. It wouldn’t have been the same. I was so caught up in it, I honestly didn’t even notice, but now that you mention it...” She circled the top of her glass with one finger and held Cody’s gaze a few moments too long for a man she’d only just met. “You’re an interesting man, Cody. And you have an interesting place, here. I think I’ll come back to Del Fantasma.”

Cody grinned wickedly as he bussed her plate and wiped down the bar, getting ready to close up. “I’m counting on it.”

The End

Del Fantasma: Sea Breeze



Sea Breeze Drink Recipe

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 oz Vodka
- 1 1/2 oz Cranberry Juice
- 4 oz (fresh) Grapefruit Juice

Directions

Pour vodka into an iced highball glass. Fill partially with grapefruit juice and top with cranberry juice. Garnish with a lime wedge, and serve.

We hoped you enjoyed this Del Fantasma tale by Jade Rivers. Jade's sexy imagination has brought other stories of love and lust to Aspen Mountain Press including the erotic murder mystery *Shattered Legacy* and the shorter contemporary Plain Brown Wrapper *Slicker*.

You can find both at www.AspenMountainPress.com

Read on for an excerpt from *Shattered Legacy*

"Hey Crystal. Fancy meeting you here." Ronny gave her *that* look and started inching toward her, making nice.

"Get away from me you sneaky little prick," she seethed. "Go find Leslie."

He chuckled low in his throat. "I don't want Leslie. I'm hungry for Crystal."

What an ass. After the way he deserted me in the quad, now he thinks I'm going to take him back? "You're such an ass, Ronny. Run back to your little trust fund girlfriend and try to get off. Hope your prick doesn't freeze and break off in there."

"Touchy, touchy. You know she doesn't let me *near* the 'golden triangle.' She guards it like Fort Knox, too good for the riff-raff. I'm getting so sick of her prissy attitude."

"So what? I don't care if your balls turn blue and rot; you're not screwing with me anymore. I saw where your loyalties lie today and it pissed me off."

He stroked Crystal's arms with his dangerous fingers and pleaded. "Please baby? With a cherry on top? I promise I'm going to break up with her. It just wouldn't be nice, right now, not after Lexi, you know? She could really freak out."

"What about me, Ronny? I'm freaking out right here, right now. Last night you were happy to fuck me in the dark, but today, in the daylight, you ran like a scared rabbit. You Pussy. You guys are all alike."

His eyes grew serious. "That's not fair Crystal. I really care about you. You say

I'm just messing around, but it's you who's doing the playing. You won't trust me because you don't believe I could have real feelings for you, just because you're not rich. So who's fooling who?"

She groaned. She knew it was a crock, but he was so cute. She gave in. "You'll break up with her this weekend. Promise?"

He smiled and nodded, sinking to his knees on the floor between the stacks. She felt his fingers travel up her legs beneath skirt to lodge between her thighs.

"I promise." He looked up at her and grinned.

His smile was wicked and her head went spinning.

They left the library separately and she took the path behind the stables to the maintenance shed. The mowers were always locked up with snow on the ground. Ronny had worked part time on the grounds crew last summer and he still had a key to the lock on the shed doors. It was cold, but he'd snuck a couple of blankets and pillows into the shed and once they got going, it would warm up fast enough.

Crystal brought a couple of candles with her. She hated sex in the dark. She liked to watch Ronny climax. She knew he couldn't do it with Leslie, so it made her feel powerful.

Ronny thinks I hate her because of him. What a twit. I hate them both. When he breaks up with her I can crush both of them. Neither of them are worthy of licking the soles of my bargain-rack boots.

Crystal didn't want a dim-witted fortune hunter like Ronny around her neck when she left this dump for New York. *Four more months and the world is mine.*

Ronny left the shed door open and she found him spreading the blankets in a corner behind a tractor. For once, he was considerate. A space heater was plugged in, making the cold shed almost bearable. He was grinning like an idiot.

You have no idea how lucky you are, asshole. You think I'm the one getting lucky, don't you? Poor little Crystal, so far beneath your class. She smiled and draped her coat over the tractor seat, dropping her purse to the floor, then did a slow strip tease. He thought she was seducing him, but she didn't want him tearing at her clothes with his clumsy

hands.

He reached for her greedily but she slapped him away, to drive him crazy with lust. *What a jerk.*

She left her shoes on, thinking she might have a little fun with him this time. Pushing him back on the pillows, she carefully placed the heel of her spike-heeled granny boot right in the center of his chest. It gave him a very clear view of the glistening pink folds of her sex.

His eyes followed the curve of her calf, and then traveled the length of her thigh, coming to rest in the damp cleft between her legs.

She smiled. "See something you like?"

He nodded, reaching for her crotch with one hand.

She smacked it away and ground her heel into his sternum, making him gasp. "What's wrong with this picture, Ronnykins?"

He looked puzzled.

Come on, do I have to do everything? "My boot?"

He peered closely at her boot and shrugged. "It's nice."

She pressed her heel into his sternum again. "No it's not! It's dirty!" She glared at him with enough venom to make him swipe feebly at the mud crusting her heel.

"Not with your hands."

He looked confused again for a moment before the light finally dawned. "You wish me to lick them clean, mistress?"

Took you long enough, you dope. "That would be a start. But first, I want you naked."

They had tried out the dominatrix/slave thing once before, so she knew he knew what she wanted him to do. He quickly stripped and assumed a subservient position on his knees in front of her, lips pressed to the toe of her shoe, his penis fully erect.

He lifted her booted foot in his hands. Gazing into her eyes, he began lapping greedily at the flakes of mud and grass stuck to her heel.

She put a hand on the tractor for balance. "Don't look at me! Pay attention. If

you do a good job, I might let you lick something else."