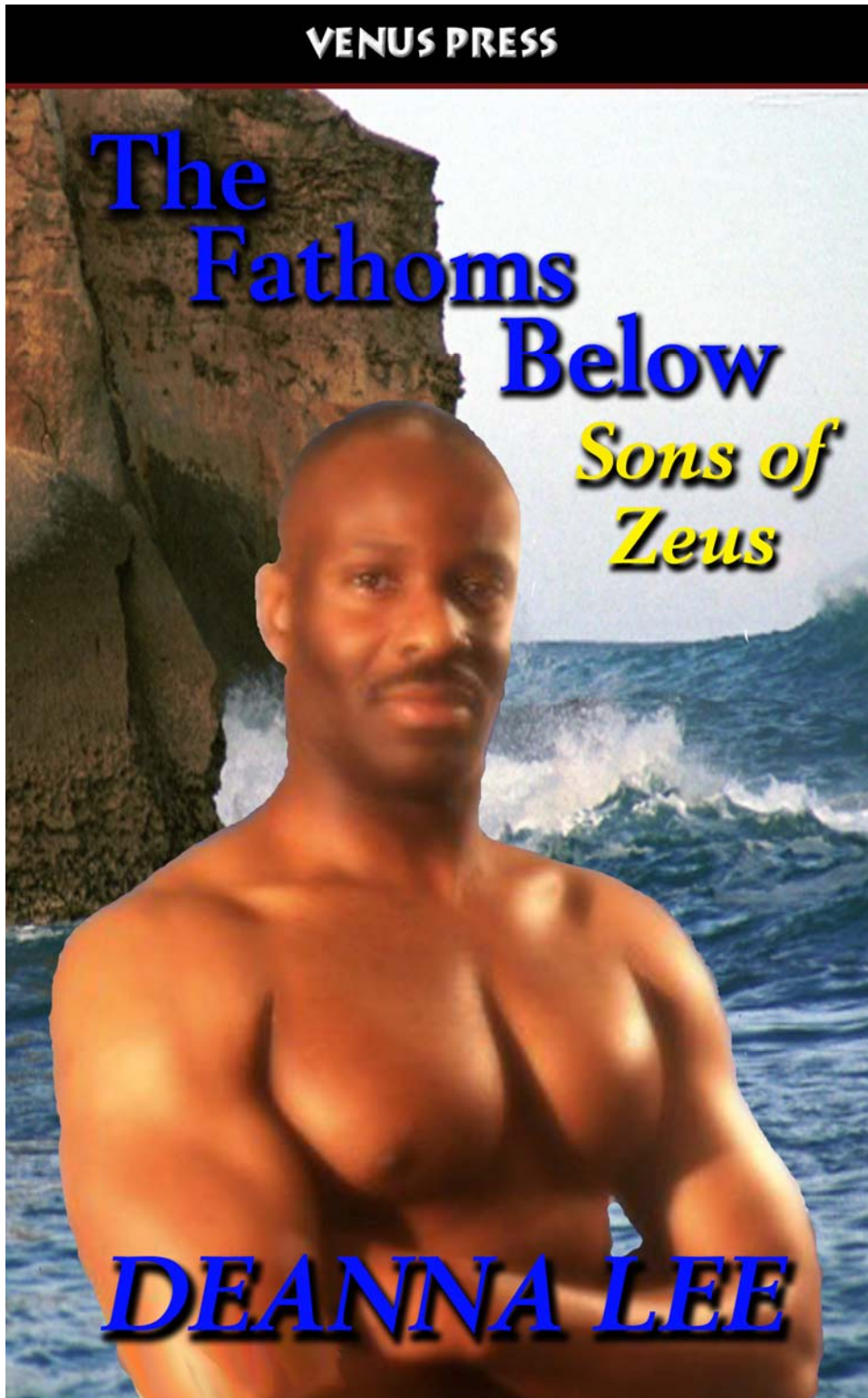


VENUS PRESS

**The
Fathoms
Below**
*Sons of
Zeus*

DEANNA LEE



Deanna Lee

The Fathoms Below Sons of Zeus

By

Deanna Lee



The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

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THE FATHOMS BELOW

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Deanna Lee

Chapter One

Madeline Keys tapped slim fingers on the small desk in front of her and looked to Detective Austin Monroe. She was his case, had been since she'd washed ashore in Marathon, Florida almost six years ago.

"No."

"Madeline, this will be national coverage. It could be exactly what we need to find your family."

Madeline looked down to the surface of the desk. She'd rescued it from a garage sale just before she'd opened Fathoms Below, the small gallery they were currently sitting in. "I've done my last television appearance."

"Madeline," there was a hint of temper in his voice in unspoken plea.

"Austin." She looked to him then, dark blue eyes bright with sadness and resolve. "I won't do it again. If anyone were going to come forward, they would have by now. I'm alone in the world. I've come to terms with it and I honestly wish you would as well." She stood from her desk and looked out into the gallery as a couple entered. "Now, I've got some tourist to wrestle."

He stood and shook his head. "I can't believe that anyone would leave you alone, Madeline, at least not on purpose. I look at you and a part of me aches for the man who put that ring on your finger."

The ring she no longer wore. Madeline looked down to her barren hand and swallowed. Taking off the ring had been the hardest thing she'd done since she'd been found. It lay in her jewelry box in her bedroom, sometimes at night the ring seemed to call to her. She sighed and rubbed her face with shaking hands.

"I can't have a future if I drown in my lack of a past. We can't be for sure who ever he was survived what ever happened to us. I washed ashore alone, and there were never any

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

reports of wreckage found. No vessels were reported missing.” Madeline moved past the detective and put on a bright smile for the obviously honeymooning couple who had entered the shop several minutes earlier. “I know just what you’re looking for.”

She guided them to a seascape of manatee’s and dolphins playing in deep clear water. The new husband didn’t hesitate to pull out a credit card. After she rang them up and made arrangements to ship the painting home to Nebraska for them, Madeline closed up her shop.

* * * *

She’d used the jewelry she’d been found with to start a new life. The astounding quality of the gems set in gold had given her enough money to purchase a small cottage and rent storefront space for her gallery. Madeline regretted the sale of the jewelry, but the pieces had offered nothing but her name. She winced at a brief flash of dark male hands moving on her shoulders as he fastened the beautiful locket around her neck with her name engraved in it. Her name had been gently carved into every piece.

If she let herself dwell on those hands long enough, memories of them sweeping over her body would surface. Never his face or his name. Those beautiful, strong hands were all she had and sometimes in the barest moments, they were enough. Madeline pulled her keys from the ignition and stared at the small cottage she had purchased. Setting down roots had been difficult. It had been admission that it was possible that she would never return to the life that had been ripped from her.

Who was he and why had he never searched for her? He had touched her a thousands time in love, the pleasure she’d known in his arms seemed to envelope her in the night. It offered remembered comfort and security, yet never did it offer her a way home. Furious with the train of her thoughts she slammed her car door and looked out to the ocean. Fear and sadness mingled in as her gaze took in the water, perhaps he’d never searched for her because he had died. Died in the accident that had stolen her past.

She dumped her purse on the deck as she walked out across the sand, discarding her shoes along the way. A quick walk down the empty dock left her standing on the end. She sat down, crossed her legs, and stared out over the water. It was something she did often. There was no way she could ever explain the desire the water stirred in her, any more than she could fully explain the fear that swept along with that desire.

Deanna Lee

Reaching out, she let the tips of her fingers tease the surface of the water. Touching it was never enough, but the thought of slipping off the dock and into the water was horrifying. The need to was sometimes overwhelming and for a moment she stopped breathing. Desire slipped over her as she let the tip of one finger brush against the water. Sucking in a breath, she felt the sadness rush to her as well. What had she suffered that night? Maybe her memories had never returned to her because what had happened had been unbearable. Pulling her hand back, she started to rise, the sleek head of a dolphin popping up from the water.

The animal made several snapping noises at her and edged as close to the dock as he could. Hesitantly Madeline reached out and touched him. The dolphin bumped against her hand gently.

“Well, aren’t you the friendly sort?” She rubbed his head carefully, keeping an eye on his mouth. Though she didn’t fear he’d bite her, it never hurt to pay attention.

Suddenly the animal darted away and disappeared beneath the water. Bereft, Madeline stood from the pier and hurried inside. The silence of the cottage wasn’t comforting, it never had been. Curling her still damp hand into a fist, she leaned against the closed door and held herself still. Pain and sorrow drifted over her skin like another layer of clothing.

* * * *

Bastiaan, the reigning Triton of Atlantis, sat back in his chair and glared at the Captain of the Guard. “I told you specifically that you were not to engage the divers off the coast of Africa.”

Cassandra shrugged. “I couldn’t help it. They were very interesting.”

“And you can count yourself fortunate that only tabloids decided to report on it. Can you imagine the destruction that could be done to our world if you’d been captured? Do you think they would content themselves with just you?” Bastiaan stood. “For the love of Zeus have you not a single ounce of will power?”

“I have served Atlantis for two hundred years,” Cassandra responded coolly. “I’ve never endangered our people and I’ve always done what had to be done to insure the continuation of our race.”

“So you say, yet you play the siren with the best of the nymphs.”

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

“There was a time when such a thing would have made you laugh. Have you not over the years been responsible for some of the most daring incidences reported by the human world?”

“You know very well that most of that crap was made up.” Bastiaan sat back down clearly tired. “Besides we can all thank your dear cousin, Ella, for the most persisting myth on earth.”

“Oh, well you can’t blame her.” Cassandra grinned, her skin brightening almost gold as she did so. “If I was stuck in a loch all winter I’d have to have some fun with the local inhabitants, too.”

“One incident could be excused.” Bastiaan pointed towards the door. “Go and I swear to Zeus if you don’t cease your incessant pranks you’ll be barred from the water.”

Cassandra flushed with anger at the threat, it was the most heinous punishment she knew of. “Good day, sire.”

Bastiaan sighed as she left the room. In truth, he was angrier with himself than at her. Cassandra had indeed served Atlantis with distinction and honor all of her life, so if she liked to play with a few humans now and again he should be willing to overlook at it. Yet, he couldn’t. He’d never be able to again. The loss of his wife had changed him and all of the occupants of his kingdom. There was no longer any amusement to be found in the water. He saw danger and strife for his people at every turn.

He had ruled Atlantis for two hundred and fifty years, and in all that time he’d faced only one defeat in the protection of his people. The loss of Madeline had taken the joy out of his life. Now, he had duty. Duty to Atlantis and to the people that Madeline had loved so dearly. He would not fail to protect them again.

“Sire.”

Bastiaan turned and then stood as one of his guardsmen strode into his office. “Dornar, is something wrong?”

“It is Nanatu. He’s at the Queen’s pool. His behavior is erratic. I haven’t seen him in such a state since her Majesty disappeared.” Dornar flushed as he said it. Bastiaan frowned. Nanatu had served his wife for nearly a hundred years and had been despondent over her loss. He’d been very afraid that the dolphin would starve to death. Yet, several weeks after her disappearance he started to leave Atlantis for long periods. A part of him

Deanna Lee

knew that the dolphin had been searching for his mistress. Six years had passed and no matter how Bastiaan tried, he'd never been able to get the dolphin to accept the loss.

"I'll see to him."

Dornar nodded abruptly and cleared his throat. "Should I prepare to take him to Dr. Williams?"

Bethany Williams was a marine biologist, and like her ancestors, she served Atlantis. Very few humans were allowed such a relationship with the inhabitants of the underwater kingdom. Secrecy was the only real protection they had. Because of this, her relationship was never misused. There were very few circumstances where she would be called upon to travel to Atlantis herself, though she was certainly welcome. More often, the beings of Atlantis went to her.

"No, I doubt that will be necessary."

He dismissed the guard with a nod and then walked towards the back door of his office. A small hall led him directly to the Queen's pool, an area he had installed when he'd taken a mermaid for a wife. A foul-tempered and easily riled mermaid. Nanatu surfaced as soon as he entered and laid his head against the edge. His clicks were mournful.

Bastiaan sighed and sat down on the edge of the pool. The dolphin moved closer and rubbed his head against his thigh. "Old friend, you mustn't upset yourself this way." He rubbed the dolphin's head thoughtfully. "I know how much you miss her. There is nothing I wouldn't do to bring her back to us."

The dolphin clicked gently and turned to capture Bastian's fingers in his mouth. Gently he pulled, and backed away from the edge. After several seconds, he released the fingers and slid away into the water. Bastiaan sighed. He did not have time to swim with the dolphin. Yet, he found himself standing and diving into the water.

* * * *

Bastiaan broke the surface seconds after Nanatu did; the dolphin brushed up against him and clicked rapidly. They'd swam for hours, and for some reason that was nearly beyond him Bastiaan had been unable to persuade the dolphin to return home. Concerned, he'd continued with the animal. They were off the coast of Florida. In the island chain, the humans called the Florida Keys. Three hundred yards in front of him, lay a secluded stretch of beach with several small cottages.

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

“What is it, Nanatu?” He reached out to the dolphin and stroked his head. “Is this place special to you?”

Nanatu clicked again and prodded Bastiaan toward shore. Swearing, Bastiaan did as the dolphin urged and wondered yet again, why he was indulging the animal. He stood in the shallow waters briefly, looked back to Nanatu, and then strode forward. A part of him was incapable of disappointing the animal that his wife had loved so dearly.

The short white kilt he still wore clung to his thighs as he strode from the rushing tide. The sand was rough on his feet, but not unpleasant. He looked towards the cottage and for a moment, a wild, unacceptable hope filled him. After six years, he couldn't let himself have such dreams. Yet, he moved quickly up the beach to the cottage. Just shy of the small porch that extended out in front of him, Bastiaan stopped. The un-curtained window drew him closer and for the first time in six years, he found himself staring at his wife.

“Madeline.” Her name was hoarse in his mouth, after a few seconds his legs grew weak and he fell to his knees.

* * * *

Madeline finished washing the last of her brushes and turned towards the large window that faced the sea. She pulled off her smock and shook back her hair as she walked towards the window. Silently she wished the sea a good night and left the studio.

She moved through the dark cottage and into the bathroom where she shed the rest of her clothing. With economical movements, she turned on the shower and adjusted the temperature of the water to suit her. Just above frigid. Discovering that she preferred cold showers had been an odd experience. Stepping into the bracing cold, she felt her body heat in response. It always did, the water slid over her skin with relentless pressure and as always, her body responded with heated pleasure.

Leaning against the cool tiles, she let the water pour over her and reveled in the heady bliss of it. Her nipples tightened into hard needy peeks, and her sex rushed wet with hot need. It had been at least six years since she'd known a man, and despite opportunities, the need to put one in her bed had never surfaced. She was lonely, more lonely than she'd thought was livable yet no man tempted her. There had been men who had charmed her into dates, but they'd never made it past her front door. In fact, most of them had never even gotten a kiss from her.

Deanna Lee

Lost in the pleasure of the water, the memory of his hands returned to her. The gentle insistent hands that roamed her body with knowledge and love. So content with the images her hands moved over her flesh, mimicking what her mind gave to her, until she slid two slim fingers into the mound of her sex. Her clit was already throbbing, her pulse a steady tattoo in the hardened flesh.

She rubbed herself in a steady circle, all the while her mind was totally given over to the memory of another's touch. Orgasm came swiftly, and Madeline cried out with the lonely pleasure of it. Sliding to her knees, she rocked under the rush of water and sucked in a deep breath to keep the sobs at bay.

* * * *

Dr. Bethany Williams had met The Triton of Atlantis only once and that had been the day she'd been told of her grandfather's role in the ancient and beautiful undersea kingdom of Atlantis. As a child, she'd gloried in tales of the Olympians, mermaids, nymphs and the merman that might populate the sea in secret places. Finding out the stories her grandfather had told her were real had nearly given her a stroke. Still, she thought she'd recovered nicely and only managed to stutter for the first half of the conversation she'd had with The Triton.

The fact that Bastiaan, The Triton, was waiting in her office had her on edge. She'd dismissed her afternoon class nearly an hour early when her teaching assistant had brought the message that a Mr. Triton was waiting to see her. She pushed open the door and sucked an in deep breath. One was entitled to be a little breathless when faced with a real live god. Bastiaan was by far the most beautiful man she'd ever seen.

He kept his hair shaved close to his head, though she'd known him to wear braids in the past. His dark, near midnight skin seemed to glow with vitality and power. Dark brown eyes were framed by enviable lashes. He was broad shouldered, slim hipped, and just about every woman's walking sex fantasy. He was standing in her office, regarding her with a cool and appraising look she found discomforting.

"Sire." Beth closed the door and flipped the lock. "I am surprised to see you."

"I don't often find a reason to come ashore."

"No. You don't." Beth walked to her desk and swallowed as she sat. "Is there an illness?"

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

“No one in Atlantis is in need of your services.” Bastiaan sat down in the chair in front of her desk and was silent for a moment. “My wife is alive and living in the Florida Keys.”

Beth’s mouth dropped open. The loss of the mermaid Queen nearly six years ago had been a personal blow for her. She remembered Madeline fondly and had always hoped that she would be around to see The Triton and his Queen have children. “Alive?”

“Yes.” Bastiaan frowned. “You can trust that I find this situation upsetting. I had no indication from her that she was unhappy in our marriage. So unhappy that she would fake her death and live as a bloody human.” He grimaced. “Not that there is anything wrong with being human.”

Beth cleared her throat. “Well, given a choice I’m sure a great many humans would love to live as you do. Have you spoken with her?”

“No. Nanatu brought me to her last night.” He grew silent, his fists tight in his lap. “I’m afraid that if I approach her that I won’t be kind.”

“Sire, I’m sure you feel betrayed by this.” Beth swallowed. One hundred and twenty years of marriage, she could barely imagine dating a man for a month much less being married for two hundred years. “The Queen never once expressed that she was unhappy in her marriage to you. In fact, during her last visit with me she spoke of having children.”

“We kept putting it off.” Bastiaan stood and walked toward the one small window in her office. “You have to find out why she left.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you. I can’t send anyone else. I won’t have her think she has no choice but to return to me.”

Beth stood and crossed her arms over her breasts. “And if she chooses to remain where she is?”

“I just want to know why she left me,” Bastiaan snapped. “She’s running a little art gallery in Marathon, Fl. She calls it The Fathoms Below.”

“How do you know this?”

Deanna Lee

“I stayed close to the cottage she’s living in all night and when she went to work I searched through it trying to find some clue as to why she was there. All I found was paperwork on the storefront she’s renting.”

Beth went back to her desk and sat down. “Let me look it up on the internet. Most tourist places have a website....”

* * * *

Madeline glanced up at the two women who were drifting around her shop. She knew only one of them would purchase, and was waiting for the right opportunity to spring on the sale. Her ability to know her customers had been frightening when she’d first opened the gallery, now it served to calm her. In the gallery she was in command of the world around her, nothing was beyond her control. That could not be said once she left the shop.

She looked toward the customers once more and centered on the woman who would purchase. She would want a beach landscape, something simple and elegant to remind herself of her time in The Keys. Putting down the accounting ledger she’d been working with, she walked to the woman.

“Good afternoon, are you finding what you need?”

Both women turned to smile at her.

* * * *

“She doesn’t know who she is.”

Bastiaan sat back in his chair in shock. “What?”

“I can’t believe I’ve missed it.” Bethany clenched her hands into fists, her own anger surfacing. “She washed ashore in the Florida Keys, naked except for a few pieces of jewelry only days after she disappeared from Atlantis. She knows nothing of what she is or where she comes from. There were a few tabloid stories about her, but I avoid those unless you ask me to clip things about Merfolk sightings.”

“By the gods that is impossible!”

“It’s true. From what I’ve been able to read, she believes she was in an accident at sea and that her husband must have died in the accident. When no one legitimate came forward to claim a relationship of any kind with her, she accepted that she was alone in the world. Over the last two years, she’s began to refused interviews and television

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

appearances. It has been reported that her amnesia might be permanent and the result of a very traumatic emotional loss.” Bethany took a deep breath and tried to concentrate on what else had to be said. “There has been no real evidence that she’s been romantic with anyone since her discovery.”

“Even if she’d lost her memory, her natural instincts and drive for the water would have eventually revealed her nature to her!” Bastiaan snapped.

“She hasn’t gone into the water since she was found.”

“Madeline hasn’t been in the sea in six years?”

She cringed at his outrage. “She’s afraid of it. I am so sorry, Sire.”

Deanna Lee

Chapter Two

“She’s afraid of the water,” Bastiaan whispered. “I’ve never known a mermaid who loved the sea more than her.”

“What will you do?”

Bastiaan looked to his father. “I will go to the place where she is. If I cannot have the woman she was... I will have the woman she is now.”

Zeus sighed. “As you will.” He looked away from his son briefly and shook his head. “When you assumed the leadership of the Merfolk, I was pleased for you. Your marriage to Madeline cemented your place among them; they respect you and were pleased when you chose to take a mermaid for a wife.”

“You are afraid I’ll choose to leave Atlantis if I can’t lure Madeline back into the sea.”

Zeus turned and met his son’s gaze. “I know what it is to love a woman, Bastiaan. I’ve certainly loved many and known more than I loved. Madeline is a strong and beautiful woman with a heart as fast and alluring as the sea. I understand your need to be by her side.”

“I won’t abandon Atlantis, not even for Madeline.” Bastiaan looked around his office and then sighed. “We can’t leave her among the humans with no memory of whom or what she is. If she were to reveal herself to anyone that can’t be trusted...”

“If it comes down to it, son, I will come for her.” Zeus brushed the wrinkles from his crisp linen pants as he rose from the chair he’d spent most of the morning in. “I would never want you to inflict pain on your wife, not even for the safety of our kind. For now, I will go visit our little mermaid and see if I can learn anything about her condition.”

* * * *

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

Madeline woke with a start, her gaze darting around her bedroom quickly. Though she couldn't place it, something was very wrong. She pushed aside her blanket and slid from the bed. The cottage was silent; she could hear the dull roar of the ocean just beyond the windows. Walking to the window, she pushed aside the flimsy white curtains and let her gaze travel over the dark turbulent waters. The storm had come up unexpectedly and had been ravaging the shoreline for nearly a full day.

"What makes you so angry?" She frowned as she asked the question and shook her head. It was a foolish question, but not one she could fully set aside. Some part of her seemed to understand that what ever served to balance the ocean was no longer in place.

It reminded her of the night she'd washed ashore. Exhausted, naked, and devastated. The ocean had seemed to rage around her as if it wanted to keep her and expel her at the same time. She barely remembered being pulled from the surf by the two teenagers that had rescued her. Pain lingered in her even though she had no memories as to why she felt that way. She'd lost everything that mattered that night and it seemed it would never return to her.

Disgruntled with herself, she went back to the bed and plucked up her robe. Pulling the soft silk over her nakedness seemed to settle her. Tying the belt, she walked through the small cottage to the kitchen area. Once at the sink, she filled a teapot with water and set it to boil on the stove. It wasn't even 4:00 A.M. Normally, she managed to get at least six hours of sleep. With a sigh, she pushed open the kitchen curtains and jumped a little.

The small cottage to the left of hers had been empty for nearly six months, yet there was a light on. It wasn't a tourist rental, and the elderly couple that lived in it during the winter months hadn't mentioned that they'd planned to rent it out this year.

* * * *

Cassandra paced back and forth in front of Bastiaan, fit and thoroughly livid. "To think that she was here this whole time?"

"I've placed my brother Marcos in charge of Atlantis during my absence."

"Yes." She nodded and then looked to him. "What of me?"

"I want you to find out what happened to her." Bastiaan looked out the window to Madeline's small cottage. "She washed ashore on a public beach not far from here with no apparent injuries. My father is with her currently; once he's come to some conclusion about

how she lost her memory, he'll come to me with that information. What I want to know from you is how she managed to stay here, so close to the ocean and not one of her kind ever saw her."

"The Keys are a popular spot for the merman," Cassandra admitted grudgingly. "They do enjoy scantily clad human woman."

"Go then."

"Yes, Sire. I won't disappoint you again."

Bastiaan reached out and took her arm. "Again?"

Cassandra flushed. "The Queen was lost..."

"We don't yet know the circumstances of Madeline's accident." Bastiaan paused and gentled his hold on her arm. "I don't blame you, Cassandra. I never did. Of all the Merfolk who serve Atlantis, I've always trusted you the most. That hasn't changed."

Cassandra nodded and sighed when he released her. "I will find out what happened."

Bastiaan watched silently as she hurried quickly from the cottage and barely flinched when his father appeared on the small couch in the middle of the small living area. "Well?"

"The memory loss is very real and so is her fear of the sea. The night she was found was horrific. Though the humans who saved her did not mean to, when they ripped her from the sea it cemented her fear. If they'd allowed the ocean to claim her, she wouldn't have become lost to us. I'll need to spend more time with her to determine if her condition can be treated."

Bastiaan nodded and rubbed his face as he sat down. "Is there any inkling of the woman I married?"

"Her instincts are strong. For instance, she can sense that you are angry and frustrated. Her fear of the sea dampens her natural urges to be in the water, I believe that with time she could be drawn back. The night of the incident, she was so frightened that the sea responded to her in way I've never known before. It seemed to understand that she had to go ashore, yet it certainly didn't want to part with her."

"You've always said that the oceans of this planet are alive."

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

“Yes. The water seemed to sense her fear and pain; it pushed and pulled her to safety. Yet, in the end, it tried to keep her as if it finally understood that giving her to the shore was not what should be done. Then two humans were there, pulling her from the water. She needs time to recover and to recognize what she is. Unfortunately, we do not have much time to spend.”

“Why?” He focused on his father aware that for once in all the time that he’d known him Zeus seemed uneasy and weary.

“Merfolk are a special race of people. They are bound to the ocean by far more than just their physical needs. Emotionally, their connection with the ocean and the creatures that live within it is just as imperative. If Madeline does not return to the sea soon she will not be able to return. Though it is rare, it is not unheard of for one of her kind to be land bound.”

“How long?”

“A few days, four at the most. She needs to spend a prolonged amount of time in the water. No less than several hours, the trip back to Atlantis should be enough to force the changes back. Then once we’ve returned her to Atlantis, she’ll need to spend several hours a day in the sea. It is her waning connection with the sea that finally drew Nanatu to her and it will draw others.”

“Give me two days, if I can not wake her memories by then you’ll come and retrieve her. I will not allow the Queen of Atlantis to be bound to the land.” Bastiaan closed his eyes when his father nodded abruptly and disappeared.

* * * *

The storm was gone. Madeline leaned against the counter and stared out the window to the cottage that was still lit with the single light. She wondered who had rented the place and how long they would remain. Disgruntled with her curiosity about the mystery neighbor, she picked up her tea and went into the second bedroom of her cottage that functioned as her studio.

The five feet by six feet canvas she’d made the day before sat empty. What had possessed her to make such a large canvas was yet another mystery but she normally followed along with her impulses as they served her in the end. The one window in the

Deanna Lee

room gave her a beautiful view of the sea; it had grown calm and now seemed as inviting as ever.

Briefly, she allowed herself to be tempted by the invitation of the water. There was no way to explain the need just seeing it woke in her, need, and eventually self-loathing. She hated herself for the fear. It was a weakness. A terrible weakness that seemed to separate her from everything she once knew and loved.

The breaking dawn distracted her from her thoughts and she walked to the window. Just off the short dock, she could see a dolphin playing in the water. She wondered if it was the same creature that had visited her before. Curious, she set aside her tea and walked to the French doors that lead out to the small deck. Forty feet of sand separated her from the sea, and as always, it seemed like thousands of miles.

She curled her toes into the sand the moment she stepped off the narrow set of steps and paused. Madeline cast a brief glance towards the neighboring cottage, as she'd just remembered she was no longer alone in the cove. Perhaps it wasn't a good idea to walk the beach in just her robe, but she looked out toward the dock and saw that the dolphin had moved closer to it.

With a smile, she hurried across the sand and onto the smooth boards of the dock. Once at the end, she sat down, crossed her legs, and waited for the dolphin to immerge. He didn't disappoint. His sleek head appeared almost instantly, his excited clicks echoing in the cove.

"Hello again." She reached out and patted his head. "I didn't think you would return."

The dolphin preened under her hand and seemed to sigh with contentment.

* * * *

Bastiaa forced himself to remain where he was as he watched his wife with her pet. He could still remember the day she'd brought the infant dolphin home to Atlantis. His mother had been killed by a fisherman and he'd been badly wounded. Rather than let the sea take the orphan, Madeline had brought him home and begged for Zeus to grant the creature a second chance.

Like himself, Zeus had never really been able to deny Madeline anything she wanted. He'd taken the dolphin and given him the briefest light of immortality. She'd

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

named him Nanatu and he'd never strayed far from her side. That is, Bastiaan thought, until the night she disappeared. He'd found Nanatu disoriented and very angry days later. He'd never been able to glean from the animal the events of the night that had seen the loss of the mermaid Queen.

The pale silk robe she wore hid nothing from his gaze, and for a moment, he let his eyes devour the look of her. The years that had separated them hadn't changed her, her dark hair still flowed down her back in amazingly hopeless dark brown curls, her pale skin still seemed to glow with an aura of otherworldliness. He didn't doubt that more than one human male had approached or pursued her since his discovery.

The first time he'd seen her he'd wanted her. Wanted her in a way he'd never wanted any woman and it had startled, even angered him. Even now, nearly a hundred twenty-five years later he could remember the heaviness that had drifted over his chest as he'd watched her in the water. The first time she'd taken his form, and had come to him at Atlantis was one of his most precious memories. The stubborn unreasonable creature had teased him unbelievably for nearly five years and had seemed to view his pursuit of her with some amusement.

Yet, one night she'd come to him with skin still damp from the sea and slid into his bed as if she'd belonged there. He'd reached out for her, accepted her, because she had belonged. There hadn't been a moment when he hadn't believed she should be with him. She'd held him, stroked him, and taken him inside her if they'd been lovers for years. Closing his eyes, Bastiaan let the memory of that first time linger with him. It wasn't the first time that he'd done so since he'd lost her.

His cock grew heavy and hard, pushing against the restraining material of his jeans. Groaning, he leaned his head against the glass pane of the door and focused on her. Carefully, he banked a fire he was in no position to extinguish, took a calming breath and slid open the door that would lead him to the beach. It was time, he thought, to introduce himself to his wife. She hadn't noticed she was no longer alone, he hoped he wouldn't startle her too much. Would he see anything in her jewel green eyes that would let him know that somewhere deep down inside she knew who he was?

* * * *

Deanna Lee

Madeline leaned back against on her hands as the dolphin leaped up into the air and flipped for her. Her delighted laughter seemed to spur the creature on. She wondered if he'd once been a part of a water park, but there was a wildness about him that seemed to belie that. Footsteps on the dock surprised her and she jerked around to see who had invaded her space.

As invaders went, he was a sight to behold. He stood at least 6'5; his broad shoulders and neat trim waist were displayed rather perfectly in a pair of jeans and a t-shirt that was probably a size too small. She stood and walked toward him, the moment their eyes met her whole world shifted out of focus. There was a very still moment between them and then her vision darkened.

* * * *

Bastiaan gently placed Madeline on the bed and took a few steps back. He'd hoped for some hint that she recognized him, but having her faint at his feet hadn't been one of them. He sat down in a chair not far from her bed and focused on her. Confusion and pain seemed to radiate off her in turns, whatever she'd remembered at the sight of him hadn't been the pleasant memory he would have preferred.

He barely stirred when Zeus appeared beside the bed and sat down. "I didn't expect that."

Zeus nodded. "No, I can tell that you didn't. You haven't called for me like that ever. Not once in your whole existence." He touched Madeline's face gently, and brushed her hair from her cheek. "Not even the night you lost her."

"Seeing me caused her pain and I don't understand why."

"The last time you were together..."

Bastiaan swallowed hard and forced himself to remember that night. "She'd been out of sorts all day. Her brother had been to Atlantis, an unscheduled visit and they had an argument earlier in the day. There was never a chance for her to tell me what it was about it. There was a formal dinner that night, we attended together and parted. When I came to our suite that night, she was missing. Shortly there after I realized she was gone from Atlantis."

"You didn't argue with her?"

"No. The last time we argued..." Bastiaan shook his head. "It was about some silly thing she wanted to do with..." He paused and stood abruptly.

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

Without a word to his father, he left the bedroom and walked down hall to the small room he'd first saw her in. Several paintings were in various stages of being completed. One large canvas lay empty and he wondered what she planned to paint.

"Bastiaan?"

He turned to look at his father. "She wanted to clear out a room on the suite so that she could paint. I told her I didn't have time to listen to every silly little thing she wanted...and she flew off in a rage."

"A misunderstanding," Zeus said softly. "It happens among men and women more often than not."

"I ignored something important to her and trivialized something she's obviously wanted to do a very long time." Bastiaan shook his head and cleared his throat. "It wasn't my intention to hurt her, yet I did. A hundred and twenty years of marriage and I still manage to devastate my wife without even trying."

"Whatever you argued about, it isn't the reason she left Atlantis and isn't the reason her memory is gone. Did you ever learn from her brother what they argued about?"

"He said she wanted him to come live at Atlantis."

Zeus paused and watched his son walk to the small window in the room. "And?"

"I didn't believe him, but I let it go. It seemed so unimportant when compared with the loss of her. She'd never discussed Rigel coming to live at Atlantis with me and she would have before inviting him. She knew that the politics between myself and her brother would have made such an arrangement uncomfortable."

Zeus looked toward the doorway. "She's waking. Call on me if you need me, son."

Bastiaan nodded and left her tiny studio. She was standing in the hallway, her eyes dark with anger and hurt. "Madeline."

"I know you."

"Yes."

"I haven't seen a face I recognize for the six years that I've been here," she whispered. Her gaze dropped to his hand and to the intricately carved wedding band he wore. A near replica of the one she'd been found with. "Where have you been?"

He started to move forward but stopped when she took several steps back. "Madeline."

Deanna Lee

“Where have you been?” she demanded again through clenched teeth.

“Mourning my dead wife,” Bastiaan snapped in return. “I had no idea you were alive. I found you by accident three days ago.”

She bit down on her lip and after a few seconds turned abruptly and disappeared into the bedroom. Unwilling to let her hide, he followed. He found her standing beside a dresser, a simple wood box in her hands. “At least I know for sure my name is Madeline now. I didn’t know... it was easy to assume.” She sighed and opened the box. “I wore it for three years before I finally took it off.” She lifted a small velvet box and set the wood case aside. “Your name?”

“Bastiaan Augustin.”

She turned and looked toward him. “You’ve an accent.”

“My mother is Haitian.” Bastiaan watched her open the ring box and pull out her wedding band. “I put that ring on your hand a long time ago, Madeline. It would please me to see it there again.”

Madeline shook her head. “Not yet.”

“As you will, wife.” He reached out and offered her his hand.

* * * *

Madeline paused and then walked toward him. “I thought I was alone.”

“No, never.”

“How can I know you and still remember nothing of me?” She looked down at their hands, pleased by the contrast between his darkness and her paleness. “How?”

“I don’t know.” Carefully, he touched her face. “Something caused you pain...when you saw me outside.”

“I felt betrayed.” She pulled her fingers free from his. “Betrayed and angry. I don’t know why.” She walked away from him. “The night I disappeared?”

“You left our home of your own will and didn’t return.”

“Where is our home?” She frowned when he paused. “No, don’t spare me anything. I want to know it all.”

“Let’s take things slowly, Madeline. Tell me about the night you washed ashore here in the Keys.”

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

"I need some tea," she whispered and rushed past him. He followed closely, but was silent as she prepared the water and set it on the stove. "I woke in the water; I thought I wasn't going to drown. I had no control over..." She paused and then shook her head. "This sounds foolish but I could no longer control the water around me."

"It doesn't sound foolish at all." He sat down at the table and watched her as she pulled cups out of the cabinet. "Continue."

"The only thing I could think was that I had to get to shore. The sea was rough, almost angry. I struggled for what seemed like hours and then suddenly hands were reaching out to me. I couldn't stop them, and I didn't know why I wanted to." Madeline turned to look at him and sighed. "All I did was cry for days after I was found. I was in a hospital surrounded by nurses and doctors. Everything was familiar but alien, as if I didn't belong here." She motioned around the room and then pulled the kettle from the stove when it started to whistle.

"And now?"

"I still feel out of place." She put a cup of tea in front of him and pushed the sugar container in his direction. "I also can't for the life of me figure out why I'm not having a complete mental meltdown right now. After six years without any hope of finding out who I am, I should be at a little crazy right now."

"You're always quiet before the storm." He laughed softly when she looked toward him startled. "Well, it's true. In fact it was the first thing I noticed about you."

"How did we meet?"

"You were swimming with your brothers and sisters." He paused when the color washed from her face. "Maddie?" Reaching across he took her hand. "Are you alright?"

"I have brothers and sisters?"

"Yes, four brothers and six sisters. You're the oldest of eleven."

"Eleven?" Her mouth dropped open briefly and then she closed it. "Okay, so I was swimming with my brothers and sisters."

"Yes, you found my intrusion worrisome. I was treated to a severe lecture for interfering with your fun." He chuckled at the blush that stole across her cheeks. "I knew from that very moment that I had to have you for my wife. No one had ever spoken to me that way."

Deanna Lee

“So my arrogant disrespect won you over?” She laughed softly and looked down into her tea. “And you? How did you win my heart?”

“At first, I meant to win you over with a display of my power and wealth. But it became obvious that you would have no part of it.” He looked down to their hands and sighed. “So, I had to grovel and beg. Five years later, you took pity on me and married me.”

She laughed softly and slipped her fingers through his, tightening her hold on his hand. “I feel like I’m going to wake up any moment and all of this will have been a cruel dream.”

“It’s no dream.” He cleared his throat. “Come here, Madeline.”

She stood and moved around the table, never letting go of his hand. She slid into his lap with a whispered sigh of relief and curled against him. Silence settled over them as she tucked her face into the side of his neck. Their fingers tightened together, as if neither wanted to ever let go.

“I haven’t known a moment’s peace since you were lost to me.” Bastiaan pressed a soft kiss to her temple and sighed as she relaxed against him completely. “Your family will be overwhelmed by your discovery.”

“Their names?”

“Your brothers are Rigel, Cannus, Christoff, and Jamison. Your sisters are Calanthea, Arianna, Diana, Cassandra, Doreena, and Melody.” He stroked her hair gently as she settled against him. “Your mother’s name is Delphiana.”

“That’s an interesting collection of names.”

Bastiaan laughed softly. “Your mother is an interesting individual.”

“I want to see them soon. Very soon.”

“Of course.” He turned her face gently so that their eyes met. “You needn’t be afraid, Maddie, you’ll never be lonely again.”

She flushed. “I like how you say my name.”

He laughed. “You never used to admit it. Come closer.”

“I’m already in your lap.” She raised her head and met his gaze. “Gosh, you’re pretty.”

Bastiaan sighed. “I’ve told you plenty of times, wife, men are not to be considered pretty.”

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

She laughed and touched his lips with the tips of her fingers. “Is this close enough?”
“Nay, closer still. I need to kiss my wife.” Bastiaan whispered as he threaded his fingers into her hair and pulled her mouth to his. She melted against him and wrapped her arms around him like she’d done a thousand times.

* * * *

Heat rushed between them, and Madeline felt her body immediately begin to respond. No matter what she did not remember, this was her man. She’d known it the moment she’d met his gaze. Staring into those startling familiar dark brown eyes had been her undoing. A soft needy moan escaped her mouth as his hands moved down her back to press her closer.

“I’ve missed you.” The words broke from her mouth in a rushed whisper when his lips left hers to trail soft kisses along her jaw. “At first, I thought I would die without you.”

Bastiaan brushed away the tears that streamed down her face away and swallowed hard. “I’ve never loved anyone the way I love you. I’ll do everything I can to give the life you lost back to you.”

Deanna Lee

Chapter Three

Madeline closed her eyes as Bastiaan stood from the chair and held her against his chest. She could have spent the rest of her life wrapped up in his arms and not ever wanted for another thing. It was a scary moment, and she wondered briefly if she was allowing her loneliness to lead her down a dangerous path.

“You needn’t fear me.”

She lifted her face from the side of his neck and met his gaze. “How did you know what I was thinking?”

“The same way you always know which people come into your shop will buy a painting and what it will take to lure them away from their money.” He picked her up and walked out through the French doors he hadn’t bothered to close when he’d brought her inside and stepped out onto the deck. “You haven’t been in the sea since the night you washed ashore.”

She frowned as he set her down on her feet. “I can’t make myself do it.”

“The sea is more your home than the land will ever be.” He touched her face gently and then brushed her hair from her shoulder. “You know that deep down inside, Madeline. You know that you aren’t like the people you’ve surrounded yourself by.”

“I am different. It would be difficult not to be considering the fact that I have no past.”

“You have a past so rich and vibrant that when it returns to you, you’ll be overwhelmed by it.” Cupping the back of her head, he drew her close and brushed his lips over hers. “You can’t begin to recover who you are if you don’t understand what you are.”

“And what am I?” She asked meeting his dark gaze with her own. “What aren’t you telling me, Bastiaan?”

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

“A thousand things.” He lowered his head and rested his forehead against hers. “Come into the water with me.”

“No.” She shook her head abruptly and tried to back away from him.

“Maddie...” He sighed and released her, as he couldn’t stand the thought of her struggling against his hold. “Don’t you know that I would never hurt you or allow you to be hurt?”

“I don’t know you, Bastiaan.” She lowered her head briefly and then sighed. “I know that I belong with you. That is what I know. Everything else is gone!” She turned her back on him and then hurried down the stairs to the sand.

“It doesn’t have to be gone.” He followed her, and took a hold of her arm gently. She lay back against his chest and stared out at the sea as it rushed to meet the sand. “We can bring it all back.”

“Did you really love me?” she asked softly.

“I do love you. I’ve loved you since the moment I saw you.” He pulled her flush against his chest. “I love how your hair curls despite your serious efforts to tame it. I love how you laugh and how beautiful you are when you cry.”

She leaned back against him and sucked in a breath. “Did I love you?”

He chuckled. “Beyond any reason. I’m fairly certain you worshipped the ground I walked on.”

She turned abruptly and glared at him. “I did not.”

“No, baby.” He touched her cheek and laughed. “You didn’t worship me. However, you loved me as much as I love you. When we first married, we spent days wrapped up in each other and in our love. We couldn’t imagine a day when we wouldn’t have each other.”

She laid her head against his chest. “Then that day came.”

Bastiaan pulled her closer and sucked in a breath. “Yes.”

“I’m sorry.” She linked her hands behind his back and moved closer. “I don’t know why I left home, and I don’t know why I didn’t come home.”

He kissed her forehead. “We’ll find the answers together.”

Madeline nodded and sighed. “I believe you.” She raised her head. “How long have we been married?”

* * * *

It was a just question, one that should have been easy to answer. Bastiaan touched her face, rubbed his thumb across her lips, and knew that lying to her would never serve him.

“We would have celebrated one hundred and twenty years of marriage in June.”

She jerked as if she’d been struck but didn’t struggle when his hold on her tightened. “Bastiaan.”

He hated the confusion he saw in her eyes and would have done anything to erase it. “It’s true.”

“How can that be true?” she demanded and jerked free from his hands. “How? That’s freaking impossible. The doctors told me I was probably in my thirties.”

“You are three hundred forty-two, actually.”

“Are you insane?” She stopped several feet in front of him and stared hard, as if she was trying to determine just how crazy he was and if it was fixable. “Is that why I left you?”

“I’m not insane and I don’t bloody know why you left me!” He snapped, anger surfacing.

“Humans don’t live that long,” she whispered, her voice saturated with uncertainty.

“You aren’t human; you aren’t even close to being human.”

“I am.”

“You aren’t and we can only be fortunate that you weren’t seriously injured when you washed ashore. The gods help all of your kind if the doctors had done any extensive tests on your physiology.”

“All of my kind,” she whispered. “You said you were from Haiti.”

“Actually, my mother is Haitian. My father is not and he isn’t human either.”

“Oh for the love of Zeus this is insane,” she snapped and stalked away. She came to a stop just short of the dock and turned to look at him. He hadn’t moved an inch. “For the love of Zeus.”

“You should be careful; he has a habit of showing up when his name is taken in vain.” He laughed softly when her gaze jerked around the small expanse of beach. “Deep down, Madeline, where it matters you know I speak the truth.”

“The sea is my home,” she repeated.

“Yes.”

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

“Is it your home as well?” she asked softly.

“I took it for my home when I married you.”

“What are you, Bastiaan?” she asked, desperate.

“I am the reigning Triton of Atlantis, a son of Zeus and you dear one are my wife. You are popular among my kind and yours. Most call you the Mermaid Queen.”

“The Mermaid Queen.” She swallowed visibly and looked out toward the ocean. “The dolphin?”

“His name is Nanatu. He’s been with you since he was an infant. When you disappeared I thought he would starve because he grieved so.”

“He’s how you found me.”

“Yes.”

“I’m a freaking mermaid?” Madeline demanded and then turned her back on him. “How come I don’t grow a tail when I shower? Trust me if I’d had such a thing develop I would have noticed.”

He laughed softly at her tone and walked slowly to the dock. “The change into your sea shape is not one that can happen without your willing it to. Your species would have never survived without the ability to fully conceal yourself when on land.”

“I’m afraid of the water. If I were some kind of a mermaid that would be rather impossible.”

“It’s certainly rare, but then we don’t know what happened to you to create that fear. Merfolk have a unique relationship with the oceans of this world. Your connection and need for it is both physical and emotional. Isn’t there some part of you that aches for the sea’s embrace?”

She nodded absently, and then sighed. “Merfolk. That encompasses more than just mermaids and merman right?”

“Yes, of course, there are a variety of shapeshifters among your people. Some shift completely into different sorts of animals depending on their mood. Though it is far less common now that the earth has become so modern and so treacherous. We’ve lost nearly sixty of our people to the humans over the last ten years.”

“You must see how crazy this all sounds.”

Deanna Lee

“Any more crazy than an insanely beautiful woman washing ashore naked, but for several hundred thousand dollars in jewelry with no memory of who she is?”

She paused and then pursed her lips. “That did raise a few eyebrows.”

He crossed his arms over his chest. “And the men that came forward claiming to know you?”

“There were enough.” She walked onto the dock and didn’t look back when he followed. “Especially when it was discovered that I washed ashore with just the jewelry. Most assumed I must be some wealth heiress.”

“But no family ever came forward.”

“No.” She shook her head. “None.” She sat down on the dock and pulled her legs to her chest as he joined her. “This is too much to take in all at once.”

“If I had a choice I would have done it differently. There isn’t a lot of time left,” Bastiaan murmured and then focused on the sea in front of him.

“Why?” She turned to him with a frown.

“If you do not reconnect with the sea you’ll be land bound until you die.”

Madeline swallowed hard. “And how long is that?”

“There are Merfolk who are more than a thousand years old. However, we are unsure what living on land will eventually do to you.” He took off his shoes and rolled up his jeans as he settled more comfortably on the dock. Dangling his feet in the water, he smiled when Nanatu appeared. “Nanatu is just one example of the life you have at Atlantis. If you become land bound, he won’t visit you anymore the grief would be too much for him.”

Madeline stroked the dolphin’s head gently and bit down on her lip. “I wouldn’t want him to hurt for me.”

“He’s hurt for you everyday since you since you disappeared. We both have. Losing you was like having one of my limbs severed.” Bastiaan reached out and brushed gentle fingers through her hair. “Put your feet in the water.”

She frowned and looked down at her bare feet. She hated wearing shoes, and wore them only when she had no choice. Carefully, Madeline released her legs and lowered them down until her toes brushed on the water’s surface. Pleasure at the brief contact surged up through her toes and over her thighs in one breathless second. “Oh.”

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

“Among the Merfolk they say that the sea is the first lover of every mermaid,” he said and then laughed softly when she took another deep breath.

She looked at him startled by his amusement. “Really?”

“Yes, really. I wasn’t exaggerating when I said that your connection to the sea was both emotional and physical.” He nodded when she carefully lowered her legs further and let the sea take her feet completely.

Sighing, she let her head fall back and for a moment said nothing as the water washed over her feet to her ankles. “How can I breathe underwater? I know I don’t have gills or anything.”

“You have internal gills. When you’re immersed in water, the gills open in your lungs and allow you to process the oxygen from the water.”

Madeline grimaced. “That must make for some rather unattractive hacking.”

He laughed outright. “As a matter of a fact, it does. You’ve always been rather secretive about it. Most women of your species are.”

“So, I’m a mermaid and a Queen.”

“Yes.”

“And you aren’t crazy?”

“I promise,” he whispered.

“And this isn’t some weird ass dream brought on by too much caffeine.”

“It’s no dream.”

Madeline rubbed her face suddenly. “I’m a hydrophobic mermaid. How’s that for irony?”

Nanatu clicked and bumped at her leg then.

“What does he want?” She touched his head with gentle fingers and sighed.

“He wants you to come into the water.” Bastiaan reached out with his hand and the dolphin immediately came to him. “She’s not ready, old friend. Go retrieve the Queen’s mother and bring her here.”

He clicked and whistled briefly and darted away.

Madeline swallowed hard. “My mother is a mermaid, right?”

Deanna Lee

“Yes. Queen of the Nymphs actually. She rules Nereidia and has since before you were born. Her royal consort, your father, died nearly a hundred years ago. She’s never remarried.”

“I knew that my father was dead.” Madeline frowned. “When you mentioned my family before, I seemed to know that my father had died. He was killed by a fisherman.”

“Yes, though it was certainly an accident. I doubt any human sets out his nets with the intention of capturing or injuring Merfolk. He freed himself from the netting but was too injured to defend himself. Weakness of that kind breaks all barriers. He was taken by sharks off the coast of Africa.”

“You’ve mentioned two cities. Nereidia and Atlantis...how can they be hidden from the humans?”

“There are five major cities; all but two are in the Atlantic Ocean. I, and others like me, hide the cities from the eyes and instruments of humans. It is why with the exception of Nereidia all of the underwater kingdoms are ruled by demigods, as human mythology knows us at least.”

“You’re a demigod?” She asked her eyes wide.

“I am the son of Zeus. He is the supreme ruler of the Olympians, perceived to be a god by ancient humans,” Bastiaan responded softly. “I told you that already, Madeline.”

“But a god?” She jerked her feet from the water and stood abruptly. “A living, breathing god?”

He stood and sighed. “I think the storm has finally made landfall.”

* * * *

“What? Do you think I’m going to have a big screaming hissy fit?” She raised an eyebrow aware that she was very close to that very thing. “Don’t you think I’m entitled to be a little bloody upset?”

“I will say this; your time on land has added nothing but trash to your vocabulary.”

“Oh, fuck you.” She turned on her heel and stomped down the dock. “Of course, I’m upset. I can be upset if I want to. You come here, after *six* years, tell me I’m a mermaid, you’re a damned demigod, I’ve got gills in my lungs...and I’m not allowed to have a screaming fit? I can bloody well have a screaming fit if I want to!”

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

“By all means.” He waved his arm around. “You are renowned for them. Go right ahead, it’ll make me feel right at home.”

She stopped as her damp feet sank into the sand and she turned to look at him. “I’m renowned for them?”

“Oh indeed. I’m regarded as the man who tamed the shrew of the seven seas!”

She frowned. “Are you mad? Where the hell do you get off being mad?”

“You aren’t the only one that spent six years alone.”

Madeline paused and sighed. “Bastiaan.”

“Don’t.” He waved her away. “It hasn’t been easy for me, Maddie. I’m trying desperately to see things from your point of view. But, the fact of the matter is that you didn’t know what you’d lost. I’ve spent everyday for the last six years knowing exactly what I lost that night. I lost the love of my life and now looking at you I can’t help but wonder if I’ll ever get her back.”

He turned his back on her and looked to Nanatu who was leaning against the dock watching them with sad eyes. “It’s alright, boy.”

“Does he understand?” Madeline asked softly stepping carefully back on to the dock.

“He understands that you fear the water and that he can do nothing about it. Despite his extraordinary life span, he’s like most of his kind. Dedicated to protecting those he views as family and easily upset by the anger of those he loves.” Bastiaan cleared his throat and looked over the expanse of water in front of him. “Your mother is here, love.”

Madeline looked to the dolphin. “You sent him to retrieve her.”

“She must have been close. I know that my father went to her and told her we’d found you, alive.” Bastiaan looked toward the cottage and then sighed. “I’ll be inside.”

“Wait.” She put her hand on his arm. “I don’t think I can handle this alone.”

“She’s your mother, Madeline. She’d cut off her own arm before she’d allow you to be harmed. Besides, I don’t think she’d appreciate me being present when she comes out of the water. As I’ve told you, females rarely leave the water in the presence of males. As I’ve seen merman immerge, I can say that it’s rather undignified.” He touched her arm. “Don’t fear her. She’s suffered so much grief over your loss.”

Deanna Lee

Madeline released his arm and watched silently as he left the dock and walked up the beach to the small cottage that he'd stayed in the night before. Everything he'd said to her was about to be proven and a part of her didn't want to bear witness to it. But, she couldn't allow herself to be a coward. She turned and watched in silence as a woman surfaced beside the dolphin.

Water streamed from her mouth as she grasped the wood dock and levered herself out of the water gracefully. She was pale, with long blond hair that fell in wet locks all over her head. It trailed down her naked body. "You're Delphiana."

"I am." She coughed and closed her eyes before she doubled over and seawater burst from her mouth with the force of a fist.

Madeline rushed forward, unable to help herself, and grasped the woman firmly. "Bastiaan says that you are my..." She paused when the woman's head snapped up and their gazes collided. "Mother."

"I am." Delphiana touched her cheek gently, a frown marring a beautiful but otherworldly face. "My child, what has happened to you?"

"Come inside, I'll get you something to wear." Madeline flushed and then glanced down at the robe she was still wearing. "We'll both get dressed."

She laughed. "If it suits you."

* * * *

"How old are you?"

Delphiana grinned. "Well, some things have not changed. You always were one to cut right to the point. I am four hundred sixty-seven, and I must say that I look very good for my age." She put down the hairbrush she'd started to run through her hair and looked around the small bedroom. "My son in law is the most patient of men. I was surprised that he sent for me so soon. I'd assumed he'd hoard you for days."

Madeline blushed. "I called him insane."

"Good. He could use a little a bit of a set down occasionally. He's a great deal like his father when he wants something to go his way. He's frustrated that you don't remember who you are."

"Yes, of course, and I certainly don't blame him." Madeline frowned and looked down at her mother's legs. "You didn't have a tail when you came up on the dock."

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

Delphiana smiled indulgently and leaned back on her hands, moved her legs together briefly before the flesh seemed to mingle and darken. The process happened rapidly, the fins of her tail uncurling and resting against the carpet just seconds after Madeline's statement. "I didn't want to upset you."

Madeline swallowed hard and let her gaze move over the dark green trunk of her mother's lower half. "Is it painful?"

"Actually, no. It's our natural state. Taking human form is slightly uncomfortable." She closed her eyes, her face tightening against the discomfort, when the flesh of her tail lightened to match the pale skin of her upper body. Seconds later, she was rubbing her lower legs together, as if the action helped relieve the discomfort. "It is something that we've grown used to. Atlantis is a closed environment and we must use legs to move about."

"Was I happy at Atlantis?"

"Happier than I'd ever thought you'd be. When Zeus and I first discussed marriage between you and Bastiaan, I worried that the match wouldn't suit you. I wanted to believe you'd be happy with one of your kind. However, the first time I saw you together I realized that you were made for each other. For a mere Olympian he is rather adept in the water, a rather graceful creature... but don't you dare tell him."

Madeline laughed. "I wouldn't dream of it. A mere Olympian?"

"Indeed. His mother is human; as I'm sure, he's told you already. There were some among the Merfolk who thought the match was unsuitable because he's blood is not truly royal, despite his father."

"That sounds elitist."

"True, true. You never cared much for what others thought. I was pleased when Bastiaan agreed to rule and protect Atlantis. His protection of both Atlantis and Nereidia is a great comfort. Before he became Triton and took his oaths of protection, our people often feared discovery by the humans. At this time, it is far more dangerous for us. Without Bastiaan and others like him, the humans would have discovered us by now. We'd have no safety in the oceans if it weren't for the Olympians." Delphiana looked toward Madeline and then sighed. "You were always the strongest, Madeline. You can deal with this and I am confident that all that you are will come back to you."

Deanna Lee

“We are two different species.” She frowned as she spoke, and looked at her mother. The knowledge that she wasn’t human was something of a relief. It made her feelings about not fitting in among the people on the island all the more clear.

“Yes. Though his human ancestry has upset some in our house, your marriage never suffered for your differences. The Olympians are adept shape shifters, taking our shape is far easier for them than taking their shape is for us.”

“There is something important that I don’t remember. I feel it edging along the back of my mind, as if at any moment it will come back to me.” Madeline stood and rubbed her arms as she looked away from her mother. “We are not of earth, are we?”

“No, we aren’t. However, I’ve never known any other home. The Olympians brought the Merfolk here some twenty thousand years ago. History tells that our own planet was dying, we’d known too much war, and that war had seen our environment destroyed. What was left of both of our species banded together and the two remaining cities left in search of a new home. They found Earth after hundreds of years of searching, and settled here. At first, the peoples of Atlantis and Olympus both engaged the humans, but they became more destructive and more warlike with each advancement they were given. Zeus made the decision to abandon the humans to their own fate and we retreated to the waters.”

Madeline swallowed as she took in the fact that she was an alien. A freaking hydrophobic alien mermaid. It just seemed to get better and better by the moment. Unable to think about it all, she focused on Bastiaan and immediately began to relax. Turning to her mother, she cleared her throat.

“It’s all too much.” She shook her head and then sat down on the bed beside her mother. Tears welled in her eyes. “I don’t feel so strong now. I don’t want you to be disappointed in me.”

“That is impossible,” she snapped and glared at her daughter. “You’ve always worn your heritage and responsibilities with pride. I couldn’t be more proud of you.”

Madeline laughed softly at her mother’s haughty tone. “If I never remember who I was before that night? If I’m never the daughter you remember?”

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

“Regardless, you’ll be my child.” Delphiana wrapped one arm around her and pulled her close. “That’s all that matters. I love you Madeline. When I look at you now, I feel a thousand things all at once and none of them involve disappointment.”

“And Bastiaan?”

“He’s a decent and patient man who loves you.”

“I knew him the moment I saw him. Though I still remember none of our life together.”

Delphiana nodded. “Something has been done to you, love. At first I wasn’t sure, but I know for certain now that it wasn’t your accident alone that prevented your return to the sea. I will go speak with Uresus, perhaps she can help us in this matter.”

Madeline stiffened as if she’d been struck. “Uresus.”

“Yes, she’s served as Nereidia’s spiritual leader for years.” She frowned. “That upsets you.”

“She upsets me,” Madeline snapped and crossed her arms over her breasts. “You said something had been done to me. What did you mean?”

“Your mind is closed off from me. I can sense your feelings but your thoughts...” Delphiana stood from the bed and belted the robe her daughter had given her. “We communicate telepathically, Madeline. Yet, I cannot reach out to you and touch your mind. It’s as if something is blocking the way.”

“You think someone cast a spell on me,” Madeline murmured.

“A spell?”

“Weaved some sort of magic to block my memories and abilities.” Madeline waved her hand around. “Do we have technology that could do that?”

“Yes of course. It is necessary sometimes to clean the memories of humans who stumble across us in the water...” Delphiana stiffened, and anger clouded her facial features. “Yes, that’s it exactly.” Delphiana turned abruptly and left the room. “Bastiaan!”

Bastiaan appeared instantly in the middle of the living room. “Is something wrong?”

She motioned to her daughter. “Someone has wiped her memory!” Her voice deepened with anger and then power. “Someone has betrayed both of our houses and I will know who! Zeus! You present yourself immediately!”

Madeline gasped when another man appeared abruptly beside Bastiaan. “No more popping in! You people will use doors until I can...” She waved her hand around the room and wondered if she would ever get used to it.

“Someone has used Olympian technology to alter Madeline’s memory and perception. This was done to her on purpose.”

“Your Grace.” Zeus nodded softly both to the Queen Delphiana and then to his daughter-in-law before he turned to his son. “I can’t believe I did not notice it before, but the Queen is correct. Madeline’s mind has been tampered with.”

Madeline stared intently at the new arrival, wondering if she’d feared him. Surely she had, he was a freaking god. His skin was golden with health and vitality. His dark blue eyes were drifting between her and her mother as if he was trying to come to a conclusion about what had been revealed of him. Dark brown hair fell over his shoulders and down his back. He was wearing Armani of all things. The dark suit looked good on him.

“You have never in your life been afraid of me.”

She jumped a little startled. “How did you know what I was thinking?”

“It’s written all over your face,” Zeus said softly. “It is time for you to go home, Madeline.”

“I can’t go into the water.”

“Zeus, you could take her to Atlantis.” Delphiana touched her daughter’s arm. “It would be nothing for you to do.”

“Take me back to Atlantis?” Madeline frowned. “What like that popping in thing he just did? No thank you, I have no interest in being teleported around.”

Zeus frowned at her. “Being among humans has corrupted you. As if I’d do something so barbaric as to tear your body down to atoms as a means of transportation.” He crossed his arms over his chest. “Olympians are quite adept at moving through space and time without such things.”

“This is no time to get your superior panties in a knot,” Delphiana snapped. “You can take her to Atlantis. There she will have time to heal.”

“What? So she can be bound to Atlantis instead of this place?” He motioned around the room. “You and I both know that she must return to the water. Don’t you sense the other changes in her?”

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

“I do.”

“Do you want your child to be land bound? Because I can guarantee you if I take her to Atlantis she’ll never leave the city again.” He looked to Madeline and then to Bastiaan. “Until you have no choice, Son.”

“I understand.” Bastiaan looked to his wife; saw the fear and frustration on her face. He turned to Delphiana. “Perhaps, Mother, it would be best if you returned to Atlantis to prepare for our arrival.”

Delphiana paused briefly and looked over her daughter’s face. “All you need is faith, Madeline. You were born in the sea, it will never hurt you.”

Deanna Lee

Chapter Four

Madeline watched as Zeus opened the door for her mother and they both left her cottage. “Bastiaan, I can’t go into the water.”

“Do you want to spend the rest of your life in fear?” He walked toward her and sighed when she took a step back from him. “Relax, love, I’m not going to force you to do anything.”

She frowned. “My mother showed me her tail. It was weird.”

Bastiaan laughed. “You can trust that it wasn’t always so weird for you. In fact, you never once bothered to take a human form before you met me. It took you a long time to make that transition.”

“I see.” She sighed. “What about...”

He watched the blush steal across her cheeks and frowned. “What about what?”

“Can you manifest a tail?”

“Yes, though not quite like yours. I’m not Merfolk and I’ve never pretended to be.” He moved closer and relaxed when she didn’t back away. “That wasn’t the question you wanted to ask.”

Madeline nodded. “No, well it was part of it. Bastiaan... how did we make love?”

“In both forms actually, and as often as possible.” He laughed when her blush deepened.

“Can we discuss my return to Atlantis later?”

“Putting it off won’t make it easier.” He touched her cheek with the tips of his fingers and then gently pulled her close to him. “However, I suppose that if I was properly distracted we could put it off for several hours.”

Madeline took in a deep breath when he lifted her off the floor and held her close to his chest. “There hasn’t been anyone since I was found.”

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

He sighed as he walked toward the bedroom. "That knowledge is comforting but I regret that you've been so alone, wife." He sat her on her feet beside the bed. "I can *not* say the same."

"You thought I was dead." She touched his face and sighed. "I don't hold it against you."

"I broke with the vows I made. It won't happen again," Bastiaan murmured as he ran his fingers along her collarbone to the strap of the sundress she wore. "I liked the robe."

"I felt naked in it." Madeline flushed and then sighed when he lowered his head and tucked his face into the side of her neck. "Just don't ever let me know who she was... I might not be able to keep myself from killing her."

He laughed softly and ran his hands down her back. "It was horrible. The worst sex I've ever had."

She slapped his arm. "You liar."

"It was never as good as what we had together." He placed a soft kiss on her neck and lowered the zipper of her dress. "Having you close like this, it's like coming home."

"I need to remember what it was like with you. It'll be something for me to hold on to...." She flushed. "When I'm in the water."

"I understand, love." He kissed her jaw and moved his mouth to hers.

Her mouth opened immediately to the invasion of his tongue. The kiss was leisurely as he pulled the straps of her dress down her shoulders and she let it fall down her body to pool at their feet. He brought his hands up her sides to cup her breasts, and gently thumbed her nipples.

"I remember your hands." She ran the tips of her fingers across his and sighed as he released her breasts in order to pull her firmly against his chest. "I never want to know another day when you aren't here to touch me."

"You won't," he promised as he brushed his mouth against hers once and then again with a soft groan. "Not ever."

Gently, he moved his hands down to her hips and snagged the flimsy silk panties and tugged them downward as he knelt on one knee in front of her. Madeline stepped free from the silk and sucked in a breath as he tossed them aside. He pressed a soft open-mouthed kiss on her thigh and then moved up to her hip.

Heat swept over her skin with each softly placed kiss and when he rose to his feet, she wrapped her arms around his neck and sought his mouth. "I need more."

He laughed at her whispered demand and could only nod when she pulled his shirt from his jeans. Her fingers slid against the firm muscles of his stomach as he tugged the shirt over his head and tossed it away. Bastiaan closed his eyes when Madeline lowered her mouth to his chest, her lips trailed over his skin until she sank her teeth into the side of his neck.

"More." Her hands sought his belt, but were shaking so badly that she couldn't unbuckle it.

"Let me."

Madeline stepped back from him and shook back her hair as she slid onto the bed. Looking over at him, heat smoldered in her eyes as she whispered, "Don't make me wait. I need this to be fast and hard."

"You've always been the most impatient creature." He shoved his shoes off and jerked open his slacks with hands that were trembling.

A part of him could barely believe that his wife had been returned to him. He wanted to sink into her body and never ever let her go again.

Madeline laid down on the bed and regarded him with half-closed his eyes, taking in the jutting length of his cock and the soft smile that played on his lips as he put one knee on the bed. She spread her legs without a moment's hesitation. "I think I may know why I married you."

Bastiaan tilted his head and ran his hands down her thighs to spread her more deeply. "Are you trying to say you married me for my cock?"

"I don't know." She shrugged, her breath caught as he lowered his mouth to the fragrant flesh of her pussy. "Oh, wow."

He pressed the flat of his tongue against her clit and then flicked the hard knot of flesh until she arched under his mouth. Madeline languished under his mouth, her hands curling into the blanket beneath them. Orgasm pressed against her senses teasing her with a long remembered pleasure, and she knew that this moment had passed between them a thousand times. His fingers dipped firmly into her and pressed upwards against her g-spot and she screamed with the pleasure of it.

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

Gripping her knees, he levered over her as she shook with orgasm and thrust deeply into her welcoming heat. Overwhelmed, Madeline wrapped her arms and legs around him. Pleasure swept over her with each thrust of his cock into her, unbelievable heat swept along with each wave of sensation until she burned and lost everything but him.

The pleasure started to ebb away, and then another orgasm swept up fresh and as hard as the first one had been. They thrust against each with frenzied need, soft moans and the steady slap of flesh against flesh the only sounds the surrounded them.

Bastiaan paused as she tightened around him again and groaned when he could no longer hold of his release. He sank into her welcome heat and closed his eyes at the sudden anger that had surfaced.

Her hands paused on his back and she stiffened beneath him. “You’re angry?”

He raised his head and brushed her hair from her face. “We lost so much time, darling. Whoever did this to you will not go unpunished.”

* * * *

“You promised me that you would be Triton before the Queen was recovered.”

Rigel of Nereidia turned and glared at his cousin. “Have you not noticed the following that Bastiaan wields in Atlantis? No one turned on him when my sister was lost. They still trust him.”

Nueran prowled around Rigel’s guest chamber at Atlantis. “It won’t take them long to figure out what was done and reverse the process. Once they do that, our lives will be forfeit! It is certainly no secret the way he mourned her when he thought she was dead. I believe we both know how harsh his vengeance of her will be.”

“That half-breed human has no business being married to my sister, he has no right to rule Atlantis, and I’ll see him dead before this is all said and done!”

Nueran laughed. “If killing the son of Zeus was an easy matter he’d be dead already and you know it. Your path to the throne of Atlantis is lost. There is only one Merfolk kingdom on earth ruled by the Merfolk and that is Nereidia.”

“As you well know the rights of succession in Nereidia are reserved for females.”

“It is the capitol city, the last grand legacy of our people and the life we had before we nearly destroyed ourselves. The Queen of Nereidia’s peace treaty with the Olympians all those thousands of years ago assured the continuation of our race!” Nueran snapped.

Deanna Lee

“I don’t need a history lesson from you.”

“You’ll be killed for your betrayal and I’ll die along with for being foolish enough to help you.”

Rigel’s head jerked up. “All is not done in yet. We have plenty of time to think of a way out of this. It’ll take them days to convince Madeline to go into the sea. The fear you planted in her mind is still very much present.”

“The Olympians do not need to take her into the sea to bring her back to Atlantis.”

“Zeus has proclaimed that she must return to Atlantis by sea if she is to begin to recover from her ordeal.” Rigel smiled and then chuckled. “It’s a stroke of good fortune. When my mother told me I could barely contain myself.”

“It does not matter if she returns today or a month from today. Once she is here and the mind alteration process is reversed... we’ll be discovered.”

“What makes you think it can be reversed?” Rigel asked. “The technique was designed to work on humans not Merfolk. We can’t be certain she’ll get anything back, ever.”

* * * *

Madeline moved closer to her husband and sighed when his hand moved down her back to cup her ass. “You are insatiable.”

“I have to be to keep with the wanton I married.” He turned and kissed her mouth gently. “The women of your species prefer to be serviced at least twice a day.”

“Serviced?” she asked amused.

“Hmm, yes, you put it in our betrothal agreement. I had to agree to make myself available to satisfy your sexual needs no less than two times a day. If I failed to provide such services you would be perfectly within your rights to take a lover.”

She sat up and stared at him, and was amazed to find his expression perfectly serious. “Is that so?”

“Indeed.”

“So, how long have been separated?” She asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Five years, two hundred sixty-three days.”

“So, you owe me over three thousand orgasms.” Madeline grinned. “I think I had four that last time... I’ll make sure to keep an accurate count. The way I see it you could be

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

in my sexual debt for the rest of your life.” She paused then, the color washing from her face. “Bastiaan...”

He sat up, touched her cheek gently, and kissed her lips. “Our life spans will be roughly the same Madeline. If I were pure of blood, I would have out lived you by several hundred years.”

“You are younger than me?”

“Yes, rather dramatically I might add. I wasn’t even a hundred when we met.” He grinned at the blush that stole across her cheeks. “But really darling, after a hundred or so years it really doesn’t matter any more.”

Madeline leaned forward and kissed his mouth gently. “Just looking at you makes me feel whole.”

“I’ve never known another like you, Madeline. I know you are worried about your memories, afraid that they won’t be returned to you.”

“Yes.”

“If that is the case, we’ll make new ones. I know plenty of men who’d like a fresh slate with their wives.” He slid the tips of his fingers across her jaw and buried his hand in her hair. “Now for the moment, stop worrying. I’d like to work on my debt a little more.”

She laughed and nodded as he pulled her down until their mouths met. “Yes, I’m ready for more.”

Bastiaan pulled her against him and then maneuvered her astride his hips so that he could run his hands down the length of her. Her sex nestled against his rapidly hardening cock with the kind of familiarity that nearly stole his breath. She moved against him as he pulled her down for another kiss, rubbing the warm and aching flesh of her pussy over the length of him again and again. Every time the head of his cock met with her throbbing clit, she stiffened briefly and moaned into his mouth.

When he could take no more of her gentle teasing, Bastiaan lifted her hips and impaled her with the thick length of his cock.

“Oh.” Madeline arched against him and tilted her head back as she settled on him. “That’s amazing.”

He sucked in a breath between clinched teeth as she began to rock on him. “Yes, so much so. You’re perfect, wife. Just perfect.”

Deanna Lee

Filling his hands with her breasts, he thumbed her nipples gently as she found a pace that was both soothing and frustrating. Her pussy clenched around him like a fist, and he could feel himself swell further in response. No one had ever turned him on the way his wife did.

“I’m a very lucky man.”

Madeline sat up and rocked gently on him as his hands dropped to her hips. “Tell me you love me.”

“I love you.” He met her demand without hesitation, and rolled her over abruptly. She arched and moved underneath him as he found her hands and thread their fingers together. “Hold on.”

She nodded and wrapped her legs around him as he began to move. He thrust deeply into her and withdrew almost completely before sinking into her again. Madeline arched under him and cried out with the pleasure and frustration of it. She gloried in the pace he set, accepting all that he gave her, and wanting it a thousand times over.

“Tell me again.”

“I love you,” he whispered against her mouth.

He slipped one hand between them and thumbed her clit in pace with the easy and slow stroke of his cock. Almost immediately, she stiffened beneath him, and she rushed wet with orgasm against the penetrating length of his cock.

“Bastiaan,” she gasped and held on tightly when he started to thrust more firmly into her. “Please.”

“I will.” He lowered his head and kissed her mouth. “I will please you.”

“More. More” she pleaded softly, her hands clutching at his back.

He hissed in a breath and closed his eyes at the pleasure and pain of her nails breaking the skin on his back. Pushing his cock relentlessly into her, he resisted the urge to give her the pounding she really needed. Bastiaan knew she wasn’t truly ready for either of their natures to be fully realized.

She screamed his name and thrust up against him with all of her strength and he let himself go. The spilling of his seed into her womb pushed a shiver of need down his back. He lowered himself to her and buried his face in the side of her neck.

* * * *

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

“It’s time that we leave this place.” He touched her face as she started to move away. “No, listen to me.”

She sucked in a deep breath and grew still. The urge to run was strong. “Okay.”

“You must return to the sea or your existence will be altered forever. My father was not exaggerating when he said that you only had a matter of days before you will be unable to return to the sea.” Bastiaan rubbed her lips with the pad of thumb and held her gaze with his own. “I will not allow the Queen of Atlantis to be land bound. It is an insult to all that you are.”

“I don’t think I can do it.”

“You’ve lived nearly six years on land with no memory of who or what you are. If you allow this fear to rule you, you will live the remainder of your life on land knowing what you are and what you allowed a traitor to take from you.” He sighed when she slipped away from him and left the bed. He watched her shrug a robe on and belt it tightly. “I have responsibilities in Atlantis. I won’t abandon them to remain here with you.”

“You said you loved me.”

“I do. I’ve loved you since the moment I saw you and the woman that I married would never allow another to interfere with the life that she wanted. You were the most powerful and demanding woman I’d ever met in my life, Maddie. The command you demanded even before you became Queen came to you effortlessly.”

Madeline rubbed her face with shaking hands. “Do you really want this arrogant creature you describe back?”

He paused and considered her words. “You were many things, wife. Kind, courageous, selfless in your ability to serve your race and mine. Your love of the sea and her creatures is probably your most alluring quality. Do you think that all of your kind have the loyalty of the sea life on earth?” He paused until she turned to look at him. “It was you who brought the dolphins and whales into our covenant. They serve, protect, and indulge the Merfolk and the Olympians because of you and others like you in the past. Long before it was required that we use technology to protect us from the humans... the animals in the oceans served to protect our kind. Even now, the children of the Merfolk are nurtured and cherished by the dolphins that serve in the underwater kingdoms.”

“Do the people in Atlantis love me?” Madeline asked softly.

Deanna Lee

"I will not say that you don't have enemies. The evidence of that is obvious." He motioned around the room. "Your being here in the state that you are...."

"You're getting angry again."

"I have every right to be angry." He left the bed and stalked toward her. She gasped softly when he took her arm and pulled her closer. "Someone I trusted betrayed me and violated my wife. You can be very certain that who ever it is, they will pay dearly for it."

Madeline leaned against him and sighed when he pulled her closer. "My glorious god."

He jerked against her. "What did you say?"

She raised her head and met his gaze. "What?"

Bastiaan touched her cheek gently. "You always used to call me that when I got in a temper. Though normally it was said with no small amount of sarcasm."

"If the memory procedure can't restore my memories...?"

He cleared his throat. "Then we will simply begin our romance anew. I think we've made an amazing start already. There are hundreds of years ahead of us, Maddie, plenty of time for me to completely entrench myself in your affections once more. Get the ring."

Madeline was shaking when he released her. Slowly she walked to the dresser and retrieved the wedding band. The metal warmed in her hand and started to glow as she turned to face him. She looked down at his hand, and noticed that his ring was shimmering with light in response. In the end, it was easy to return to him and place the ring in his hand.

He slid the ring on to her finger silently. Lifting her hand, Bastiaan kissed her palm and then met her gaze unflinchingly. "I'll keep you safe, Madeline. All you have to do is trust me."

"As you will." She rose on her toes and pressed her mouth to his.

"Yes." He ran his fingers through her hair. "As I will. And it is time, dear one, that we go home."

She stilled in his arms. "I'm not ready."

"You'll never be ready. We both know it."

"I have a life here." She tried to pull free of him and gasped when his hold on her tightened. "Bastiaan?"

"You have a pretense here. Not a life, certainly not the life you were meant to live."

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

“No. I have my work...”

“Your paintings are at Atlantis. My father took them and everything in your studio and store front when he left.”

She paled. “People will wonder...”

“Nay, they won’t. When they remember you, wife, they will remember that your husband came to retrieve you and that you went home.”

“You can do this?” she demanded.

“My father can and has done it.”

“No. No. I’m not ready.”

He pulled her close and lowered his forehead to hers. “I will not allow your fear to keep you from me and our home.”

Deanna Lee

Chapter Five

Bastiaan closed his eyes and tried desperately to remember that he was doing the right thing. He could have called on his father to do this task, to take Madeline back into the sea. The thought of her having that sort of fear and not having him there was unbearable. She struggled in his arms as he strode toward the shore.

“Bastiaan, please.”

He paused as the water rushed over his feet. “Have faith in me, Madeline. It’s all you need.”

She buried her face in the side of his neck and shook with anger and fear. “If you love me, you won’t do this.”

“It’s because I love you that I must do this. I can make this easier on you, if you don’t fight me.”

* * * *

Anger and fear washed with the pleasure of the water on her skin as Bastiaan lowered her into the water. He moved deeper into the water until the dolphin, Nanatu, joined them. His soft, happy clicking noises did nothing to sooth her. She no longer struggled, fearing that adding to his burden would only endanger her.

Madeline clung to his neck as her feet touched the sandy bottom of the ocean floor. Water rushed up past her waist. The fear lingered, but the anger slipped away. She had no room for it. The pleasure of the water rushing over her skin was overwhelming. “You don’t have to do this to me. You could zap us both to Atlantis.”

He laughed softly and pressed her closer to him. “Yes. I could ‘zap’ you to Atlantis, but it is important that you accept what you are.”

“The sea was my first lover,” she whispered. “It feels so amazing.”

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

“Yes, I know.” He sucked in a breath when she moved closer and rubbed her breasts against his chest.

“How can I fear it so much and have this pleasure, too?” She sighed and then let her head fall back when he lowered his mouth to the side of her neck. “Yes.”

His teeth grazed her skin and a shiver ran the length of her body. The setting sun highlighted them and the water around them in a soft blush of color. “Close your eyes.”

Squeezing her eyes shut, Madeline took in a deep breath and tried to remember that he loved her. The evidence was all around her, the sea was where she belonged. It would not let her die; he would not let her die. The water rushed around them, powerful and alluring in its eagerness to embrace them both. Terror pushed at her, she remembered the relentless pull and push of the water. She tightened her hands on his shoulders and screamed just before the water overtook them.

* * * *

Cassandra looked around the room and carefully took in each member of her security force. The security of Atlantis had never been breached from the inside. There had been humans who had gotten too close to the underwater city, and one more than twenty years ago who actually came up through the Queen’s moon pool. However, never had they had to worry about those within the city being a threat.

“The Queen is on her way home to us.” She watched relief and joy wash through the group and wondered which one of them had committed an act of treason. “On the night that the Queen disappeared from Atlantis her mind was wiped using the Memory Altering Device the Olympians built us for protection against human explorers.” Shock, anger... she could feel both emotions overtake the happiness. “The MA Device is never used without the authorization of me or the Triton. Since I know for certain that neither of us ordered it or allowed it to be done, we are left with one only situation. Someone was allowed to use the device without approval.”

Dornar cleared his throat. “It’s not possible. The science division was my assignment that night. No one entered the facilities. The entire science staff was at the feast in honor of Rigel of Nereidia.”

“You weren’t on duty all night. Who replaced you?”

The young merman frowned and then shook his head. “I have no idea. The logs?”

“Are gone. All of the logs for the two days prior to the Queen’s disappearance are gone as well. Someone planned carefully to take her from Atlantis. They violated her mind, created an obscene fear of the sea in her, and cast her loose in the water like she meant nothing.” Cassandra’s skin brightened to fine gold sheen with her anger, her jewel green eyes sparkled with righteous anger.

“Captain?”

She turned at the intrusion and watched Lord Marcos enter. “The Triton?”

“My brother has been forced to take his time with the Queen. We anticipate they’ll be here within the next two hours.” Marcus came fully into the room and looked to the guards she had assembled. “If the perpetrator isn’t willing to come forward and admit what was done we can force it out of them.”

Cassandra raised an eyebrow and then glanced back to her people. “I would prefer not to subject the innocent to your sort of interrogation.”

“Someone in this room committed an act of treason.” Marcos snapped. “Not just against Atlantis but against us all.”

“No, wait.”

They both turned as young mermaid stepped forward. She was of the artic clan; her near blue skin had darkened with shame. “It was me.”

“Dahlia?” Cassandra demanded. “Explain yourself!”

Dahlia rung her hands as she struggled with her own words. “I took Dornar’s place in the Science Division that night. Several hours after I’d gone on duty, a scientist came in. He wasn’t cleared for the department he wanted access to, but he grew so irate with me that I let him in provided that he was quick. He told me that he wanted to retrieve some data from the MA Device in order to incorporate some of the properties into the defense shield he was working on. He seemed harmless, arrogant but harmless. His name is Nueran.” She lowered her head and rubbed her face with both hands. “I don’t know what happened after that. I woke up several hours later, and he was gone.”

“You woke up?” Cassandra walked to her. “Were you attacked?”

“Not that I remember. I just woke up,” Dahlia blushed, twin peeks of dark blue appeared on her cheeks. “After I was released from my shift I came to you to report what had happened, but by that time you’d been informed that the Queen was missing. It didn’t

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

seem so important after that. I was ashamed that I'd been asleep while the Queen went missing."

Cassandra touched Dahlia's cheek and then nodded. "You'll be questioned further on this matter Dahlia. You should have reported what had happened."

"I'll accept any punishment the Triton wills."

"You were a victim in this matter," Marcos murmured. "My brother is not an unjust man."

* * * *

Bastiaan lifted his wife to the edge of the pool and could only nod when her mother reached out for her. Madeline's body was limp with exhaustion and he knew shock was starting to set in. "It was far worse than I expected."

Delphiana sighed and hugged Madeline close to her. Water was streaming from the sides of Madeline's mouth. "It's going to feel like you want to throw up. It's just your body expelling the water."

Madeline coughed and clutched at her mother as her body heaved of its own will and seawater poured out of her. The coughing returned as the water spread out beneath them. "Don't leave me."

"Nay, I won't." Delphiana looked to Bastiaan. "Come pick her up."

He walked hesitantly toward them as he wrapped a short kilt around his hips. "Madeline?"

She looked to him, her eyes wide with fear and anger. "She's right. I'm not sure I can walk."

Gently he picked her up off the floor and waited until Delphiana had risen to walk ahead of them. He wondered if his wife would forgive him for what he'd done.

"Yes." Madeline wrapped her arms around his neck and sighed. "Of course, I will."

He glanced at her startled. "You heard my thoughts?"

"I'm very tired." She curled against him. "Don't let anyone see me naked."

Bastiaan laughed softly as he walked into the outer chamber of their suite. It was fortunate the moon pool had private access or half of Atlantis would have seen her naked. He laid her out on the bed and stepped back as Delphiana covered her with a blanket.

"You'll take care of her?"

Deanna Lee

“Yes, of course. See to Atlantis.” Delphiana slid up onto the bed beside her daughter and then looked toward Bastiaan. “Get that look off your face before you face our people. The Triton of Atlantis does not look defeated or beaten down, not ever.”

“Yes, of course.” He touched Madeline’s face briefly and then left them.

* * * *

Cassandra grimaced and drew her hand back from Nueran’s neck. “He’s most certainly dead.”

Marcos nodded and frowned. “My brother will be most displeased.”

“Well, it’s obvious that his accomplice didn’t trust him not to spill his guts when we caught up with him.” She looked around the lab and then to Marcos. “How do you feel about being the messenger on this one?”

“Not on your life.”

“I’ll have sex with you.”

Marcos chuckled. “You’ll have sex with me, anyway. As for this mess.” He motioned towards Nueran’s prone body in disgust. “You’re on your own.”

Cassandra glared briefly at him and then straightened when the door to the lab opened and the Triton entered. “Sire.”

“I take it your investigation is not progressing well.” Bastiaan looked from the body to his brother and then finally to Cassandra. “He’s the one?”

“He’s one of them.” Cassandra tucked her hands behind her back as she spoke. “This was made to look like he poisoned himself, but I think he was murdered.”

“Why?”

“He’s a low level scientist who transferred from Nereidia only weeks before the Queen disappeared. When he came here, he was assigned to work on the shield technology project and had no contact with the Queen as a result. He had no personal grudge against her and what ever this was it was personal. To strip her of everything the way they did, it’s the worse thing we could do to our own kind and to have it done to the Queen of Atlantis speaks volumes about the motivations of the man responsible.”

“So, someone used him and then disposed of him when you started to close in.”

Cassandra shook her head. “No, no one knew what went on in the meeting I had with my staff. Lord Marcos and I came straight here from the meeting to confront Nueran.

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

He was killed earlier in the day, shortly after the Queen's discovery was officially announced to the people of Atlantis by Zeus."

"Who ever orchestrated Madeline's disappearance and near murder is in Atlantis," Marcos murmured.

"Yes." Cassandra nodded abruptly. "I've already placed extra guards outside of the royal suite. I've given strict instructions that only you and the Queen's mother may enter."

"Good."

* * * *

"You are angry with him." Delphiana put down the hairbrush she'd been using to tame her daughter's hair and met Madeline's gaze in the mirror in front of them both. "Don't be. He did what was best."

"He could have spared me." Madeline lowered her gaze to the counter in front of her. "I thought he would relent once we'd been in the water for a while, but he didn't."

"Do you think that wasn't painful for him?"

"I'm sure it was."

"Your anger is selfish, but you've been through enough that I imagine you deserve to have it."

"Selfish?" Madeline turned to look at her mother.

"Bastiaan is the truest and bravest man I've ever known. He loves you with the kind of pure devotion that cannot be measured by time or deeds. Had it been in your best interest, it would have been done. You can't avoid the water forever, Madeline, it's simply not in our nature."

Madeline stood from the vanity counter and ran her hand along the silk she wore. The dark green gown was the simplest in the closet, and it was so luxurious she'd been afraid to put it on. It fell down her body in a simple column that clung to curves and slid against skin like a very skilled lover. "I feel so out of place."

"You felt out of place on land as well."

"Yes." Madeline nodded and then looked around the beautifully appointed room. "I did. He's angry, I can feel it."

"When you married, your minds linked in the way our kind does. Mated couples are privy to each other's thoughts and emotions. It is likely the only reason that you've been

Deanna Lee

able to recover what little memories you have, it is not a surprise that the link is resurfacing.”

“Are any of my siblings here?”

“Yes, Rigel. The others will be here within the next few days.”

“I’d like to see him.”

Delphiana nodded. “I’ll go retrieve him.”

Madeline was still until her mother left the room. Once the door was shut, she allowed herself a few deep breaths. In many ways, returning to Atlantis had been just as traumatic as the night she left. The only thing that kept her from giving into the fear and anger was the knowledge that Bastiaan was somewhere in the city, trying to find justice for her. He wasn’t her enemy, and no matter what he’d done to return her to Atlantis, she couldn’t find fault with him.

* * * *

“He’s my son.”

Dornar held firm, his cheeks a dull red. “The Captain has ordered that only the Triton or you may enter the royal suite. If you would like I can open the main hall and her majesty may meet with her brother there.”

“Do you always follow orders so closely?”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“Very well then,” Delphiana snapped and motioned towards the main hall doors. “Prepare the room.” She turned to Rigel. “We’ll join you soon.”

* * * *

Madeline paused in the entry of the hall, nausea and rage sweeping over her in the instant she set eyes on her brother. It had been him; dark pictures of him lingered in her mind. Betrayal. He’d betrayed her. A rush of warmth slipped over her as the events of her last night in Atlantis came back to her. Rigel telling her that her husband had been unfaithful. That had been the lure he’d used to draw her away from the protection of her guards. He’d understood that she’d want privacy for such a conversation.

When she’d refused to believe his story and tried to leave his room, he’d leapt on her. The attack had been swift and nearly deadly. She hadn’t expected him to physically attack her. The memory caused pain to slide across her face and the side of her head. She

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

reached out to grip the side of the door and jumped when Bastiaan suddenly appeared by her side. “I told you, no popping!”

He took her arm to steady her. “You’re upset, dear one.”

Madeline focused on Rigel who had grown still beside her mother. “I didn’t realize that Rigel was my twin until just now.”

Bastiaan looked to Madeline’s brother and frowned. “I apologize, twins are so common among Merfolk the significance of it didn’t seem important before.”

Madeline nodded abruptly and walked forward when Bastiaan released her. She could see the fear in her brother’s eyes, and for one moment, she considered keeping what she now knew to herself. Yet, the anger at what he’d done to her was like relentless wave inside her. He’d tried to kill her.

She paused several feet from them. “Mother, Bastiaan and I had an arranged marriage.”

Delphiana raised an eyebrow. “Of a sorts. Zeus and I encouraged the match, and were pleased when the two of you saw fit to marry. Before you married, you were the heir apparent to Nereidia. Bastiaan had been chosen by the people of Atlantis to be Triton. It was a pleasant arrangement, when the two of you fell in love we were all quite pleased.”

She nodded. “Had there been no need for an Olympian to lead Atlantis?”

Delphiana paused and then cleared her throat. “Actually, before we chose to place Atlantis and the three outlying cities under the protection of the Olympians the children of my house were placed on the thrones of the various cities. Nereidia is our capitol city, and the ruling city has always provided the leaders for the others. This changed when we realized the humans were developing technologies faster and faster. We knew that there were would come a time when the Olympians natural abilities to bend time and space around them would be our best defense.”

“If I was the heir apparent to the throne of Nereidia before I married, then Rigel would have been in line for throne of one of the other cities.”

“Yes, of course, the line of succession for Nereidia is female but that is not the case for the other cities. Once you married Calanthea became my heir.” Delphiana turned to her son as she spoke, the color washing from her face. “Rigel?”

“It was my right!” His pale face washed red with fury.

Deanna Lee

She backed away from her son, horrified and looked to Madeline. “I don’t understand.”

“Rigel thought that if I was assumed dead the people would realize that Atlantis is not any safer with an Olympian in power. He wanted the throne of Atlantis and it appeared my death would give him that.”

“That’s insane.” Delphiana turned on her son. “Is that what happened? You tried to kill your sister for that.” She motioned toward the throne of Atlantis. “There hasn’t been a murder among our kind in a thousand years!”

“I would have retrieved her if things had gone my way,” Rigel snapped. “You weren’t supposed to rally around him after he failed to protect her.”

Delphiana sucked in a breath. “Failed to protect his wife from her own brother? Is that what you mean, Rigel? All of these years I thought that Zeus misjudged you, but he was right, you are not fit to lead. You were never fit to lead, even if Bastiaan had been replaced here at Atlantis it wouldn’t have been with you. It was decided hundreds of years ago that you would never rule.”

“I’m not fit to lead?” Rigel demanded.

“You never were.” Madeline moved between her mother and brother, aware that her mother was close to lashing out physically. “You’ve never been a good example of our people. You found pleasure in the pain of others and the creatures in the sea. Our father always said that you were the only creature he’d ever known that could have such joy at the expense of another.” She took a step back and pushed her mother back as she did so.

“Shut up.” Rigel shouted. “You don’t know what you’re talking about. You don’t even remember who you are! How can you pretend to know who I am?”

“I do remember, Rigel.” She turned to her husband. “I don’t want him killed.”

“After what he’s done?” Bastiaan demanded.

“We have not resorted to capital punishment in a thousand years; we will not do so now.” Madeline slipped her hand into her mother’s and tightened her grip. “He will be confined for the rest of his natural life for what he’s done. Confined in the city of Articia.”

“Articia? You’d send your own brother to the bloody Articia?”

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

“Don’t make our mother make a decision that would see one of her own children dead.” Madeline snapped. “You will be taken to Articia, and confined there in their prison. You will be allowed no contact with the sea.”

“You would bind me to the land?”

“It is no less than what you nearly did to me.”

* * * *

Madeline was silent until Bastiaan closed the door to their suite and then she turned on him. “Before I disappeared, were you involved with Ureseus?”

Bastiaan was silent for a moment. “Involved?”

“Were you fucking her?” she demanded softly.

“Of course not.” He frowned at her. “Is that what Rigel told you that night?”

“Yes.”

“And you believed him?”

“No. At least, I don’t think that I did.” She frowned. “I remember being angry with him and angry at myself for letting him draw me into another conversation about our marriage.”

“Another conversation?” Bastiaan asked softly.

“I don’t really remember. I just remember telling him that I wasn’t going to have another conversation with him about you. He grew very angry and struck me. The next thing I remember is being in the water.” She walked away from her husband. “One thing I don’t understand is Nanatu. Why wasn’t he in the water with me?”

“He’d been placed in his holding tank. At first, I assumed you did it because you didn’t want him following you. Now, we can be certain that Rigel did it because he wanted you to have no measure of comfort in the water.”

Madeline nodded and looked around her husband’s office. “I have duties here?”

“Yes, you handle social and civil issues within the city.” He watched her move around the room aware that a part of her still didn’t believe that she was home. “Atlantis will wait until you are ready, Maddie. Everyone understands what you’ve been through and will not allow you to be pushed into things you aren’t ready for.”

She nodded. “I need some time alone before I go to the lab for the memory treatments.”

Deanna Lee

“Of course.”

* * * *

Madeline laid her cheek against the cool tiles and let her hand trail along the surface of the moon pool. Nanatu was leaning against the edge, his head resting next to hers. The rest of her memories were rushing back to her with breathtaking speed, thanks to the Memory Altering Device. It had been a difficult procedure to go through but she was thankful that it was done.

Despite the return of her memories, her fear of the water remained. It was devastating, because that fear was now accompanied by her love and passion for the sea. Her greatest memories were wrapped around the world's oceans. She'd traveled them all in her youth, swam with the whales during migration, and had even sunned herself on obscure deserted beaches in the Caribbean.

Nanatu clicked softly and slipped back into the water. She knew what he wanted, but it was beyond her at least for the moment. She didn't glance up when the door opened and her husband entered. “Will you swim with him?”

Bastiaan sat down on the edge of the pool. “He wants you. I'm afraid I'd be a poor substitute.”

Madeline sat up and watched with a disappointed frown as Nanatu darted away and disappeared into the darkness of the pool. “He left?”

“He's an animal, love. Emotional pain is foreign to him in a great many ways, dealing with it is taxing. He'll return when he feels better.”

“What if I can never be in the sea as I once was?”

“You've had a difficult and abrupt experience, Maddie. It isn't very realistic to assume that a fear you've nurtured for six years would slip away in a few days, no matter what memories you've recovered.” He stood and offered her his hand. “Come, you can practice diving in our bed.”

She laughed softly and took his hand. “You're insatiable.”

“I've got three thousand plus orgasms to work on...” he reminded her with a grin. He swept her up in his arms and looked toward the pool. “It will come back to you, darling, the same way we came back together. You'll just have to give it time.”

She buried her face in the side of his neck and sighed. “He's there by now.”

The Fathoms Below / Sons of Zeus

“Yes, Zeus saw to his imprisonment personally. Though I can tell you my father would have much preferred a more dastardly punishment.” He walked slowly into their chamber and towards the large bed they had shared for years. “Don’t dwell on it. I have other matters that need your attention.”

Madeline smiled as he sat her down on the bed. “Okay, I’m listening.”

“Mermaids are fertile only when they chose to be.” He touched her face. “Do you remember yet how to make that happen?”

“I think so.” She ran her hand down his chest to the waist of his kilt and grinned. “But, I’m sure we can practice until I get it right.”

Deanna Lee

About the Author

Deanna lives in the southern United States. She has been writing for eighteen years. Deanna is married, works in a library, and spends her spare time writing, working on website design, and reading. To learn more about Deanna's day-to-day trials, check out her website. She would love to hear from you!