



Dream Strokes

by

Desiree Holt

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Dedication

To Diana, editor extraordinaire, who keeps me
honest and makes my books sing.
And to the real Dallas. You know who you are.

Reviews

GIVE IT TO ME

Coffee Time Romance—This has the works in it. It is a nice glimpse into sensual and erotic exploration of both characters, with a bagful of toys. The ending was satisfying, and the characters wanted each other secretly so it was nice to see them come together. ~

Romantic Time's 4.5 stars—Looking for a quick read you can dive right into? Do yourself a favor and print out this novella. Holt delivers with delicious love scenes, a believable story and characters you care about. A perfect combination of wit, sexuality, experimentation and romance. It's over way too soon!

Chapter One

The gallery was packed, a tribute both to the owner and the quality of the paintings on display. Erin Sullivan sipped at her champagne and glanced over the crowd. Year-rounders and summer residents both stood in groups chatting, sampling the refreshments, and admiring the exhibit.

"Georgia outdid herself, don't you think?" Erin's sister, Mimi, had worked her way over from the far corner of the area.

"She worked damn hard to do it, too," Erin agreed. "But look at this crowd. She's off to a huge start."

Georgia Ramsey was a long-standing client of the accounting firm Erin and Mimi owned. The gallery was a new venture she'd started with part of her divorce settlement and a lot of nail-biting.

Mimi chuckled. "I guess knowing you can afford to fail makes a big difference."

"Maybe. But it still took a lot of guts."

"Who do you suppose that hunk is she's talking to?" Mimi glanced over Erin's shoulder to where Georgia was in earnest conversation.

Erin turned her head to follow the path of Mimi's gaze. The man was tall, broad-shouldered, his muscular body outlined beneath a navy blazer and grey slacks. His back was to Erin and his head was bent close to Georgia. From the woman's smile, Erin could tell he was giving her his undivided attention.

Why not? If I had a man like that, I'd smile at him, too. "Don't know. I wish he'd turn around so I could see what the rest of him looks like."

"You can always feast your eyes on the hottie in

this painting.” Mimi gestured to the huge watercolor hanging in front of them.

A merman and a sea nymph were frolicking in the water, splashing each other, a wave curling around them. There was a magical, mystical quality about the painting that almost made it come to life. The nymph had long raven-black curls that draped over one breast, leaving the pink flesh of the other glistening with water. Her full lips curved in a sensual smile as she playfully splashed her lover. Her face was alive with pleasure, her wet breasts thrust toward the merman.

Like the stranger talking to Georgia, the merman was tall and his body well-defined, his rugged face framed by thick tawny hair that brushed his shoulders. Droplets of water clung to the golden hair on his muscular chest. His eyes were the color of the sea and filled with a wicked combination of laughter and lust. The waves frothed around his hips, concealing what she was sure was a magnificent cock.

Looking at it from a certain angle, Erin had the strangest feeling he was staring not at the nymph but at her. The hand splashing water at his lover seemed to reach out from the canvas instead and beckon to her.

For a moment, she was jealous of the laughing nymph who’d captured this superb creature of the sea. Embarrassingly, her nipples hardened and her panties were unbelievably soaked. Her thighs slid together, slick with the evidence of arousal. Sensations of pleasure skittered over her body, and her skin flushed with heat.

Holy crap! Was she in such bad shape that a painting could arouse her that way? She glanced at Mimi, hoping she hadn’t noticed her reaction, but her sister’s lips turned up in a hint of a knowing smile. Erin blushed and turned away.

“You should make Alan buy it for you,” Mimi

told her. "As an apology for behaving like such an ass."

Erin made a face. "The only thing I want from Alan is his total disappearance from my life."

The disaster of her almost-wedding still loomed over her like a black cloud. She wondered if she'd ever be rid of the image of her fiancé doing the horizontal tango with another attorney in his office—on top of his desk! God, how she regretted walking in that day. No secretary in front to derail her impromptu visit, only the two bodies writhing and grunting on a wide expanse of polished mahogany.

They hadn't even seen or heard her at first. It was only when she actually made herself walk up to them and drop her engagement ring on Alan's clenched buttocks that they became aware of her.

If she hadn't been so mad, she would have laughed at the two naked figures jerking and rolling to the floor, scrambling for clothes. And Alan, the ass, chasing her down the hallway, waving that damned ring. Her last bit of satisfaction was biting his fingers as he tried to jam them into the closing elevator doors.

"Are you sure you want to hang out by yourself right now?" Mimi asked, studying her with concern. "It isn't good for you to be alone."

"Absolutely. I'm fine. I don't think I could handle anyone's company right now. Not even yours, my darling sister."

"Well." Mimi shrugged. "If you say so. It was nice of Donald to give you a break on the cottage rental."

Donald Mattucci, another client, owned four cottages on a secluded area of Palmetto Beach. Lucky for her he happened to have one vacant at the moment.

"Yes," Erin agreed. "I like the way his cottages have their own secluded beach area. That suits me

fine right about now.” Her mouth lifted in a quirky grin. “How can I possibly be alone with you calling me three times a day?”

“At least it got you here today,” Mimi retorted.

“Let’s just enjoy the champagne and art, okay? No more lectures.”

They both turned to gaze at the painting again.

“You know.” Mimi cocked her head and looked at the painting from another angle. “I swear these two almost look like they’re about to step off the canvas into this room.”

Erin pulled her eyes back to the painting. “They do, don’t they? Maybe I should stick to make-believe men. It would be a lot safer.”

“Maybe you should go introduce yourself to Georgia’s hunk over there,” Mimi told her. “They say when you fall off a horse, you should get right back on.”

Erin frowned. “This isn’t exactly the same thing. Besides, he might be her new tight squeeze, and I wouldn’t want to poach.”

“Well, too late to find out now.” Mimi glanced to where the couple had been standing. “He’s flown the coop.”

“See? If it was meant to be, he’d still be here. And the last thing I want in my life right now is another high maintenance man. Or any kind of man.” Erin put her empty champagne flute on a tray sitting on a stand. “Listen, this has almost been fun, but I think I’m ready to retreat to my cave. I’ve mingled as much as I can, and this fake smile is making my cheeks hurt. Besides, I’m running out of things to say to people.”

Mimi enveloped her sister in a huge hug. “I’m only a phone call away, sweetie.”

“I know, I know. Give me a couple of days, okay?”

“Whatever. Just take care.”

“I will.” She grinned and blew a kiss at the

painting. "Who knows. Maybe a merman will appear out of the Gulf on my beach."

"That would be a blessing. Call me," she repeated as Erin headed to Georgia to say her good-byes.

On her way out the door, she paused briefly to take a last, lingering look at the painting of the merman and the water nymph. Something about it still captured her attention. Maybe the merman's sculptured body or his strong face. Or the way his eyes smoldered when they looked at the nymph.

Wait. Could painted eyes smolder? Maybe she was losing it completely. She hurried out and putting the top down on her convertible, drove back to her beach hideaway. She hoped the wind would blow the cobwebs out of her mind.

Erin tossed her car keys into the bowl on the coffee table, kicked off her shoes and slid open the glass doors. She padded barefoot across the deck, leaned on the rail and inhaled the salty tang of the Gulf of Mexico.

The wide beach was fairly deserted, even on such a warm summer day. This stretch of it was private to the cottages fronting on it, and it was almost sunset, time for people to be inside, feeding their families or drinking cocktails. She walked down the three steps to the beach and wriggled her toes in the fine-grained sand. Lifting her face to the last rays of the sun, she released her raven-black hair from its French braid and let the soft Gulf breeze play with its strands.

Renting this cottage had been a good idea, despite what her friends and family said. She wanted to get away from the city, away from the sympathetic looks of friends and family.

"You have to get this out of your system," her mother said every day, until Erin was sick of hearing it. "Get mad. Scream. Shoot him if you feel

like it.”

She hadn’t done any of those things. Instead, she’d gone about taking care of everything in a quiet, controlled manner. Returning wedding gifts. Sending out announcements. Canceling all arrangements. At least Alan would have to eat the cost of the honeymoon, unless he took Miss Long Legs on the trip instead.

Throughout the ordeal she refused to cry. After a while, she wondered if her heart was actually wounded or just her pride. It amazed her how little the lack of his presence bothered her. Maybe she’d been saved from a world class disaster. Still, the whole experience diminished how she looked at herself. She began to examine her shortcomings until her friends were ready to slap her.

Once she’d decided on the rental, she was packed and away from her condo in twenty-four hours. In the chaotic aftermath of what happened, she needed some peace and quiet, not non-stop activities that were supposed to occupy her mind.

Mimi finally threw up her hands in frustration and said she’d pick up the slack in the accounting firm they owned, despite her unhappiness at Erin’s decision. In return, this afternoon Erin had driven into Sarasota to meet Mimi at the gallery opening to do the public relations thing with their client.

Now she was back to her solitude and relishing every moment of it.

Dinner was a sandwich and wine out on the deck. Erin lay back in the chair with her feet up on a stool as sunset changed to twilight and stars began to ignite in the clear sky. Without realizing it, she fell asleep.

She woke to sense a presence nearby, the feeling that another person was close. Forcing open her heavy-lidded eyes, she saw him standing beside her, broad shoulders tapering to narrow hips, silver light

glinting over the curls on his chest and brushing glistening streaks through the rich golden hair on his head.

He was big all over, and hard. Not workout hard like the men she knew. A warrior's body. There didn't look to be an ounce of give to him anywhere. He was without a doubt the most masculine man she had ever seen, muscles limned in the ambient light, his face defined by a square jaw and high cheek-bones. She couldn't see the color of his eyes in the dark, only that the faint light from the sky shone in them, reflecting the lust burning there.

Her heart trip-hammered, and she tried to move away on the bed.

He reached out and placed a hand on her arm, stopping her. "No. I won't harm you. Don't move."

She looked around. Yes, this was her bedroom, her window with the moonlight streaming in. But who was this man standing so close to her?

He lifted the sheet covering her naked body and drew it back, as if unwrapping a package, his eyes devouring her as each inch of her was revealed. Her flesh shivered under his gaze. When she lifted her arms to cover herself, he shook his head. "Why would you want to hide a body so beautiful and tempting?"

Erin dropped her hands to her sides, unexpectedly craving the stranger's touch, the caress of his gaze on her skin. Her heart hammered against her ribs, and heat bloomed throughout all her erogenous zones. How could she be doing this, exposing herself to a total stranger? Yet it seemed so very right. So...so...fated. That was it. Fated. As if arranged by a power greater than both of them.

Excitement and anticipation raced through her as his eyes raked over her, taking in her breasts, her stomach, the patch of dark curls covering her sex, her shaking thighs. Extending a finger, he bent low and traced the line his eyes had drawn, his touch as light as a feather.

When he reached her mound, he nudged her thighs apart and traced his fingertip the length of her slit. She dampened, a pulse already beating inside her.

Using his hand to spread her thighs even wider, he brushed his thumb across the hard knot of her clit, setting the nerves in that little bud afire, then tracing the opening to her pussy as if drawing a circle. Her breathing hitched, and more liquid seeped from her. She fell into a whirlpool of sensation, drawn by his touch, spinning in the grasp of something more carnal than she'd ever known.

Every place his hands glided against her skin, she felt tingles of pleasure, as if electricity sparked from his fingers. His erection, rising proudly from a thick nest of curls, pressed against her thigh. Her hand automatically extended toward it, her fingers closing around its steely length. She heard his indrawn breath and tightened her grip just the slightest bit.

"Careful," he warned as he uncurled her fingers from his cock. His deep voice wrapped itself around her like warm honey. "Just looking at you arouses me to the point of orgasm. We don't want this to be over before we even get started."

"I want to touch you, stroke you," she protested.

He shook his head. "Tonight is for you. "

He moved to the foot of the bed, the mattress dipping as he kneeled between her thighs. "I think I'll die if I don't taste every inch of you," he told her and proceeded to do just that.

His voice was thick with desire, so intense it set off flutters in her belly. She couldn't recall ever hearing that level of need—for her—in the voice of any other man, and it raised her own degree of hunger. She wanted nothing more than to lie back on her cool cotton sheets and take his gorgeous cock deep into her body.

Leaning on his forearms to catch his weight, he

began with her forehead, tracing light kisses from side to side, then down the bridge of her nose. His lips whispered across her eyelids and traveled the plane of her face until his mouth pressed hers. His lips felt like rough satin and tasted of clean salt water. His scent enveloped her, a mixture of mint and outdoors.

"I'm going to fuck your mouth," he whispered. "Just like I'm going to fuck your pussy. Open for me and let me inside."

Mindlessly, she opened her mouth and accepted his hot tongue, somehow powerless to do anything except that which he requested. His tongue was like a flame, leaving tiny fires wherever he touched inside—her cheeks, the roof of her mouth, the very tender skin around her tongue.

When he had drunk his fill, he traced the line of her jaw with his tongue, then moved onto the slender column of her neck. At the sensitive juncture of neck and shoulder, his teeth bit lightly, the sensation sending a waterfall of liquid through her quivering cunt, copious juices that trailed into the cleft of her buttocks.

The fine hair on his legs lightly abraded the insides of her thighs. His cock rubbed against her belly, and his testicles just brushed the outer lips of her pussy. Her skin felt electric every place their bodies touched.

When he lowered his head to her breasts and took the hard bud of one nipple into his mouth, she jerked against him, the sensation so intense she was sure she'd come without any further urging. The pull was gentle and fierce at the same time, sending spikes of pleasure straight to her womb. He sucked the tip deep, grazing it with his teeth and flicking his tongue against it.

Erin lifted her hands to his back. She loved the feel of him, the play of muscles rippling beneath the skin, the rigid column of his spine. Her fingers traced

bumps and ridges, markings she somehow knew were his souvenirs of battle. What did he do that was so dangerous?

She ran her hands over the tight muscles of his ass, trying to find some play in his skin that she could hold onto. He flexed his buttocks, and his penis moved against her.

"Your skin is like silk," he murmured. "Soft and elegant. I could lick every inch of it. Forever."

"Who are you?" she asked, barely able to form words with his intense exploration setting off sparks in nerves she didn't even know she had.

"The man who's going to fuck you every way possible," he answered. "Who's going to make love to you more intensely than anyone ever has before."

Without warning, he slid his hands under her buttocks and lifted her to his mouth, his tongue licking her slit from top to bottom. She jolted in his hands, but he tightened his grip and steadied her. Her hands fluttered as his mouth closed over her heat, his tongue flicked expertly over her clit. Little spikes of electricity streaked from that throbbing knot until there wasn't an inch of her that wasn't on fire.

His thumbs opened the entrance to her cunt as if he were peeling back the petals of a flower, and he carefully lapped at every exposed, dripping inch. When he stiffened his tongue and stabbed it into her waiting cavern, she thrust her hips at him and a soft moan escaped her lips. Her hands reached for his hair, fisting in its silken softness while he plundered her with his tongue until she thought she would come apart.

"Please," she cried as the coil inside her tightened unbearably. "Oh, please."

Ignoring her cries of desperation, he drank from her greedily, no tiny particle of her vaginal vault left untasted, her juices pouring into his mouth. He hummed in satisfaction, the vibrations sending more pleasure spikes through the walls of her pussy and

into her body.

When at last he lifted her legs over his shoulder and positioned himself at the entrance to her body, she didn't know if she wanted to weep with relief or shout at him to move faster. Instead, she merely tried to urge him on with movements of her hips, her hands gripping his broad shoulders.

"Look at me," he commanded.

She forced her heavy eyelids upward and found herself trapped in a gaze that was equal parts of hunger and...something she couldn't quite define. She felt as if he were looking right into her soul, capturing the essence of who she was.

The room filled with the scent of salt water and musk and sex as he placed the head of his cock against her and pushed inside.

Oh my God!

Her eyes had automatically drifted shut again, but again he commanded, "Look at me. Know who this is that's taking you. Giving to you. Let me see inside of you. Now."

Her eyes popped open, focusing on the strong, chiseled planes of his face outlined in the moonlight. His thick shaft drove all the way in until he prodded the edge of her womb.

He began to stroke his cock in and out in a steady rhythm. "Move with me."

Body screaming for release, she found the pace and they moved as if they were dancers in a choreographed ballet. Sex for her had never been like this, a burning spear torching every one of her nerves, her liquid heat bathing him, the inner walls of her cunt quivering and pulsing and milking him.

On and on he drove her, his thumb now tormenting the hard nub of her clit, his hips rolling and thrusting. And all the time her gaze was locked with his, an invisible bond binding her to him.

The orgasm, when it hit them, had the crash and force of a tidal wave, the undertow sweeping them

out to sea, shaking them as if they were in the grip of a giant fist. Their bodies shuddered and shook as their hips rocked together and spasms gripped every muscle.

At last he lowered her hips and slid his hands to her thighs, then slipped his cock from its warm cradle and lay beside her, panting. She flung her arm across his chest and felt his heart thundering against his ribs, no less harder than her own.

After a long moment, he unwrapped his arms from around her, kissed her forehead and her cheeks with touches as light as a feather, and pushed himself from the bed.

The loss of his warmth left her feeling bereft. Empty. She wanted to keep him pressed to her forever. An unfamiliar ache settled in her heart.

"Don't go. Please." She reached a weak hand out to him. "Tell me your name."

Without answering, he slid open the glass doors, and a heavy wind blew in, wrapping the sheet around her with the force of it. Erin yanked at it, trying to pull the fabric away from her warm, damp flesh.

"Come back," she cried. "Don't leave me."

Erin's eyes snapped open, and she looked around, disoriented. Bewildered. She was on her deck, in the same chair where she'd fallen asleep. The wind had twisted her long hair and whipped it across her face, and her fingers were tugging at it. There was no one on the deck but her. And she wasn't in her bedroom.

A dream. She'd been having a dream.

Not possible. She never had erotic dreams. Especially about men she'd never met.

Swallowing her disappointment, Erin leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. She tried to pull back the threads of what had seemed so real. When she shifted her hips, she discovered her

panties were soaked, her fluids leaving a puddle on the canvas mat of the chair. Touching her breasts, she realized the nipples were still hard and beaded. Her body felt well-used, but no one had used it. At least no one real.

The face had seemed so familiar, but it wasn't anyone she remembered meeting. She had no idea who he was, yet she felt as if she'd known him forever.

The painting in the gallery!

That was it. Oh, God, the merman. He looked like the merman come to life in her room, plundering her heart as well as her body.

What the hell was going on?

Chapter Two

Dallas Clark bent his leg, resting his foot on the kitchen chair, and wrapped the flexible brace around his right thigh. He cursed as he yanked it tightly into place. Recovering from a bullet that plowed deep into your thigh, damaging both bone and muscle, wasn't a lot of fun. He had the distinct feeling the docs and therapists were dragging their asses on getting him fixed. They knew his goal was to return to his team and get back into action where he belonged as quickly as possible.

He checked the watch on his wrist, gritting his teeth when he remembered the one it replaced. A very expensive piece of jewelry he'd thrown into the Gulf of Mexico his first day at the beach. The watch had been a present from Krista on his last birthday. Krista the bitch, who wasn't "much good at nursing sick people and staying home doing nothing."

Apparently the glamorous appeal of a SEAL only worked when he was in dress uniform and suitable for showing off at parties. She hadn't even had the guts to break it off in person, just sent him an email in the hospital.

Well, the hell with her. The hell with all women. The sooner he rejoined his team the better.

He was damn lucky his kid sister knew about this rental cottage. Set on an isolated portion of the beach with only three other similar structures, it gave him the privacy he needed. No, craved. He could do his therapy each day, exercise the way they'd showed him and hang out alone the rest of the time. Brooding. Something his sister nagged at him about.

Dallas had given in and gone to her gallery

opening, partially to thank her for turning him onto the rental and partially to shut her up. Well-meaning family could be a pain in the ass.

Not much for art to begin with, he'd hugged his sister, congratulated her on her success, and headed for the door. But a painting had stopped him. Hung by itself on a white expanse of wall, the scene showed a water nymph and a merman frolicking in the waves. As a SEAL, anything to do with the water interested him, although not usually something as frivolous as this.

He had no idea why that painting kept him rooted in front of it, mesmerized. He'd had to give himself a mental shake just to get his feet to move out the door. He had things to do besides gawking at a painting of water nymphs. But maybe, if no one bought the painting...No, it was sure to go for a fat price. Nevertheless, he had decided to check with his sister the beginning of next week.

Now the memory of the painting clung to the edges of his mind, along with the images of the strange, erotic dream he'd had. Was he losing his mind, dreaming about sex with a woman he didn't even know? He couldn't blame it on the pain medication he took for his leg because he'd cut it off days ago.

Consciously, he made his mind a blank and began the stretching exercises he did before his morning run.

The Gulf was fairly calm, the sun reflecting like a huge ball of fire in its bluish waters. No one had ventured into the water yet today. The people in the other cottages usually sat on their decks or waited until afternoon before taking a swim. It was almost like having his own private beach.

He'd measured a five mile distance out and back the first day. Now he settled into the slow, measured pace he always began with, feet pounding along the packed sand at the water's edge, forcing the muscles

of his injured thigh to work through the burn. Running allowed him to keep his mind blank and concentrate on the work at hand.

And forget about that damned Krista.

He made his loop, slowing down as he neared the cottage again. Down to an easy jog, he spotted a woman standing on the deck of the cottage next to his. She was leaning on the rail, arms supporting her slender body, face lifted to the sun, dark hair blowing like strands of silk about her face in the soft breeze from the Gulf. He couldn't help noticing the way her breasts were outlined by the soft material of her top or the nicely rounded hips and slim legs accentuated by her shorts.

His cock hardened automatically, and he gritted his teeth. He didn't need to walk along the sand with a tent in his pants.

Something about her intrigued him. For a moment, he thought she was someone he knew, but that was impossible. That's why he'd come to this isolated section of the beach. There wasn't a soul he knew here except his sister. He almost stumbled, a combination of the residual weakness in his leg and the tempting view capturing his attention, but he caught himself in time.

No. No women. Not as long as his right hand held out. That was all the sex he needed. Safe and uncomplicated.

She spotted him and half-lifted a hand to wave, then quickly drew it back and turned away.

Aha! Another person with demons?

Dallas shook his head and climbed the steps to his own deck. A shower and a beer would wipe away any interest in the sexy woman next door. Why the hell did she have to be here, anyway, just at this particular time? He'd just have to be careful not to be outside at the same time she was. He didn't need his testosterone taking over again. He'd already been that route.

He spent the rest of the day exhausting himself with the exercises the therapist had given him to do, then soaked for a long time in a hot tub. He felt the aftereffects of all the exertion when he crawled into bed and dropped into a deep, heavy sleep.

"You came again."

She was lying on the bed, her naked body silhouetted by the moon, covers thrown back in anticipation of his visit.

"How could I not."

She was so beautiful she took his breath away. A slash of moonlight caught the dark rose of her nipples and her aureoles. When she shifted, he saw the soft dark curls covering her mound, raven black like the fall of hair cascading from her head. His cock stood instantly at attention, remembering the tight, moist feel of her around him, her liquid heat bathing him. Her taste still lingered on his tongue, a hint of strawberry flavored with honey. He couldn't wait to plunge into that warm, wet cunt again, to taste it and experience it grasping him.

She reached out her arms, and he moved to the bed, kneeling beside it so he could run his hands over her smooth, satiny skin. Her breasts were firm to his touch, her nipples like ripe berries that he rolled and plucked with his fingers. Her back arched as each pinch and tug drew a low moan from her, a breathy sound slipping over her slightly parted lips.

His cock was harder than a steel rod, blood pulsing through the thick vein that fed it, the head sensitive, as if some rich, soft fabric was being drawn over it. He wanted nothing more than to bury himself inside that tight, wet fist. Feel her pussy muscles clench around him, gripping him. Feel her milking him and drawing every bit of his seed.

But he forced himself to go slowly, to touch and worship every inch of her, memorize the sounds she made when he touched the places she liked. The way

she liked.

No, he wouldn't hurry this. There was something more going on here than just the physical pull between two bodies. Almost like her soul was calling to his. He wanted to savor each and every second he was with her, tucking it into his heart to keep forever if she suddenly disappeared.

Disappeared? He deliberately shoved the thought from his mind, unwilling to accept even the possibility, and bent to the pleasure of her body.

His mouth traced a line from her shoulder over one breast, stopping to suckle and graze at the beaded nipple before moving down to the indentation at her waist. He feathered kisses across her hip and followed the crease where hip and thigh joined with the tip of his tongue.

She shifted restlessly, the moans increasing, her hand reaching for his head and twining through his hair. His fingers drew circles from her ankle slowly up the inside of her thigh until at last he reached the nest of curls guarding the entrance to her cunt.

With a fluid motion, he grasped her hips and shifted her around until her legs hung over the mattress. His strong fingers holding her ankles, he bent her legs until her knees touched her chest, exposing the opening to her pussy, now glistening with dew, the flesh already rosy and flushed.

He leaned into her and inhaled her essence, the scent of her arousal streaking straight to his painfully erect cock. He wanted nothing more than to fuck her endlessly, but first he had to drink his fill. His thumbs stroked her outer lips, slipping on the slickness of the flesh before transferring his attention to her clit. Carefully peeling back the hood, he nibbled and licked until she was a writhing mass in his hands.

When he lapped her slit from end to end, she thrust so hard at him he nearly lost his grip.

"Ssh," he soothed. "Let me pleasure you."

"I want you inside me," she cried.

"Soon." He slid his fingers into her pulsing core. Mimicking what he would do to her with his cock, he rubbed the walls of her channel. His fingers curved to hit that special pleasure spot, jolting her and bringing forth a tiny scream.

The tiny muscles of her cunt clutched at him, squeezing his fingers. God, she was like wet silk inside. He loved the feel of her against his skin as he dragged his fingers out, slick with her cream, and gently grazed the tight rosebud of her anus.

"Oh!" The word was plucked from her mouth, and at first she tried to withdraw from him.

But he kept his hand in place, circling the sweet opening with the pad of his finger, pushing until the tip slipped past the tight ring of muscle and into the grip of her rectum. Then he pulled back and placed a kiss on each globe of her buttocks.

"Not tonight," he whispered. "Tomorrow night. Anticipate me. I want you more than ready when I slide my cock inside your sweet, sweet ass."

A fiery shaft of pain spiked through his balls. His cock was so engorged he thought it would explode. He needed to be inside her, fucking her, right at that moment.

Patience. Just a moment more.

From the tiny pouch he'd brought with him, he produced a wand and a tube of gel. He spread the lubricant liberally over the entrance to her rectum. Then with great care, he began to slowly insert the wand inside her.

At first she flinched against the unfamiliar intrusion, but again he soothed her, murmured to her, as she took more and more of the wand. Then he kissed her cheeks again. He nearly came like a horny teenager, anticipating the feel of his shaft in that hot, dark tunnel.

When he had the wand fully seated, he rose to adjust her on the bed, lifted her legs over his

shoulders and plunged into the hot, welcoming depths of her cunt. He could feel the wand through the thin membrane of skin, tightening her channel even more.

"Yes," she hissed and thrust her hips.

He held himself still, closing his eyes and gritting his teeth, wanting this moment to last and last. She was like the rarest treat, a taste and feel that imprinted itself on his skin, on all of his senses. He felt surrounded by her, and all he wanted was to tumble into her and never, ever leave.

"You are magic." He could hardly get the words out, fighting as he was for control.

"Do it." The demand exploded on a groan of need. "Fuck me."

The raw command sounded so out of place on her sensuous lips, in any other situation he would have laughed.

"Play with your nipples," he commanded. "Take them in your fingers and pinch them. Hard."

Her violet eyes glittered as she obeyed, squeezing the ripe, rosy buds. A flush suffused her face as she pulled on them and compressed them. His body was rigid with the control he needed, stimulated as he was by the sight of her pleasuring herself.

His eyes locked on hers as he reached down and pressed the pad of his thumb on her clit. Then very slowly, he began stroking it in circles, feeling her liquid drench his shaft as he increased the motion.

She was exquisite, a feast for his eyes. Black hair spread out on the cool, white sheets like a cloak of silk. Her lips, swollen from his kisses, begged for more. At the base of her throat, her pulse fluttered wildly, a signal of her arousal.

God! As much as he wanted to come, he wanted to stay locked within the wet satin of her heat forever.

His chest grew tight and drops of sweat trickled from his brow as he fought to maintain some semblance of control. It was a losing battle. His body

demanded release.

"I can't wait any longer," he groaned.

"Good." Her voice was thick with desire. "Don't wait. I'm beyond ready."

He began the age-old movement, drawing his cock out until only the head was inside, then thrusting back inside. Over and over again, the sensation so exquisite he wanted to hold onto it forever. His hips moved faster, the walls of her slick pussy gripping and milking him, pleasure spiking through him.

She linked her heels behind his neck and drew herself to him even tighter, matching her rhythm to his. Fire spread up his spine and down his thighs, and his balls drew up so tightly he thought they would self-destruct.

"Now," he ground out.

They came together, a shared orgasm more intense than a fireworks display. Her deep violet eyes glazed as the climax shook her body and the pulse in her throat beat harder. She hunched him and hunched him and screamed out her release, her hands gripping her breasts, her cunt like a vise, squeezing every bit of liquid from his cock. The power of the orgasm stole his breath. Would he live through this or die of such extreme gratification?

When the shuddering spasms subsided to aftershocks, he lowered her legs and collapsed forward onto her, careful to catch his weight on his forearms. He didn't know if the thudding he felt was his heart or hers. The only sound in the room was the rasping of air as they drew it into their lungs. The scent of her teased at his nose, a heady combination of her light perfume and the aftermath of sex. He drew in a long breath, wanting to fill himself with her tantalizing aroma.

"I can't let you go." A statement of fact, shocking himself even as he said it. "Keep the wand in place to prepare yourself. Tomorrow night, when you feel me

in that sweet ass of yours, you'll know you belong to me and no one else."

"But who are you?" she asked.

He couldn't get enough breath to answer. His lungs still starved for air, he touched his forehead to hers, knowing he should move but unable to make his legs work.

Dallas opened his eyes, gasping for breath as if he were being strangled. His face and body were covered with sweat, and at the rate his heart was beating he was afraid it would leap out of his chest.

The dream was still so vivid he reached out a hand, almost expecting to find the woman lying next to him on the bed. But all he touched was empty space.

"Damn!"

Who the hell was she? Why was she invading his dreams? The image of the painting in his sister's gallery flashed briefly across his memory. No, that was stupid. Wasn't it? He wasn't a man given to fanciful thoughts by any means.

With a shock, he realized it wasn't just her body he was craving. Somewhere in the dream, with a woman who might not even be real, a crack had opened up in his armor-plated heart and the essence of her seeped in. It flowed through him like warm syrup, heating the places that were cold. He'd been in darkness, and now he was bathed in a warm light.

Jesus!

Forcing himself to his feet, he stumbled into the bathroom to pour a glass of water and drink it down without stopping. This was two nights in a row. Something weird was going on with his brain, not to mention his body.

And his heart. That was the strangest of all. He was falling in love with a woman who wasn't real, who was only a nymph in a painting.

There was only one answer.

He was losing his fucking mind.

Chapter Three

Erin was so sore when she finally roused herself from her bed, she could barely move. Every muscle felt as if it had been stretched on a rack and replaced on her body. Her cunt felt pleasantly used, but beyond that, her rectum felt as if something thick had plundered it. She had to touch herself to make sure nothing was there.

Keep the wand in place.

But it had disappeared, just like the dream.

The dream. The damn dream.

Yet even as she cursed it, she wanted to close her eyes and wrap herself in it, call it back. Call *him* back. The breakup with Alan had left her unexpectedly questioning her sexuality. Her dream man made her feel treasured. Desired. Wanted. The way he touched her, the words he murmured to her, even now set her on fire. She wrapped her arms around herself and looked at her image in the mirror.

Her eyes widened. There, on her neck. A tiny love bite. And her lips, swollen as if from kisses. But that was impossible. She rushed to the bed, seeking evidence of another person, but the only indentation was from her body, the only scent was hers.

I'm going crazy. God, I have to stop this. I'm trapping myself in a world of fantasy sex.

Pulling herself together, she treated her body to a long, hot shower, then pulled on a T-shirt and shorts and twisted her hair back into a pony tail. When the coffee was ready, she carried her mug out onto the deck. The summer sun was well on its way to the noonday zenith, the air already thick with its heat. The early morning breeze was a little stiffer

than usual, pushing tiny whitecaps toward the shore. A scene of such peace, it should have calmed the turmoil inside her, yet it didn't.

From the corner of her eye, she saw her neighbor leave his cottage and head toward the shoreline where he settled into a steady jog. A wide black brace wrapped around one thigh, and she wondered how he'd been injured. His rich, golden hair glinted in the sun, and even from this distance, she could see the flex of his muscle as he increased his speed, long legs striding, arms pumping. He looked like a Norse god running along the sand.

Or a merman.

Son of a bitch!

Erin nearly dropped her coffee. Impossible. Absolutely impossible. She couldn't be having dream sex with her next door neighbor, a man she'd never even met. But it sure as hell looked like him. And there was no denying he reminded her of the painting in the gallery that had mesmerized her so.

No, I'm imagining this. There's a faint resemblance, and I'm making it into something it's not. I've got to get hold of myself.

Refilling her cup in the kitchen, she quickly returned to the deck and settled in one of the chairs, legs outstretched, feet resting on the rail. He'd have to come back this way. Then she could get another look.

Dallas nearly lost the rhythm of his stride when he spied his next door neighbor. Even in an old T-shirt and shorts, her body radiated sexuality. Today, her black hair was scraped back into a pony tail, but he remembered it yesterday, loose and blowing around her face.

Just as it wrapped around him in her bed.

Whoa! Wait a minute!

He nearly broke stride again. Gritting his teeth, he pushed himself harder. This was nuts. He had to

get the dream out of his head. Just because his neighbor bore a faint resemblance to the woman who gave him a raging hard-on every night, as well as orgasms that shook his body, didn't mean she had anything to do with it.

But the painting, a voice whispered in his head.

Fuck the painting. And the dream, too.

Right now women were poison. He had two things on his plate—recovering from his wound and getting back with his team. That was all.

Her second cup of coffee was down to dregs by the time Erin saw him heading back down the beach. She tossed down the last few bitter drops and stood, her heart knocking against her ribs. She was hardly a shy person, and strangers had never fazed her, but this was different. Totally different.

Was he having dreams, too? Had he seen the painting?

As he finished his run and turned toward his cottage, she moved down to her bottom step, raised her hand and called out to him. "Hello, there."

Hello, there. Well, don't I just sound too simpering and stupid?

At first she didn't think he heard her or maybe just chose not to acknowledge her so she raised her voice. "Hi. Hello."

He stopped, jogging in place, fingertips checking his pulse, muscular chest heaving with the deep breaths he took.

Well, at least he hadn't run away. Erin stepped onto the sand and walked toward him. When he lifted his face, she couldn't control the shock that swept over her. It *was* him. The merman in the painting. The man in her dreams. But how was that possible? She certainly couldn't say anything. He'd think she was crazy.

But here he was. The same rough-hewn face, chin shaded with overnight stubble that, on him,

looked sexy rather than unkempt. And those eyes, like a storm-tossed ocean she was sure she'd fall into and drown. She had an almost irresistible urge to reach up and touch his face. Lick the corner of his mouth.

Chewing her bottom lip between her teeth to distract herself, she lowered her eyes. But when she raised them again, she saw the shock she felt mirrored on his face. She could tell he was doing his best to control it, but for a moment, he looked as if he'd been blind-sided.

He stopped jogging in place and stared at her. "Do I know you?"

She shook her head, her legs trembling. "No. That is...I mean..." She shook her head and drew in a calming breath. "For a moment, I thought you were someone I knew." She held out her hand. "Erin Sullivan. I thought since we were neighbors we should introduce ourselves."

He looked at her hand as if it were a foreign object, then shook it once before dropping it. "Well, Erin Sullivan, we happen to be residing in close proximity for the moment, but I wouldn't call us neighbors. I'm here because I like the solitude."

Abruptly he turned and headed into his cottage, leaving her standing there, open-mouthed.

Well, that went really well. He didn't even tell me his name.

A hot flush of embarrassment swept over her, and her stomach knotted.

What an asshole. See if I let you into my dreams again.

Dallas closed and locked the sliding doors, pulled the drapes and collapsed on the couch, his heart thundering.

Jesus, Christ! It's her!

He could hardly believe it. How the hell could a woman he'd never met invade his dreams, then turn

up next door to him as a flesh and blood person? And what did it have to do with the damn painting?

He'd behaved like such an ass he certainly didn't have to worry about her throwing herself at him. God, could he have acted any worse? He scrubbed his hands over his face. Even under the worst conditions, he'd never behaved that way toward any woman.

Thank you, Krista, for warping my personality.

Pushing himself off the couch, he went to the kitchen and pulled a beer from the fridge. He popped the top and swallowed half without taking a breath.

Great, Clark. Get drunk. That should solve the problem.

But no amount of beer was going to erase the image of his dream lover standing there on the beach, the sunlight glinting off her raven black hair. And those eyes. The most unusual shade of purple he'd ever seen, fringed by thick, dark lashes. One tiny dimple winked at the left corner of her mouth. He'd wanted to devour her, every bit of her—lips, breasts, cunt.

Sweet Jesus. He was in a world of trouble, covering up his vulnerability with rude behavior.

Well, whatever was going on, in or out of his dreams, his conscience wouldn't let it lay. He'd behaved abominably, and he at least owed her an apology. If she didn't hit him with a hammer, that is.

He chugged the rest of the beer, then mentally kicked himself. Sure, show up like a drunk.

In the bathroom, he rinsed his mouth first with water, then with a huge gulp of mouthwash, and splashed cold water on his face. He probably should shower, but he settled for a clean T-shirt for the moment.

I can do this. I'm a SEAL. I have faced down enemy insurgents and violent terrorists. I can handle one slender female.

Yeah, right.

Screwing up his courage, he made his way across the sand to her deck and knocked on her glass doors. For a long moment, he was sure she was going to ignore him. Then the door slid open a few cautious inches, and she glared at him, her face rigid with barely concealed anger.

"I only allow myself to be insulted once a day," she snapped. "I've already reached my quota."

Dallas swallowed twice. "I actually came to apologize."

He hoped he wasn't staring too hard. Her resemblance to his dream and the painting was so uncanny it was eerie. How was he supposed to handle this?

"Apologize." Her eyes were steady on him.

"Yes." He was determined not to lose his composure again. "I behaved badly."

One corner of her mouth almost turned up. "I'd say that's an accurate assessment." She slid the door open wider and motioned him inside.

He shook his head. "I need a long shower before I'm fit company for anyone." Then the words dropped out of his mouth before his brain regained control. "I wondered if I could take you to dinner and show you I really know how to behave."

She stood watching him for so long without answering he braced himself for her refusal.

"Maybe you should tell me your name first," was what she said. "You already know mine."

"Dallas Clark." He held out his hand. "I hope you'll be better about shaking hands than I was."

She took his hand, her eyes still fixed on him, as if she was trying to see beneath his skin. "Do we know each other? You seem very familiar."

And isn't that an understatement? Can I ask you about your dreams?"

"I'm sure I would have remembered if we'd met before." He still held her hand. "So does that get me a yes for dinner?"

She withdrew her hand gracefully and tucked it into the pocket of her shorts. "Well, now that we're introduced, it hardly seems fair for me to refuse."

He wasn't even aware he'd been holding his breath until he exhaled. "All right then. I'll come over and get you about seven if that's all right."

"Seven would be fine. I hope whatever place you pick is casual. I didn't really bring uptown clothes with me."

He grinned. "Casual is good. See you then."

It took a considerable amount of self control for him to walk slowly back to his cottage when he had an unexpected desire to leap in the air and click his heels. God, he was really losing it.

Erin slid the door closed and fell into the nearby chair. She wasn't sure if she'd just done the stupidest or smartest thing in her life. She never—make that double never—put herself in that kind of situation with a total stranger. Alone, in a strange community, without any support system to fall back on.

But then, he wasn't really a stranger, was he? They'd made incredible love for two nights now. Except those were dreams and dreams weren't real. Were they? Maybe he'd dreamed, too, but she wasn't about to ask him. Butterflies were holding a convention in her stomach, and her face felt flushed. She hoped she hadn't just made the biggest mistake of her life.

Wiping her hands on her shorts, she rose from the chair and headed for the bathroom. She had a very long time to get ready, but one could never start preparations too soon, right?

Only...why did she have the feeling she was about to step off a steep precipice?

Chapter Four

Dallas arrived promptly at seven, dressed in khaki slacks and a vivid blue short-sleeved shirt that almost matched his eyes. Her body leaped to attention, her nipples hardening and moisture flooding her pussy. She had to squeeze her legs together to still the quivering in the walls of her vagina. God, what was happening to her?

She might have panicked except she saw the same reaction mirrored on his face as his eyes raked her from head to toe. She'd taken the longest bubble bath of her life, massaged fragrant cream into every crevice of her body, and brushed her hair until it shone. Instead of her usual French braid, she left her hair loose and clipped back behind one ear with a gold butterfly. The white sundress she'd chosen swirled around her tanned legs, and she knew it set off her shoulders.

It wasn't her legs or shoulders his eyes were devouring, though. It was her breasts pushing against the soft cotton fabric, the nipples all too obvious. And lower, where the fabric fell in soft folds against her hips.

I should go hide in the closet.

Instead, she locked the door and let him hand her into his shiny pickup. She fastened her seatbelt and sat straight as a ramrod.

The place he'd chosen for dinner was a popular one with tourists along this stretch of Florida beaches. Rustic, with a patio overlooking the Gulf of Mexico. Soft music drifted out through hidden speakers, filling the night air. Candles on the table danced in the breeze. All around them, quiet conversations and the clink of glass and pottery

resonated.

Dinner was strange. That was the only word Erin could think of to describe it. For the most part they were silent, as if now that they were face to face, they had nothing to say to each other. She tried desperately to separate the image of the naked man in her dreams from the man across the table but found the task nearly impossible.

Erin wasn't sure which of them was more uptight. Her first date hadn't produced this much tension.

"So how did you happen to rent this cottage?" he asked, his deep voice breaking the silence.

She shrugged. "I needed to get away for a few days. A client of mine owns them and had a vacancy."

He lifted his eyebrows. "A client?"

"Yes. My sister and I own an accounting firm." She saw his lips twitch and glared at him. "And don't you dare laugh. I'm a damned good one."

He swallowed his laugh. "I'm sorry. I'm sure you are. It's just...well...I can only say I wish my accountant looked more like you." Hastily, he finished the rest of his drink.

More silence.

"And you?" she prodded.

"Just doing some rehab on an injury."

"Oh?" Now it was her turn to ask questions. "Car wreck?"

"No. Combat. I'm a Navy SEAL." His face closed up tighter than a drum, and he looked away.

Erin tilted her head. "Is something wrong? SEALs are considered the most dedicated, fearless warriors that serve our country. I have a healthy admiration and respect for them."

He said nothing, just changed the subject.

By the time dessert arrived, Erin couldn't stand it any more. "Are you sure we haven't met before?"

He shook his head. "I guarantee you I'd have

remembered. Still..." His gaze studied her.

"I know. There's something familiar about you, too." *I see you in my dreams at night. Did you come down off the wall of the gallery to haunt me?*

"Look." He cleared his throat. "I guess I owe you two apologies. I wanted tonight to be kind of...well, special. I'm not the greatest conversationalist at best, and right now, I'd say I'm scoring a big fat zero. But I'm just not in a good place in my life socially right now. I'm sorry. I wanted more out of tonight."

"I don't know what that means," she said slowly. "But I'm not doing so hot myself. Actually, I don't think I'm doing well at all. Did something happen to you?"

"Yes." Just that short, clipped word. Nothing else.

She waited, but when he didn't go on, her mouth, acting independently of her brain, opened wide and sentences tumbled out before she could stop them. "I'll match you. Whatever it is. I found my fiancé playing Hide the Salami with a member of his law firm on his big executive desk. Makes you want to deep six the entire male population." Her cheeks burned at the shameful admission.

Dallas didn't laugh or offer platitudes or criticism. He just looked at her and said, "Mine sent me an email while I was in the hospital and told me she wasn't really good around sick people."

Erin's jaw dropped. "But that's disgusting. And cruel."

"Yeah, I didn't think it showed too much class, either. Kind of puts you off women." He drained his coffee cup. "Actually she probably did me a favor. Listen, let's get out of here, okay?"

"What? Oh, sure. Fine."

They rode back to the cottages in silence, each lost in thought.

"Thank you very much for dinner," she told him in a formal voice. "I had a very nice time."

She slid out of the truck quickly before he could come around and open the door for her. She didn't want his touch, the feel of his hand on her skin. She was too vulnerable, and she wasn't sure what to expect of him now. If she read him correctly, the evening was over.

Well, what did she think? That he would be dazzled by her? Sweep her off her feet? And into his bed?

Fairytales only happened in books.

He laughed, a sound more like a short bark, as he met her halfway around the truck. "You don't have to say that. This wasn't what I wanted out of tonight at all."

She wrinkled her brow. "Oh? What *did* you want, then?"

"Something entirely different." They were at her door now, and he seemed to be searching for words. "Listen, could we try this again tomorrow night? This is going to sound stupid, but there's some kind of connection here that I don't understand."

Erin's heartbeat sped up. He felt it, too. "A-all right. I guess it couldn't hurt."

They stood looking at each other for a long moment. He moved toward her so quickly, she barely had time to take a step away. Then his muscular arms were around her, one large hand clamped to the back of her head, and his hot, hot mouth captured hers. She couldn't have resisted if she'd wanted to.

It was like the kisses of her dream lover, heavy and demanding. Devouring. His tongue touched every surface of her mouth—cheeks, lips, roof, teeth. He was a thirsting man and she was the spring in the desert. She gave him as good as she got, her tongue tangling with his, her hands rubbing the taut muscles of his shoulders.

He stepped into the cradle of her thighs, and his bulging cock pressed hard against her pussy. She

felt a rush of fluid and a throbbing of her pulses. But even more than that, she had the sensation of something stretching the walls of her rectum. She knew that wasn't true. No matter what she'd imagined that morning, there was nothing in there. So why did she have this sudden impression of fullness? Why did she *want* something there, yet shiver with nervousness at the thought?

And that suddenly he stepped away, leaving her lost and aching.

"I'm sorry." His face was expressionless, but his breathing was uneven, as choppy as her own. "I presumed too much."

He turned toward his own cottage.

"Wait," she called after him. "Please don't go."

But he never turned back.

Swallowing a sob, Erin rushed inside and frantically stripped off her clothes. She threw back the covers on her bed and lay there nude, willing sleep to come.

Waiting for her lover.

The walk hadn't helped to clear his brain any. He slammed the sliding door almost hard enough to break it, then rested his forehead against it.

Jesus. Could he have made a bigger fool of himself? No social skills? How about barely above animal level? Blurting out that shit about Krista. What a jerk he'd sounded like.

And then that kiss at the end. Grabbing Erin the way he did, shoving his tongue practically all the way down her throat. Clenching his hands tightly around her to keep from palming her breasts. Pressing his cock against her pussy, nearly dry-fucking her through their clothes.

Shit. He should be locked up.

But oh God, if she wasn't his dream woman come to life, no one was. Had she stepped out of that painting in his sister's gallery right into his head?

Still leaning his head against the door, he banged it against the cool surface. Maybe if he hit it hard enough he could unscramble his brains.

Sighing, he made his way to his bedroom, tossed his clothes onto a chair and threw himself down on the unmade bed. He was rock hard and so ready to come, one stroke of his hand would do it. Instead, he closed his eyes, trying to call up the dream.

The vision of her naked body floated across his brain, her perfect ass outlined by the moon. Lifted, poised, waiting for his cock to plunge inside it as he'd fucked her with the wand. The thought of that hot, tight channel gripping his shaft was almost painful.

Come on, dream. Let me be the lover she deserves.

Warm lips pressed to her forehead, and Erin's eyes opened to see her golden god leaning over her.

"You came," she said.

He grinned. "Not yet, but I plan to. And more than once."

She reached a hand out and wrapped her fingers around his shaft, feeling it pulse beneath her touch. When she slid her thumb over the broad head, she felt the tiny pearl of pre-cum already seeping from the slit and spread it over the satin-soft skin. He jerked at her touch but didn't remove her hand.

"Let me taste you," she begged. "I want to give you the same pleasure you've given to me."

"All right. Tonight I want you so much I know I can come more than once. Get up on your knees."

She shifted smoothly to her knees, his cock still in her grasp, and slid her other hand between his thighs to find his balls. Cupping them in her palm, relishing the feel of the hardness contained in the soft sac, she manipulated them with her fingers. Pressing them gently, she bent and took his penis into her mouth.

Running her tongue over the head, she inserted the tip into the slit, as if their roles were reversed and she had a tiny penis with which to invade him. His entire body clenched and tightened, and she heard the indrawn hiss of his breath. His cock vibrated in her grip. She felt hot, then cold, then hot again as sensations chased themselves across her skin.

Opening her mouth wider, she slid her lips slowly down the length of him, moving from tip to root and back again. He was so large she could barely take him all. His hands gripped her head and tilted it back, helping her adjust, moving his hips to very slowly ease himself further into her mouth.

He tasted so good. She swirled her tongue along the length, lapping at the little drops of fluid that seeped from the dark slit.

When the head of his cock hit the roof of her mouth, she closed her teeth gently around him, raking him ever so softly with her teeth, making him jerk. She caressed his balls again and felt them draw up and tighten. Arching her neck, she sucked harder on him, his shaft sliding further and further down her throat.

At last he filled her completely, so tight she could barely breathe. She began to suck and stroke in a coordinated rhythm, rubbing his balls and drawing hard on his cock. His hands on her head continued to guide her, to show her how and what he liked.

She wanted to make him come apart the way he'd done for her. To take control away from him, make him let go. In a frenzy, she released him and batted at his hands, pushing them away from her head, and shoved and tugged until he lay back on the bed, feet trailing on the floor. Kneeling before him, she slid him all the way into her mouth again, and one hand caressed his balls.

"Jesus!" The word exploded from him.

She worked her mouth on him, using her tongue and teeth, teasing his sac with one hand. She knew

when he was ready. His balls drew up, his thighs tightened and the pressure in his penis filled what little space was left inside her mouth.

"Now," he ground out. "I'm coming now."

She pumped with her hand as the first splash of hot cum hit the back of her throat, then another and another. She sucked and swallowed, pumped and squeezed, until she'd drawn every bit of fluid from him and his muscles relaxed.

She loved the salty-sweet taste of him and licked her lips to make sure she captured every drop. She grinned up at him. "You taste good."

He pulled her up to lay on his chest and placed a gentle kiss on her lips, then shifted with her still in his arms, cradling her against him. His spent shaft nestled against the cleft of her buttocks, and his thighs pressed against hers. The feel of his big body against her smaller one heated her, aroused her. She wished he could stay there without end, yet at the same time, her pussy was already pulsing with the need for him to fill it.

"I could fuck your mouth forever," he told her. "So soft, so wet. It's like heaven."

"And I could wrap my lips around your shaft forever. I love the feel of it."

He chuckled, and one hand crept up to cradle her breasts, his thumb rasping against the nipple. "Good to know. That means you'll want to do it again."

He drew her leg over his hip, spreading her out for his touch. His fingers drifted from her breast down through her nest of curls to her waiting slit, already wet with need. When his thumb and forefinger began the familiar rolling movement with her clit, liquid flooded from her opening, drenching her thighs.

"Ah, good," he murmured. "I love it when you're so wet." Scooping her cream onto his fingers, he slid them back to her anus, rubbing her juices into it. "Did you keep the wand in here like I told you?"

Did she? She could hardly remember. Yet she felt as if indeed something had been there since last night, preparing her for him.

He kissed his way from just beneath her ear to her shoulder and down her arm. She shivered at the touch of butterflies and nestled hard against him.

Now he was at her clit again, massaging it with slow, circular strokes. His lips, like rough silk, still trailed paths of light kisses everywhere he could touch her. Her skin felt too tight, her breasts heavy and full, her nipples tingling.

"So soft," he murmured against her. "You taste like fresh flowers and sunshine. I could eat you up with a spoon."

He talked to her, whispered to her, erotic words, telling her what he would do to her. With her. And with every word, the need in her body grew.

His fingers teased her clit, stroked at her labia and slipped easily into her soaked channel. Slowly, he stroked the walls of her pussy, waking up every nerve and bringing it to life, until she was ready to beg him to fill her.

She needed him inside her. Craved him. He was like a drug working its way through her system. Everything he did unraveled her, turned her into a whimpering mass of flesh.

"Please," she cried. "I need you inside me. Now."

He kissed her ear and traced the rim with the tip of his tongue. "Yes, you do. But remember what I told you? Tonight I'll be filling that sweet ass of yours. Tonight I'll take you to the moon."

He rolled her over and lifted her to her hands and knees, placing the pillows beneath her stomach to brace her.

"You have the most unbelievable ass," he breathed. "Gorgeous."

He showered the raised globes with kisses, so light they were like the sweep of a feather, driving her need even higher. His big hand pressed her thighs

outward, and she knew she was completely exposed to him, every bit of her. She felt him behind her, his hands steady on her hips. Then his tongue lapped at her entire cunt, licking every inch, sucking at her clit, until she was sure she'd come just from his touch.

When she was trembling and shivering, barely able to hold her position, he moved again. Turning her head, she saw him reach toward the night stand and retrieve the tube of gel he'd apparently placed there when he entered her room. In seconds, the tip was pressed against her puckered hole, and the thick substance oozed into her, seeping into her tissues, cooling and heating her at the same time.

Then she felt his lean finger breech the tight opening and slide in.

Chapter Five

Dallas thought he would explode the minute his finger slipped inside Erin. Her rectum was so tight it clenched around him. Bracing one hand under her stomach to hold her in place, he moved his finger in and out in measured strokes, giving her time to adjust. It would take more than a few minutes to stretch her enough to take his cock, now swollen and pulsing again, inside that narrow channel.

When he felt her relax into the one finger, he slipped another in next to it and began a careful scissoring motion. He stretched his thumb so that as he moved his fingers, his thumb caressed her slit, spreading her juices over the pouty open lips.

God, she was so beautiful, so tempting. Her eyes were closed, thick eyelashes lying against her alabaster cheeks as she gave herself to the sensations racing through her. Her full lips reddened by his kisses were slightly parted, her breath coming in little puffs of warm air, the arching of her neck inviting his to taste. He wanted to sink himself into her and never move. If he searched all his life, he might never find another woman like this, who called to his soul and heart as well as his body. Her delicious little moans and cries were making him even harder, and he had to clench his teeth to keep from taking her before she was ready.

"Push back," he whispered as his fingers continued their movement inside her. "That's it. Push back like that."

Beneath his splayed hand, her tummy muscles tightened and released, tightened and released as she thrust against his stretching fingers.

He leaned over her. "Do you want me, nymph?"

Do you want my cock in here, fucking your ass?"

"Yes, yes, yes," she chanted.

Pulling his fingers out, he coated his cock with the gel, spread the cheeks of her ass wide to give him better access and pressed the head of his shaft against the tempting rosebud before him. As he eased in past the tight muscles, she clenched her body and her sharp cry fell on a breath of air.

"Breathe, nymph," he told her. "Breathe through your mouth and shove back against me like before."

One little bit at a time he sank into her, each time stopping and holding his position so she could adjust. Her heat scalded him, her satiny walls clenching at him, but he fought for control. This was the ultimate gift of trust from her, and he would not abuse it by forcing his cock into her too soon.

He shifted his hand against her tummy until his fingers reached her clit, and he massaged it, feeling the wet bundle of nerves respond to him. Her body jerked against him. She was panting now, her body rocking back against him, each movement dragging him in further and further.

And then he was there, all the way, his balls slapping against her open cunt. He was sure he'd died and gone to heaven. His hips began to thrust, his cock moving in and out, in and out, until the pressure in his balls sent streaks of fire through him and heat spread through his spine and the backs of his thighs.

"Now, nymph," he ground out. "Now."

Rasping her clit and rocking with her, he exploded inside her just as her own climax hit. He lost all sense of time and space as they convulsed together, muscles clamping, cock spurting, bodies shattering together. He held her tightly against him, skin to skin, feeling her spasms as if they were his own.

When the orgasm receded, like the waves of the Gulf rolling in to the beach, he slowly withdrew and

eased her down to her stomach. He left her to get a warm cloth from the bathroom, and returned to clean both of them. Then he lay down beside her, holding her so tightly they were almost one. His lips feathered kisses on her ear and her forehead.

She completed him. There was no getting around it. How could he ever let her go?

Erin awoke with a gasp, sprawled on her stomach, pillows scattered beneath her. Every part of her ached, every muscle was sore. But she felt satisfied in a way she never had, not ever in her life. She rolled over and brushed her hair back from her face. This was absurd. She was having phantom sex with a man who might or might not be living next door to her. Was he having the same dreams?

She wanted him again. Spectacular sex and she still wanted him again. Right now. How absurd was that?

Was Dallas really the man in her dreams? Was he lying in his bed wracked with the same spasms? Was his cock still hard and waiting for her?

Jesus, Erin. Get a grip.

She stumbled out of bed and fumbled in her drawer for a long T-shirt, then ran a glass of water in the bathroom. She drank it down and refilled the glass, carrying it out into the living room to the sliding doors overlooking the Gulf.

It was a clear night again, the moon a silver ball in the sky, stars twinkling like diamonds around it. The water rolled into the shore in gentle waves. On impulse she slid open the glass doors, stepped out onto the deck and walked out to the beach. Maybe a late night dip in the Gulf would help soothe her.

Dallas reached beside him, expecting to find a soft body, but his hand encountered nothing but empty space.

Damn it. Where had she gone?

He opened his eyes and realized he was in his own room, not *hers*, and he was once again alone.

He sat up and swung his legs over the side of the bed. This was so absurd he could hardly deal with it. Was he really dreaming about the woman next door or confusing her with the image from the painting? Why was he having these dreams when he'd told himself he had no place in his life for women right now. Maybe not for a very long time.

Still, he couldn't help wondering if she was in the grip of the same spell. If she was dreaming, too. About him.

Pushing himself to his feet, he wandered into the living room and opened the drapes. The night was crystal clear, the moon like a beacon shimmering over the water. Maybe a swim would clear his head. He slid open the glass doors, cleared the deck in three strides, and made his way across the sand, stark naked. He hoped none of his neighbors decided to peek out of their windows.

Something at the periphery of his vision caught his eye. He turned to see Erin, long hair flowing about her shoulders, pulling a T-shirt over her head and running toward the water. His heart clenched and his cock stood at attention. It *was* her. There was no mistake. But how had she found her way into his dreams every night?

She hadn't noticed him as she raced across the beach and reached the edge of the water. She dipped her toes in, then waded out to her knees. Catching a breath, she dove into the water, swam a stroke or two then burst from the water, arms stretched toward the moon, water sluicing from her like a true nymph emerging from the deep.

Afraid to disturb her or frighten her, Dallas moved silently into the water with the stealth he'd learned in his SEAL training until he was directly behind her. When he reached around and cupped her breasts, pulling her body against him, she shrieked

and tried to pull away.

"It's me," he murmured into her ear, holding her tightly. "It's all right. Don't panic. I've come to swim with my nymph."

Erin's heart nearly stopped and panic stole her breath when she felt masculine arms lock around her and large hands palm her breasts. Did anyone hear her scream? Maybe her neighbor, the antisocial SEAL?

Then she heard his voice, soft and steady, calming, in her ear, and she forced herself to relax. But in the next instant, she realized they were both naked and her body tensed again.

"Easy," he crooned. "Enjoy the water and the moonlight."

"W-What are you doing out here?" She tried to still the trembling in her voice.

"Same thing as you. Taking a swim." He bit lightly where her neck joined her shoulder, his hands tightening on her with possessiveness. "Maybe the better question is, what are you doing in my dreams?"

Shock raced through her. So he *had* been having the same experience. "And I could ask you what you're doing in mine."

He turned her to face him, studying her carefully. "How did this happen?"

"I-I don't know. I've never been one for believing in mystical events."

His thumb caressed her lips. "Me either. I thought you wanted to kill all men."

She couldn't resist a grin. "I thought you were off women forever."

One corner of his mouth turned up. "Seems the gods and goddesses of the sea and dreams had other plans for us. Maybe we're moonstruck. So let me ask you another weird question. Have you been to that new art gallery in Sarasota?"

Her eyes widened. "Yes. I was at the opening. A client owns it."

"No kidding?" He laughed, a deep, happy sound. "Another coincidence. Your client just happens to be my sister."

"I saw you talking to her," she whispered. "But all I saw was your back."

"You should have introduced yourself." His fingers were playing her like a musical instrument.

"But then we met after all, didn't we?"

A breeze whispered over them, caressing their skin like silken fingers, urging them closer.

They both shivered and stared at each other.

"You don't think..."

"Hey, who am I to question fate?" He pulled her to him for a deep kiss, his tongue tasting and exploring her. His rigid cock bobbed against her tummy in the water, and he moved his thighs to bracket hers.

"I'm not really a nymph," she told him when she could catch her breath.

"You could have fooled me, the way you rose from the water. And you sure could call a SEAL a merman." He smiled, a real, honest smile.

Like a tidal wave rolling through her, all her empty places were filled. She clutched at him as he rubbed himself against her. "So where do we go from here?"

"I'd say someone, somewhere, on this planet or another, worked very hard to get us together. We can't let all that work go to waste." He nipped her ear lobe. "And I don't think I could give up such spectacular sex, can you?"

She laughed. "Not on your life."

He lifted her in the water and wrapped her legs around his waist as he plunged his cock deep into her waiting, ready cunt. She felt her world tilt, then settle around her.

"I'm gone a lot. Missions, you know. But we can

live wherever you want. That's not a problem." He rocked her gently, sliding her back and forth on his shaft.

"For four months of the year you'll hardly see me. Tax season's a bitch. But the rest of the time I'm yours to do whatever you want."

"How can I pass up an offer like that?" he teased, even as his body tightened with an impending orgasm.

"You can't." Her breath hitched as her own climax built.

"Then let's get on with it," he said. "Let's start forever right now."

She knew with absolute certainty that her fierce warrior would protect her with his life and love and cherish her as if she were the world's greatest treasure. In turn, she would create a sanctuary for him and bring him the peace he needed between his battles.

His mouth came down on hers again, his hips pistoning as he thrust in and out of her, driving her higher, and then they shuddered in their cataclysmic release.

Resting his head on her shoulder, dragging air into his lungs, he still managed to speak. To say the important words.

"I love you."

She let out a shivering sigh. "I love you, too."

On the wall of the brand new gallery, a merman and a nymph splashed in the water and smiled at each other in triumph.

Also available

Night Ride

by

Desiree Holt

He'd been leaving a flower every day for the past month on Lily Ryan's desk in her office at Hellfire Ranch. Just one single lily. No name, no card. Any one of the cowboys working the ranch could have left it. Or could it be the man she'd lost her heart to? And now he'd left an invitation for a night of erotic adventure.

Could she accept an offer of forbidden pleasure from a total stranger when her heart belonged to another? Could she take a chance that this Night Ride might lead to everything she desires? Or would she be stepping into a danger greater than she's ever known?

Chapter One

Lily Ryan sat on the edge of the chair in her living room, watching the second hand on her watch move in measured beats. In her hands she held a note and a flower. Almost time. Just another few moments and she'd finally meet her mystery man. The nameless stranger whose calling card was a lily. One perfect flower delivered to her every day for the past month at her office at Hellfire Ranch. No card. No name. Just the flower.

She hadn't even had a date in two years, for God's sake. Not since she fled Austin, still raw from the collapse of her last relationship. The ad for the job at Hellfire Ranch seemed like a gift from Fate, so she'd hauled herself to the tiny Central Texas town of Courtland, named for Hellfire's founders. Courtland and the ranch seemed the ideal place to pull herself back together. Focus completely on her job.

But then one day the lilies began to show up.

The first appeared a month ago, lying on her chair in the office when she returned from lunch. Every work day since then there'd been another one. Sometimes after lunch. Sometimes waiting for her in the morning.

Just a single lily, petals like white velvet rising from the long, jade green stem. Its perfect beauty was a counterpoint to the desk littered with cutting horse magazines and feed reports.

Each time the flower arrived, her heart stuttered and a knot of anticipation lodged in her throat. Maybe this would be the day he'd speak, make his feelings known.

But he never said a word, nor gave any indication that the gifts were from him. He was a hard cowboy, not given to romantic gestures or softness of any kind, so it made the possibility that he'd made these gestures that much more special.

Now, today, finally there'd been a note, printed on stiff paper, propped up against the stem of the flower.

Come join me on the ride of your life, if you dare. I'll give you a night you'll never forget. A car will call for you at nine o'clock. If you accept this invitation, please take the package the driver will have with him and follow the instructions inside.

That was it. Nothing else.

And the lily. Her special flower.

She'd been in a tizzy of indecision all day, deciding whether to accept the invitation. Was the invitation from *him*? Was he finally making a move? God knows she'd wished for it long enough, for a sign from this cowboy who made her heart do somersaults but hid behind an invisible wall.

She looked at her watch again, then shifted her gaze to read the note for perhaps the hundredth time, lifting the flower to inhale the delicate fragrance.

She knew there was a possibility she could be putting herself in the hands of a complete stranger. That frightened her a little. The unknown could be very dangerous. Only the desperate hope that Ridge Courtland, the man who unknowingly held her heart, was her mysterious lover prompted her to accept this invitation.

Besides, she'd already come to one decision. When she got wherever she was going, if it wasn't him, she'd simply go to Plan B. Get the hell out of there by whatever means she could.

So she sat in her living room, in an agony of anticipation, driving herself crazy playing What If and waiting for whatever would come.

At exactly nine o'clock the doorbell rang.

When Lily opened the door she almost closed it again. A very pleasant but nondescript man in dark jacket and cowboy hat stood on her porch. No one she'd ever seen before. In his hands, he held a large rectangular box.

For a moment she was filled with disappointment. Not at all the man she'd been hoping to see. Not the lover she longed for. But then he spoke, and she realized he was merely the driver.

"Miss Ryan?"

She nodded. "I'm Lily Ryan."

He handed her the box. "From your date for the evening. I've been instructed to wait for you." Then he turned and headed back to the car.

All right, then.

A folded note was taped to the top of the box.

Lily,

You have haunted my dreams for a very long time. Working, riding a horse, doing your errands in town—all the different parts of Lily invade my thoughts day and night. Thank you for accepting my invitation tonight. You won't be sorry. I promise. Please follow the instructions and don't be afraid. I would never, ever hurt you.

She opened the box with hands that trembled slightly. Another note lay on top of the tissue paper.

Please put on this dress and the earrings. No underwear. And wear your boots. Do not be frightened when the driver blindfolds you. I repeat: I promise no harm will come to you. You can trust me. Hurry. You don't want to be late for the ride of your life.

Hurry? No underwear? And a blindfold? For a moment she was tempted to send the driver on his way. But she so wanted it to be *him*. She trusted *him*. For *him* she'd take the chance.

To purchase Night Ride and other erotic titles, visit www.thewilderroses.com.