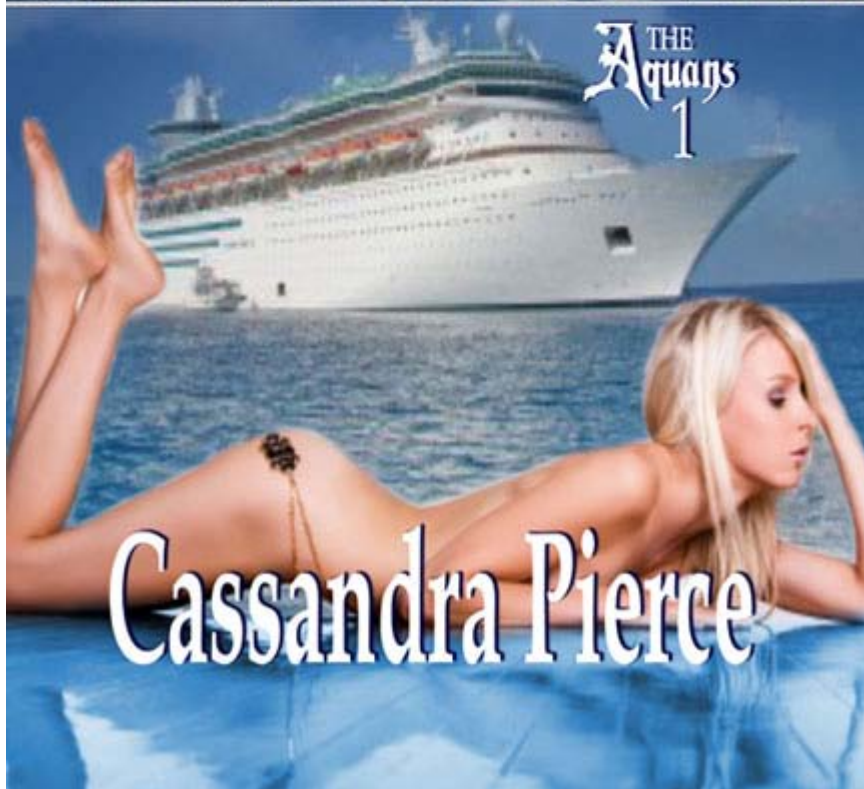


Siren Publishing

*LoveXtreme*



# JEWELS FROM THE SEA



Cassandra Pierce

## The Aquans 1

# Jewels from the Sea

Heiress Savannah Godfrey is relaxing on the deck of a Caribbean cruise ship when a gorgeous naked man rises from the water and invites her to the island retreat he shares with four other mermen. Together, Kral, Bariah, Joquin, Jhoad and Zueb introduce Savannah to a world of sand, surf, and bodily pleasures she has never imagined.

Savannah is astonished, but intrigued, when the mermen suggest that she is the perfect mate for all five of them, an arrangement central to traditional merman culture.

She returns to the ship to consider their offer, but before long a mysterious attempt is made on her life. After they rescue her, all five mermen pledge to help discover and outwit whoever is trying to kill her. Will she live long enough to take them up on their offer of a multiple marriage?

**Genre:** Contemporary, Ménage a Trois/Quatre, Paranormal

**Length:** 30,445 words

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## **DEDICATION**

Special thanks to Rachel Clark, a fabulous Siren writer and an excellent Beta Reader as well. Zoeb and Jhoad are for you—they should be swimming by for dinner soon! Hope hubby doesn't mind.

# JEWELS FROM THE SEA

CASSANDRA PIERCE

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## Chapter 1

Savannah Godfrey lay on the deck of the *Caribbean Dream*, daydreaming about the handsome uniformed steward who had delivered their room service order. She imagined his wide hands applying creamy sunscreen to her shoulders and back, and then sliding to the front of her bikini. His tapered fingertips slithered under the straps...

Sighing, she opened her eyes and sipped her fruity blue cocktail, its color a perfect match for the tranquil water around them. In stark contrast to her fantasy, the only sensation on her upper body was the steady chafing of her new and entirely too skimpy bathing suit. Struggling to ignore the discomfort, she focused instead on Angela Spencer and David Culliton, her two best friends since college, as they turned bronze in the tropical sun.

Their three-bedroom suite included an enclosed veranda for sunbathing, and Angela had taken advantage of the privacy by untying her top. Her bare back curved warm and supple in the balmy air, while the pale, fleshy sides of her breasts swelled out against the striped chaise longue cushion. She'd get up with the kind of near-perfect tan Savannah longed for. Still, Savannah couldn't get up the nerve to do the same, especially in front of David.



Sometimes she wished she wasn't such a prude. In fairness, David hadn't stolen so much as a glance at Angela's exposed feminine charms. In fact, he'd never thought of either woman as anything more than a buddy in the six years since they'd met.

Soon Angela shifted and sat up. Her bikini top sagged around her shoulders, revealing a brief flash of nipple, but she made no attempt to retie it.

"Too much sun for me." She heaved herself to her feet. "I'm going in for a bit. Wish I didn't burn so easily, but I'm a Boston girl. Clouds and snowstorms we can handle. Ultraviolet rays, not so much."

"I can put some more sunblock on you if you want," David offered from his own chaise longue.

Angela pressed a fingertip to her shoulder and watched the skin flush deep red. "Too late. Believe me, I'd stay out here all day if I didn't think I'd fry."

"Me, too," David agreed. "Thanks again for inviting us, Savannah, in case I haven't said that enough over the past three days."

"You don't have to thank me. It was the least I could do after the way you guys helped me."

Angela paused to touch Savannah's shoulder. "Honey, you lost your dad. Why would you think we wouldn't be there for you?"

"I know...but you dropped everything to fly out and help me. That's more than I would have expected from anyone, no matter how good a friend. And we hadn't even seen each other in years."

"That's exactly why I went into business for myself," David said, tugging down his sunglasses. "So I can get to the people I care about, wherever they happen to be."

"I'll bet it didn't hurt to own a travel agency, either," Angela teased. "All those discounted tickets just waiting to be used up." She laughed. "As far as my job, walking out of that department store for the last time turned out to be one of the happiest moments of my life. Maybe I'm the one who should be thanking you."

"Of course not." Savannah gave Angela's fingers, still resting on her shoulder, a brief squeeze. Her old friend talked a great game, but she knew giving up her hard-won position as buyer for a high-end department chain had pained Angela more than she let on. As for David, helping her deal with her father's funeral and considerable estate had probably cost him plenty of profit. Taking them on a luxury vacation, all expenses paid, seemed a good way to compensate them for their sacrifices. She was grateful to David for suggesting and arranging the trip.

Angela's sun-reddened face flushed a bit. "Well, guess I should cool off before the costume party or I'll have to go as Lady Godiva. You guys staying?"

"I'll stay a little longer," David said. He sat up and reached for the pitcher of Blue Hawaiians he'd stashed in an ice chest beside him. After pouring himself a fresh glassful, he held the pitcher out toward Savannah. "You?"

"I shouldn't."

"Oh, go ahead. We have a right to get tipsy. It's not like we're driving the ship."

"True." Savannah tilted her half-empty glass. "But I've already had one, and I'm a little nervous about getting light-headed."

Angela paused with one hand on the sliding-glass door. "You're not having another dizzy spell, are you?"

"No. I haven't had one since we boarded the ship."

"I knew it was just stress." Angela nodded with relief. "Understandable, considering all you've been through. But getting away can do wonders. You'll see."

She continued inside while David got up and refilled Savannah's glass. "Angela's probably right, but I still think you should get that checked when we get home."

"I know." Savannah grimaced. Her strange headaches had started after her father's death and made the funeral preparations almost unbearable. Yet, for now, they were gone. She was afraid that

thinking about them, or acknowledging their existence by discussing them with a doctor, might bring them back.

She rolled the cocktail glass against her lower lip, pausing to take only the tiniest sips of the sugary concoction. Gradually, she sensed David was watching her.

“This is the life, isn’t it?” He gestured toward the open sea and brilliant sky. “Tell me you couldn’t spend every day of the rest of your life out here.”

“I don’t know if I’d go that far. There’s a lot to be said for standing on solid ground and driving to the mall, too.”

He scoffed. “There’s a mall right on board. What more do you need? Anyway, I wasn’t being literal. I just mean there’s nothing quite like traveling the world and doing whatever you want on a daily basis. Don’t tell me you haven’t thought the same thing.”

“To be honest, I haven’t had time to think about anything but getting my father’s affairs in order.”

“But you did it, right? That’s my point. Whatever might have happened in the past, you’re free to start over again. You’ve got the time and you’ve got the money. You don’t even realize how lucky you are.”

Savannah blinked as unwanted tears rushed into her eyes. “I’d rather have my dad back than any of that.”

She got up and leaned on the rail, facing away from him. He followed, resting a comforting hand on her arm.

“I know exactly how you feel. But there’s no going back, Savannah. You have a great opportunity in front of you. I want to help you grab it.”

“I know. I’m not angry. I’m more...overwhelmed.”

“Have you thought about what I said the other day? Picture the two of us running our own cruise ship. It would feel like being on vacation every day. I don’t know about you, but I could handle that just fine.”

She turned to him, using her palm to shield her face from the sun. “You know I’m flattered that you’d even ask me. But it’s much too soon for me to take such a huge step, David. I’m sorry.”

“No, don’t be. I understand.” He grinned, clearly trying to hide his disappointment. “I don’t mean to rush you. I just think we’d be great together. In business, I mean. And there’d be a position for Angela, too.”

“What’s your costume for tonight?” she asked, deciding to change the subject.

“You’ll see.” He winked. “How about you?”

“Mine’s a secret, too.” In other words, she’d be settling for whatever the rec director had left in the closet after the rest of the passengers had made their choices. The only reason she was attending the party, after all, was that Angela and David had insisted. They couldn’t force her to make a fool of herself, though.

“Will it be something sexy? Be careful, or you might give one of those silver-haired shuffleboard champions a heart attack.”

“I’m not planning to show even a sliver of flesh, if that’s what you mean. I’ll leave the Lady Godiva impressions to Angela.”

She returned to the rail and leaned her weight against her folded arms. Her gaze followed a pretty white seabird gliding over the water, unfurling its sleek wings into the balmy trade winds.

Belatedly she realized the bird wasn’t simply enjoying its freedom. It wasn’t even skimming for prey. It was actually keeping pace with another darker and much larger shape swimming alongside it.

A man’s shape.

“David, look at that! There’s a guy swimming out there!”

By the time he came to the rail, pushing up the bridge of his sunglasses, there was nothing.

“Not out this far. Probably a dolphin or some kind of game fish. We’re in the Caribbean, don’t forget.”

“No, I’m sure I saw a guy.” Savannah continued to squint into the sun long after David turned away, still tracking the bird. The water swelled and ebbed peacefully in its shadow, with no sign of anything—or anyone—to disturb it.

Still, she knew what she’d seen. Or did she? A sleek, muscular back, silvery skin, powerful arms splitting the blue-green waves...had all of that been a mirage?

Suddenly the man’s head and upper body broke the surface, emerging only a few yards to her right. This time she saw him fully and clearly, noting his strong-jawed face, glittering eyes, and the dark hair plastered to the tops of his broad shoulders. He stared right at her, his expression an odd mixture of curiosity and disdain.

“David—” she began. Before she spoke the second syllable, the man was gone.

David returned. His brows drew together above the sunglasses as his hand came to rest on her arm. “It’s really bright out here,” he said. “The reflections on the water make it easy to imagine things.”

“But what if a passenger fell overboard? Or maybe someone was scuba diving and got lost. We ought to alert security!”

“Savannah, there’s no one.” David swept a demonstrative hand over the rail. The seabird doubled back, wheeling higher in the sky now. Aside from the steady pulse of the waves and the wake churned up by their own ship, she detected no other movement of any kind on the water.

“David, I know what I saw!”

“Okay, okay, don’t panic.” He took hold of both her arms and eased her away from the rail. “Sav, are you all right? Your eyes look strange.”

“Of course,” she shot back, a bit more harshly than she’d intended. “Why wouldn’t I—”

A rush of vertigo swept over her in a thick, suffocating wave. While David clung to her, the horizon itself tilted and went vertical. The line between sea and sky contracted and then flared, filling her

senses as if she were drowning. Her legs shook and folded beneath her, and she sagged onto the deck like one of the crumpled towels they'd tossed aside earlier.

Though her spinning mind tried to summon her strength and balance, her body didn't respond. If not for David's steadying grip, Savannah feared she might have toppled right over the railing and plunged into the dazzling water below.

Then, for an oddly peaceful, silent moment, everything went black.

As if from somewhere far away, she heard David calling her name. Savannah stretched out her hands at her sides, relieved when her palms touched the solid surface of the deck. Somehow, her vision became focused again and the world righted itself around her. She found herself in a sort of crouching position, with David kneeling beside her. The side of her head rested against plexiglass covering the bottom half of the rail.

"Savannah? Can you hear me?"

"Yes," she murmured. Once the vertigo had passed, her mind seemed detached from her body. For some reason, the sensation relaxed her. "I'm fine."

David spoke rapidly, his voice cracking with fear. "Something just came over you all of a sudden. I saw your eyes kind of glaze over and then you just...collapsed."

"Well, I seem to be all right now. Help me up?"

"Is that a good idea?"

"Guess we'll find out."

"I knew you got too much sun." Pulling her upright, he guided her toward her cabin, keeping a protective arm around her mostly-bare waist.

He started inside with her, but she braced one hand on the threshold and waved him back. "I'm okay now, David, really. Maybe I got a little tipsy from the drinks. Let me lie down for a while and I'll be good as new."

“You ought to see the ship’s doctor, at least. Heatstroke is nothing to fool around with.”

“Later. Right now I want to lie down. Please, David.”

Though he still looked skeptical, to her relief he left without further argument. As soon as he was gone, she closed her cabin door and leaned against it. Tears rose to her eyes as the muscles in her neck tightened with fear.

The drink and the sun had caused her to black out, she told herself. The dizzy spells weren’t coming back. They couldn’t—not after she’d been free of them for nearly a full week. Angela’s theory about stress had to be correct. Now that she was past the pressures associated with her father’s death, she would get over the headaches, too. It only made sense.

The cabin door vibrated against her shoulders as someone pounded on the other side. So David couldn’t let it go after all. If she didn’t open up, he’d be back in ten minutes with the ship’s physician and a contingent of security officers to cart her off to sick bay.

He meant well, she reminded herself as she turned and yanked the handle. She had to keep that in mind.

“David, I told you I’m—”

The protest died on her lips as she stood staring at a dripping wet man, wrapped in nothing but one of her own discarded towels. He didn’t resemble David in the slightest.

He looked like the man she’d seen swimming in the ocean.

## Chapter 2

The tall, muscle-strapped figure stood framed in the doorway of her cabin, staring down at her. His shoulder-length dark hair and crossed arms glistened with fragrant seawater. The same blue towel she'd left on the deck hung low on his lean, well-defined hips, the ends twisted into a loose knot. The towel seemed poised to slide off at any moment, prompting Savannah to suck in a nervous breath.

Secretly, she had to admit she would have been more curious than scandalized if he did offer her a glimpse of what lay beneath the tortured scrap of terrycloth. In truth, she'd never seen quite so much perfect male flesh on display at such close proximity. He clearly kept himself in prime physical shape...maybe he really had been swimming free and alone in the open ocean.

His skin tone puzzled her. Obviously, a trick of the light had caused its odd, silvery tint, more suitable to a shark or a dolphin than a man.

Her mind reeled. Had he climbed over the side of the ship to reach her so quickly?

The visitor didn't wait for an invitation. Two quick strides brought him into the center of her stateroom.

"I wanted to make sure you were all right," he said without preamble. "I saw you fall out there. I became concerned."

She had expected his voice to sound British or American, since most people on the cruise belonged to either one group or the other. Instead, his accent fell somewhere in between—Old Worldish in its calm and measured cadence, but without any particular lilt she could identify.



Savannah blushed. “Yes. I slipped on the deck. It was nothing. I’m fine now.”

He tipped his head sideways as if examining her face. She couldn’t help squirming. He seemed to know she was fibbing about the seriousness of what had happened. Or maybe he had just seen a lot more than she’d assumed. While David tried to assist her, the mysterious swimmer might have drifted quite near without anyone noticing.

“I’m the one who should be worrying about you,” she said, unwilling to debate her infirmities yet again. “I didn’t think people were supposed to dive off the ship and swim alongside it. You could have been killed. You could also get in real trouble if someone besides me sees you.”

For the first time, it occurred to her that she stood in front of him in nothing but her all-too-scanty bikini. Trying to look casual, she grabbed a robe off a nearby chair and wrapped herself in it. The fabric scraped at the beginnings of a sunburn, reminding her of Angela’s suggestion about attending tonight’s party in the nude. Her blush deepened as she imagined doing the same thing...with this man accompanying her in a matching costume.

His lips twitched in a half-smile. “The opinions of others don’t affect me. I do as I please.”

Savannah had no trouble believing him, but she also knew from watching several documentaries that the tropical sea contained any number of lethal creatures and currents. “I still don’t think it’s safe. Slipping on the deck is nothing compared to floating into a rip current or getting bitten by a barracuda.”

“I’m a strong swimmer, and I know these waters well. I faced no danger.”

“If you say so.” She decided not to argue with him. He’d remember this conversation later, when ship’s security apprehended him and confiscated his passport.

"I do. Anyhow, you're dodging the subject." His bright blue eyes narrowed. Savannah found herself mesmerized by their intense, almost metallic color. She'd never seen eyes like his before. "That man on the deck with you—the one who helped you up. You know him well?"

Savannah nodded. "His name is David Culliton. We went to college together." She saw the unspoken question flash across his face. "I mean, we're nothing more than friends, but we're incredibly close. I'd trust him with my life."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Why?" The seriousness in his voice startled her. Why had he taken a mere figure of speech so seriously? "What do you mean?"

"I just don't think it's wise to give anyone else so much power over oneself. Life is precious—and fragile."

He reached out, his long fingers brushing the curve of her cheek. Savannah froze, all her attention suddenly and completely focused on the sensation of his flesh touching hers. All too soon, he let his hand drop away. The nerves in her face tingled in the wake of his caress.

"Why did you fall?" he asked.

This time she didn't even think of fibbing. "I get dizzy spells sometimes," she admitted. "I don't know why. They just...happen."

"You've consulted physicians?"

What a strange turn this conversation was taking. Common sense suggested she tell him to back off and mind his own business. Yet with those blue eyes boring into her, and his very presence making her giddy, confiding in him seemed the most natural thing in the world.

"I've been trying to treat the problem on my own. You know, special diet, minimizing stress. My health is the main reason I'm on this cruise. It's supposed to relax me...make me feel normal again. But I haven't had any testing done, if that's what you mean."

"Why not?"

“Maybe I’m afraid to find out.” She clenched her jaw as unpleasant emotions surfaced. “My mother died of a brain tumor when I was a baby. All my life I’ve feared getting one, too. If it’s happening now...well, part of me would rather not know. If everything comes to a crashing halt one day, I can accept that. I just don’t want to have any regrets.”

He crossed his arms again and tilted his head, scrutinizing her. Maybe he thought she was lying, or at least overdramatizing. If he wanted to ask uncomfortable questions, she decided, he ought to be prepared to deal with uncomfortable answers.

“What’s your name?” she asked after a moment of silence.

He raised a silky brow. “I am Kral. You are Savannah. I heard the man—David—address you as such.”

“Right.” Kral? Obviously foreign. Savannah supposed that explained his unusual mannerisms and oddly direct manner. “So which deck are you staying on? I haven’t seen you around before.” She didn’t add the obvious, which was that either she or Angela would have noticed, and pointed out to one another, such a perfect specimen of maleness in a sea of pasty lounge lizards and over-50s in Hawaiian shirts.

“That’s because I prefer to keep to myself. Crowds perturb me, and I don’t care to engage in meaningless conversation.”

“I guess I can understand why.” Privately, she wondered about his attitude, since most people signed up for a cruise in order to enjoy the social activities and the banquets. On the other hand, maybe he was fibbing to protect his privacy. Could he have come aboard with a wife or girlfriend? If so, she could see why the lucky woman might want to keep him hidden away. She ignored the irrational twinge of disappointment that hitched itself to that particular train of thought.

“In any case, you are obviously in no danger now. I shall leave you to rest.”

Without another word, he turned his deliciously bare back on her and strode from her cabin as purposefully as he had walked in. The

moment he disappeared from sight, Savannah followed him out onto the deck, curious to see which direction he headed off in. It might give her a clue where his cabin was located, and from there she could make discreet inquiries whether anyone else inhabited it with him.

To her bewilderment, she saw no sign of him on the deck, the nearby stairs, or anywhere else in the vicinity. It was as if he'd leapt back overboard again and disappeared beneath that shimmering blue surface...which, of course, was impossible.

\* \* \* \*

A few hours later, the three of them made their way down the passageway to the ballroom, where the costume party had already begun. Savannah couldn't help feeling both silly and self-conscious in the getup she'd been stuck with—a cut-rate mermaid, complete with a huge plastic starfish stitched to a green tank top and a long, leg-hugging skirt covered in silver sequins. Behind her dragged a flat, boomerang-shaped tail made of Styrofoam and metallic cloth.

Angela shook her head. "I told you not to wait until the last minute, or all the good costumes would be gone. David and I had plenty to pick from yesterday morning."

"Yesterday, I wasn't sure I wanted to attend at all," Savannah said. Last choice or not, she preferred her outfit to the one Angela had donned. A sparkly ten-gallon hat, short-shorts, and white cowgirl boots wouldn't be her style any day of the week. And she certainly wouldn't have gone to the trouble of dying her hair the way Angela had.

"So what changed your mind?" Angela went on, raising her hat and tossing her newly blonde locks as if she'd read Savannah's thoughts. "The prospect of seeing David in a pirate suit?"

"I can't pretend that wasn't tempting."

The two of them laughed. Though David was walking a few feet ahead, balancing a plastic sword at his hip, the tips of his ears turned red under the bandanna and tricorner hat he wore.

From behind the polished double doors of the ballroom, they heard the muffled strains of upbeat dance music mixed with conversation and laughter. A twinge of nervousness rippled through Savannah's body. She had no idea if Kral would be there, or if he'd show up with some other woman—or even a man—on his arm. In fact, she knew nothing at all about him beyond a single-syllable and possibly fake name. She might be about to make a first-class fool of herself in front of David, Angela, and everyone else on board the *Caribbean Dream*. Still, what choice did she have? Since she'd caught sight of his mostly bare body earlier that afternoon, she hadn't been able to think about anything else.

Her heart began to pound as David reached out to push open the doors, and nervous sweat prickled along her spine. Angela was saying something to her, but her emotions churned so furiously that she couldn't make out a word.

The moment they entered the ballroom, her fears evaporated like a teardrop in the tropical sun. Kral was not only present at the party, he was making himself the center of attention. A multigenerational group of women clustered around him, listening raptly as he spun a tale, complete with dramatic sweeps of his right hand.

His face was in profile to her, and she noticed that he'd tied his long hair into a knot at the base of his neck. A dark green cloak hung from his broad shoulders, its high collar reaching to a point just below his ears. As if he'd sensed her staring at him, he turned his head in her direction.

Kral paused in mid-sentence, and a slow, easy smile spread across his face. His intense gaze felt like warm liquid dripping down the front of her body. A few of the women, noticing where his interest had drifted, turned toward Savannah as well. When they moved aside, Savannah got a good look at Kral's costume.

Her heart began to pound faster. He wore more clothing now than when she'd last seen him. His single tunic-like garment covered his chest and stopped at mid-thigh, the middle cinched with a length of polished silver chain. His muscular calves strained against the crisscrossed straps of a pair of black sandals that resembled the high-laced kind she'd seen in Ancient Greek artwork.

Yes, she thought, that was exactly what he looked like. A Greek god who had tumbled out of a painting or stepped off some antique marble base in a museum...a relic come to life.

She'd forgotten all about David and Angela until they started talking to her. "You've got to be kidding!" David yelled. "Check out all these freaking pirates!"

Savannah forced herself to look past Kral and his circle of admirers. Sure enough, the room seemed overrun with pirates. More than half the men and a good many women were adorned in some variation of boots, vests, and eyepatches.

"Never mind," Angela said. She, too, was staring at Kral. "Look at that costume!"

A middle-aged woman, overhearing her, turned and winked. "This guy is great. He's even got a story to go with it."

"Let's listen," Savannah suggested. She pushed forward, close enough to hear Kral's voice, only dimly aware of Angela following her. David vanished from her radar altogether.

"You were telling us about Lemuria," a woman in a pink princess costume prompted him.

Kral's smile widened, but his eyes grew mysterious. "Lemuria...yes. The ancient home of the Aquans, a proud race of philosophers, artists, and poets. They lived in their corner of the sea for thousands of years, swimming as freely as the fishes, until invasions from Atlantis and the land-dwellers forced them from their haven. They scattered throughout the oceans of the world, banding together in small groups to preserve their culture and bloodlines. In

this way they have managed to survive these many eons, though theirs remains a difficult and lonely struggle.”

A titter of amusement and admiration rippled through his audience. Kral was still looking at Savannah. His gaze seemed to pierce her own ridiculous costume and stroke the heat-suffused flesh below. Her cheeks were flushed, her nipples peaking as if he actually had made contact with them. As his lips arced upward, she swallowed and raised her eyes to his.

“How many are left?” she asked, playing along with his fantastic tale.

“A handful, here and there. You ladies may be interested to know that the female of our species has proven far less adaptable than the male. To this day, Aquan women keep to the open seas, migrating where their pleasures take them. The males are left to stay close to the shore and find new mates. They have much love to offer...if only they can find the right woman to accept their gift.”

He paused, his dark gaze sweeping the assembled women as if searching for such a partner among them. Their delighted giggles gave way to enthusiastic applause. Kral gave a quick bow, his cloak swirling around him with a theatrical effect.

Sensing that the show was over, the women began to drift away, some returning to their disgruntled husbands and others heading for the buffet tables. Savannah wondered if she should do the same, but the woman in the princess outfit grabbed her wrist and pulled her toward Kral.

“Hey, I think I see your new mate right here! Check this out—she’s got a tail and everything!”

Mortified, Savannah twisted her hand away, but the woman only laughed and moved on.

“I’m sorry,” Savannah stammered. “I had no idea she was going to do that. The mermaid was the last costume left. I didn’t choose it on purpose.”

He tilted his head indulgently. "I trust you have recovered from your accident."

Another topic she didn't feel like pursuing. "Where did you get the idea for your costume?"

"The mythology of the sea has always been close to my heart."

"I can tell. Your little story was wonderful. You certainly got some hearts pounding."

"Did you enjoy it?"

"Yes," she answered without hesitation. "I did. It was very...romantic."

"Most people find the concept of an underwater civilization intriguing. Part of their fascination stems from nostalgia. If Atlantis hadn't vanished, it would be just another heap of ancient ruins now, overrun with pollution and tourists."

"I guess you're right."

"Savannah, I thought we were going to dance," a voice interrupted, and Savannah groaned inwardly. David and Angela had been watching them the whole time, apparently, and for some reason David was determined to spoil the moment she'd looked forward to all day. He glared at Kral with what struck her as belligerence. "She promised me."

"Of course." Amused, Kral gave another of his little bows and walked away. For a moment, Savannah was too shocked and outraged even to react.

"I'm beginning to understand why she came to the party," Angela said.

"David, why did you butt in? I never promised you any such thing. And look at my skirt! I couldn't dance in this if I wanted to! I can barely walk in it!"

"Oh, get real, Sav. That guy was as oily as they come. Prince of Atlantis—give me a break."

"I think he said Lemuria," Angela corrected.



Infuriated, Savannah pulled away from both of them and plunged into the crowd, heading in Kral's direction. She passed the buffet, the dance floor, and even the bar, desperate for any glimpse of him. She came up empty. Somehow, in the space of a minute or two, he'd vanished.

She soon found herself near the double doors again, having circled the room to no avail. All she could think of now was headlining in a disappearing act of her own. Her costume itched, her mood had soured, and the din of chatter and music grated on her eardrums. She noticed David and Angela nearby, pointing at her and whispering to one another.

Without acknowledging their presence, Savannah stormed through the doors and put as much distance between her and the party as she could. The tight mermaid skirt made it difficult to walk briskly, never mind purposefully, but she did her best. By the time she got to her cabin, she couldn't decide whether to trash her room in a fit of disappointed rage or collapse on her bed in tears.

In the end, she did neither. The moment she stepped inside, she saw Kral's distinctive cloak and tunic folded on the floor at the foot of the bed. The man himself lay on top of the covers, his hair down again and every inch of his magnificent and utterly naked body on display for her approval.

## Chapter 3

Kral lay on his side with his left fist propped under his head. His right hand rested on his abdomen, splayed across the raised ridges of muscle. His fingertips stroked the trail of fine dark hair that led to the denser patch between his legs.

She stared in wonder at the massive erection that curved up to his navel, the distended head already flushed with need. He smelled of the ocean and raw male lust.

The heaviness of arousal settled in every extremity of her body. Her feet seemed to drag against the floor as she moved toward him, and not just because of the silly mermaid skirt hugging her legs. The hand she lifted to the light switch seemed to weigh a hundred pounds.

He rose from the bed as if in slow motion. His bare skin shimmered as he closed the distance between them in a single stride.

“Thank you for not making me wait,” he said. His palms came to rest on her forearms and then slid upward. “I didn’t expect you to—but your friends seemed rather insistent.”

Excitement prickled her skin. “I’m...um...sorry about them.” Savannah struggled to keep her thoughts, never mind her words, coherent. That was no easy task with his naked body only inches from hers. The heat of his groin seeped through her costume skirt and burned her bare flesh. “I can’t imagine why they acted like that.”

“Isn’t it obvious?” His fingers crept higher, hooking the straps at her shoulders. To her relief, he was too polite, or maybe too turned on, to comment on the plastic starfish. “They don’t trust my motives.”

He began to tug the straps down. She murmured with pleasure as her breasts tumbled free of the stretchy fabric and the built-in bra

cups. The lack of a real bra meant one less layer for him to peel off her. Good—though she couldn't deny the sweetness of the anticipation building inside her as he slowly bared her upper body.

His blue eyes held hers as he began to ease the garment lower, bunching it around her waist. "How do you know they aren't correct to be suspicious?" he went on.

"I...suppose I don't. But I'm willing to take the chance."

"Yes. We arouse each other. I became aware of your longing the moment you entered the party. Desire tends to muddy one's judgment. If it did not, few would ever find mates."

"That isn't it. I feel...safe with you. I trust my instincts."

"There is, of course, another possibility." He paused, keeping his arms around her waist, his fingers at the small of her back, resting on the clasp that held the sequined mermaid skirt in place. "Perhaps the man is in love with you."

Savannah blinked at him, momentarily unable to process what she'd heard. "David? Are you kidding?"

"What is so difficult to believe? You say he knows you well. He must have noticed by now that you are beautiful and sensual. He may dream of the day you will long for his touch. Who could blame him?"

"Honestly." Savannah bit back a burst of laughter. "David doesn't think of me like that, I promise you."

Kral frowned. "Still, I sensed something when I observed you together. He has strong feelings toward you. As does the woman."

"The three of us are old friends. You were probably right the first time. They noticed my interest in you and didn't want me to get hurt. We've been looking out for each other since college. I was too annoyed with them to see it before." She shook her head, wondering how things had gone so far off track. She was standing half-naked next to a fully naked, aroused man. Why were they talking about David and Angela? Savannah wasn't used to taking command of people or situations—especially not ones involving lots of bare skin—but in this case, she knew she had to act before the mood evaporated.

Sliding her hands along his back, she leaned in so close that she felt his cock nudge the folds of that damned dress. She needed it off immediately. But just wriggling out of it wouldn't do. He had to take it off her.

"Never mind them for now," she whispered in his ear. "You're right about one thing. I do want you, Kral. I want you next to me, on top of me, inside me."

In response, his heart began to beat faster. She could feel it pound against her exposed breast. A low growl rose to his lips as he tilted his head and crushed his lips to hers.

Savannah kissed him back, reveling in his mouth's aggressive lunges and meeting each thrust of his tongue with one of her own. Soon Kral tightened his arms around her waist and rocked forward just enough to tip her off balance. She leaned against him, letting his strong shoulders bear her weight. At the same moment, he unhooked the skirt. It collapsed in a shiny heap around her ankles. Her panties went down with it. A simple twist of Kral's upper body lifted her out of the fabric shell altogether.

Finally, her legs were free. She lifted them to Kral's waist, and he responded by cupping her thighs in his palms and hugging her body to his. His erection prodded her thigh with an urgency matched only by her own.

Before they had even broken their kiss, Savannah found herself on the bed, stretched out and ready for him. Kral settled himself over hers, his weight holding her snugly in place.

He paused to stroke her honey-blond hair. Then his fingers moved to the matching swatch between her legs. They dipped inside her pussy just long enough to tease her clit, then slipped back out again. "Are you a virgin?"

From his tone, she understood that he wasn't asking in order to pass judgment, but out of concern that he might proceed too quickly or too roughly. She could imagine how fragile she looked to him, considering his powerful swimmer's physique and forceful attitude.

She was determined, though, to show that she could handle anything he could shove at her...literally.

“No, I’m not. I admit I got a little wild in college. There’s been no one for a few years now. But I am on the Pill.” The irony of that made her bite back a smile. Angela had insisted they both go on birth control, certain that a shipboard romance was inevitable for each of them. Savannah had played along, convinced Angela alone would be the one to fulfill that particular fantasy.

He nodded. His fingers began their downward slide again. “Good. To all three.”

When he bent to kiss her again, she held up her hand and stopped him with his lips only a breath away from hers.

“Why me, Kral?” she asked in genuine wonder. “I saw the way those women looked at you during the party. You could have any of them, right there on the buffet table if you’d wanted.”

His brows lifted and his fingers paused. “Can you be serious? I’ve been mad for you since I first saw you on the deck. When you fell...it was all I could do not to knock your silly so-called friend into the water and swing you into my arms. I thought the shock might be too much for you, though.”

“I would have gotten over it. I promise you.”

Smiling, she drew him close and enthusiastically accepted his kiss. Meanwhile, he extended the fingers of his right hand deeper between her legs. His thumb parted her sensitive folds as he spread them for his entry. Then it moved higher to brush her clit. She felt the muscles in her thighs contract with need.

He drew his hand away, leaving her trembling. “Not like that,” he decided. Amusement tinged his voice. “I want to be inside you when you come. You want that, too, I’m sure.”

“Ye—yes. I do.”

Savannah gasped as his cock nudged her slippery flesh. He was big, no doubt about it, not to mention so thick and broad that she couldn’t blame him for fearing he might hurt her.

In an attempt to encourage as well as accommodate him, she opened her thighs as far as she could, until she felt the sting of her muscles protesting.

“This is what I have imagined from the moment we met,” he said.

“Me, too,” she whispered.

Kral sank into her, melting against her softness. Part of him remained good and hard, though. A single, urgent push of his hips drove him inside.

Savannah closed her eyes and arched her back with pleasure as he filled her, one fleshy inch of himself at a time. The bulging, lust-engorged veins that ran along his cock stroked her delicate nerves while his shaft drilled its way forcefully through her center.

He felt huge. Strength and power seemed to radiate from his cock, sealing her will to his right along with her body. Before long, she was stuffed to bursting. Though a little pain resulted due to his size, her body was aroused enough to interpret it as entirely pleasurable.

“Amazing,” she whispered. She was unaware until he paused, fully encased, that she had spoken out loud.

“What is?” he asked. His blue eyes burned with lust.

“You. This. Everything. I can’t quite believe it’s happening.”

“Our courtship has retained a certain dreamlike quality,” he agreed. “I hope it will continue in much the same vein.”

“I do, too.”

“Well, then...” His voice trailed off as he shifted his hips against hers. The friction of his hot flesh teased the thin flame between her legs into a full-blown conflagration. Gasping, she dug her fingers into his shoulder blades and urged him on without words. He understood her body language perfectly, as she’d expected.

With a growl of his own, Kral began to rock back and forth in a steady, controlled rhythm. His every movement seemed calculated to drive her closer to complete, mind-blanking pleasure, and every withdrawal, no matter how slight, pulled her back from the precipice.

Before long, he had angled his head so that he could take her left nipple into his mouth while he stroked in and out of her. The combined stimulus of his cock's forward thrusts, along with the insistent tug of his lips on her breast, soon had her shuddering with the onset of orgasm.

The outside world faded from her awareness, every sensation contracting into the single, sweat-slicked point where their flesh came together. Kral pumped in and out of her harder and faster, pushing her closer to the edge with each stroke. Again...again...again...

Suddenly he went rigid and pulled his lips from her breast. Instead, he buried his face in the hollow of her shoulder, gnashing his teeth as orgasm racked his powerful frame. Wet heat scorched through her in a powerful blast.

Release gripped her just as abruptly, stopping her breath and thickening the blood in her veins. The room around her seemed to tilt, as if the ship had been upended like the one in some silly disaster movie she'd seen. This was no catastrophe, though. She felt as though she were spinning up into heaven.

Inevitably, she returned to Earth. Kral was still there, bracing his arms on either side of her shoulders, his face flushed but relaxed. An irrational pang of loneliness tormented her in the brief minute it took him to get up, turn out the light, and return to bed.

"Don't worry," he whispered, dragging his thumb down the side of her face and rolling it over her lower lip. She nibbled it playfully. "The dream is just beginning."

She curled against him, exhausted and exhilarated, and let her mind drift. As she listened to the surge of the warm sea outside, she felt her pulse slow to the pace of his breathing.

At some point in the night, someone knocked on her cabin door. She also thought she heard Angela's voice calling her name. When she opened her eyes and sat up, the noise had stopped. And Kral was gone.

\* \* \* \*

By morning, Savannah was half-convinced she had dreamed the whole thing. Surely only a fantasy lover could have made her feel so gratified and yet left every pore on her skin agape with yearning. When she swung her feet to the floor, however, she found his clothes neatly folded. The ancient-looking sandals lay beside them.

Savannah picked the tunic up and turned it over in her hands. So Kral really had been here...but had he strolled back to his own cabin, wherever that was, naked? He certainly took being a free spirit seriously.

The costume gave her an idea. She'd signed out her own outfit by noting her name, the type of costume, and cabin number in a ledger. Since Kral hadn't returned his, there might be a similar annotation with his full—or real—name and information.

She showered and dressed, shoved Kral's costume back under the bed, and set off with her own rumpled mermaid gear in a canvas tote bag.

When she got to the rec room, she found a young woman at a small desk, supervising the return of borrowed items. The oversized red ledger book Savannah remembered sat on the edge of the desk unattended.

Eagerly, she dropped the tank top and long skirt in front of the woman and grabbed for the book. She pretended to search for her own name for several moments after she had located it. Unfortunately, she saw no mention of an Atlantis toga and cloak or any name resembling Kral's on any of the pages.

Not a total surprise, she had to admit. No way had he pulled that from the rather pathetic collection kept by the rec room. He must have designed it himself. Surely he would drop by her cabin to reclaim it?

The woman at the desk held up the mermaid skirt and pursed her lips in disapproval.



“Quite a few sequins seem to be missing,” she complained. “You really ought to have removed it more carefully.”

Savannah bit back a smile at the memory of Kral stripping it from her body in quick, decisive motions. A few lost sequins seemed a worthy sacrifice, even if the cruise line added some exorbitant surcharge to her bill.

“Sorry. Guess I had a little too much fun as a mermaid.”

“Well, just sign for it and I’ll try to have the damage repaired.” The woman scowled and tossed the offending garment into a large cardboard box at her side. Savannah stole one last glance at the ledger before scrawling her name and walking out.

Would he be at breakfast? She hurried to the dining room, trying not to get her hopes up. Unfortunately, she saw no sign of him at any of the tables or in the buffet line. She did, however, spot David and Angela in their usual seats, talking with their heads bent low. Angela wore a bright green sundress that set off both her new suntan and her newly blonde tresses to perfection. David was idly stirring his coffee with one hand. They broke apart and straightened up as she approached them.

“Oh, good. You’re here,” Angela said with obvious relief. “When you wouldn’t answer your door last night, I figured you were really mad at us.”

Savannah bought some time by pouring herself a cup of coffee from the silver pot on the table. She was too distracted by Kral to feel any emotion at all toward them, but she thought it best to say nothing until she had sorted out her thoughts a bit.

“We’re both sorry about what happened,” Angela went on. “We didn’t mean to chase him off. Well, I didn’t anyway.” She paused when David threw her a dagger-sharp look.

Savannah realized that her friends knew nothing about what had transpired after she’d left the party. They had no idea Kral had returned to her room, and they thought she’d ignored the banging on

the door because she was angry...not because she was enjoying the best sex of her life.

A slow smile formed on her lips. Normally, she and Angela would have spent hours discussing every detail of the event. This time, though, she preferred to keep the whole thing a secret. Doing so made her night with Kral seem special...private. It also filled her with an unexpected and satisfying sense of power.

"I see you kept your hair blonde," she said to Angela, the innocuous subject throwing her friend off guard. "I thought for sure you'd dye it back after the party."

"You don't like it?" Angela pulled at a strand. "Too bad. I've decided to keep it this way for another day or two. You know I've always wanted hair like yours."

"Listen, someone said there's a tender leaving for the island in a couple of hours," David interrupted. "Angela and I are going into port for the afternoon. You with us?"

Savannah sipped her coffee and considered. Exploring Grand Cayman Island sounded great, but right now she was more interested in the adventures hopefully awaiting her on board.

"I don't know if I'm up to it. I feel kind of zonked after the party."

"Come on, it'll be fun," Angela said. "We can swing by your cabin and pick you up later if you want to rest."

"Don't force her," David said. "Remember, she had one of her headaches yesterday. She probably shouldn't overdo it until we're sure she won't have another one."

Though Angela looked disappointed, she didn't argue the point. They didn't interfere when Savannah rushed through her breakfast and announced her intention of returning to her room.

The moment she did, she noticed a difference. In her rush to get to the costume drop, she hadn't bothered to inspect the room. Now she saw that her top dresser drawer was open a crack. She opened it the rest of the way and found her things moved, just a little, and the wallet she'd hidden under a pair of jeans lay unclasped. Fortunately,

she found her cash intact, though it looked as if her credit cards had been shuffled through and put back out of order. Thank goodness her passport was in the ship's safe. The rest she could replace, though it would certainly be inconvenient.

Damn—had her one-night stand tried to rob her? Had she turned over in the night and startled him out of following through? Cold sweat prickled over her skin as she considered what might have happened had anything of value been missing. She could hardly report the incident to ship's security. She'd have to explain why she'd let a man she barely knew spend the night in her cabin.

Her head started throbbing. No, she thought, gritting her teeth. Not another headache.

She suddenly became aware of something else that was different. She walked to the sliding glass door and stopped. Kral was on the verandah. He might have come back for his costume, but apparently he hadn't found it. He was, once again, stark naked.

He lounged in the sun, his hair damp and tousled on his shoulders. He gazed up at the sky like any tourist.

Instead of greeting him, she confronted him. "Did you go through my wallet?"

His face registered momentary surprise. "Of course not. I have no need of your money. Besides, where would I hide it?" He spread his hands over his body. Savannah felt her heart begin to pound harder. "You are free to search me if you wish."

Before she could answer, he pulled her onto the chaise longue on top of him.

"What are you doing?" she asked as he slipped off her panties.

"Getting comfortable. I had hoped to repeat last night. I found it extraordinary. Didn't you?"

"Well...yes," she admitted. "But I don't know if I should make a habit of this."

"You are on vacation. Live a little, as they say."

He propped her on his lap and positioned her knees on his shoulders, supporting her with one strong arm around her rear end. Lifting the hem of her dress, he ducked his head underneath and settled his face against her pussy. His tongue roved over her thighs and darted into the tender flesh within.

He lifted his head for a moment. Savannah felt her pussy clench with need as he tugged away. "I love your taste," he said.

"I love feeling you taste me," she replied in a lust-choked whisper.

Murmuring his approval, he went back to work. Savannah felt as though electric shocks were running up and down her spine. A hot flush of arousal spread from her pussy to her upper body. Her lungs heaved and her nipples swelled until they ached, though nowhere near as painfully as the space between her legs as his agile tongue brushed up and down, then up again. He curled the tip around her clit, squeezing while his fingers slid inside her and stroked from within. She felt herself swell against his mouth, her tender bud growing more sensitive with every movement of his tongue. Her inner nerves, meanwhile, burned as his fingers prodded and rubbed her. Wet heat bubbled out of her and slicked her parted thighs.

Secure in his embrace, she leaned forward and let each thrust of his mouth and hand drive her closer to the edge. His timing was perfect, turning her into a quivering mess in minutes.

Before long, her head was tilted back, her muscles spasming around his probing finger. Any dizziness or muscle tension she'd felt in any location was long gone by then.

When she had finished shuddering, Kral wiped his mouth against the soft flesh of her abdomen and looked up at her thoughtfully. "Where are your friends this morning?"

"They're taking the tender to the island. I chose not to go."

"I'm sorry they left you behind, but perhaps you should forget them for today. Would you like to meet some of mine instead?"

She bit her lip. She knew getting more deeply involved with him was a risky proposition at best. Still...when he looked at her that way, what choice did she have?

“I’ll need to get my bag. And you need to get dressed.”

“I can see you have a lot to learn about the way I do things.”

With a laugh, he stood up, holding her against his body. Then he leapt over the side and took her with him, straight down into the crystal blue water.

## Chapter 4

The warm water opened and swallowed them. To her surprise, Savannah experienced no panic at all as Kral positioned her on his back and plunged forward. She clung to him as if they'd swum together like this a thousand times, both arms wrapped around his waist and her chin tucked against the hard plane of his dorsal muscle.

Savannah recalled how David had tried to convince her that Kral had been a dolphin the first time he'd broken the surface in front of them. Now he was spiriting her away through the waves the same way he'd appeared.

"This is crazy!" she marveled. She didn't realize she'd said it out loud until she heard Kral laugh.

"You'll have to trust me," he said.

"I know—but I never expected anything like this! How can we just drift in the middle of the ocean?"

"All your questions will be answered in time."

What choice did she have? The *Caribbean Dream* had already disappeared from view. Besides, Kral was an amazing athlete in the water. Even with her additional weight resting on his back, he swam with the graceful strength of a marine creature, or like the prince of Lemuria he had pretended to be at the party.

Unless...

No. No way. That had been a game, a role he'd played and nothing more. Somehow, she'd find some rational explanation for all this. In the meantime, she'd just have to suspend her disbelief and enjoy this bizarre interlude. She'd have one heck of a vacation story to share with Angela when she got back, for sure.

Assuming she did get back.

They swam on for what seemed like hours, though Savannah knew it couldn't really have been anywhere near that long. Eventually she abandoned herself to the sensation of the wind and the gentle waves massaging her skin through her wet clothing. Beneath her, Kral's muscles relaxed, tensed, and flexed, in a continuous cycle that carried them relentlessly forward.

Just when she'd lost all sense of place as well as time, she spotted the bristly tops of a few palm trees off in the distance. Soon she spotted their rough trunks as well, and finally a line of powdery white sand. This wasn't the harbor the ship's tender would be docking in later, though. Here, she saw no sign of other people or any manmade structures save for a cluster of modest, thatch-roofed bungalows and a ramshackle dock. A dinghy and one much larger boat bobbed in the surf.

"Where are we?" she asked as he slowed his strokes and coasted toward shore. They had floated into shallower water now. Savannah could see colorful sea plants and silvery fishes passing by them.

"Home," he said. A few last kicks and his feet were back on solid ground. Savannah gasped in surprise when he swung her up into his arms and carried her toward the shore like a heroic lifeguard on some corny TV show...a lifeguard who had lost his swimsuit in the rescue attempt.

They had just entered waist-deep water when Savannah spotted a blur off to her left...and then another to her right. Two dark shapes came barreling toward them, converging on the two of them with the speed and precision of two cannonballs.

Tightening her arms around his neck, she hugged herself to his chest and screamed.

"Kral! Behind you! Sharks!"

To her astonishment, Kral betrayed no anxiety whatsoever. In fact, he stopped walking and remained where he was, holding her above the surface. The two shapes continued forward, each making a

beeline for one of Kral's legs. Savannah braced herself, prepared to fly into the air the moment Kral went down. She didn't want to think about the blood and carnage that would follow. She only hoped the end came before she could actually feel those sharp teeth sinking into her flesh and separating her limbs from her body.

Why wasn't Kral at least trying to get away?

Just when impact seemed inevitable, the two shapes veered off to either side. Savannah gasped as two men emerged from the surf, their upper bodies breaking the surface in a spray of water and seafoam.

Now she understood why Kral hadn't worried. The pair waded toward him, smiling and calling his name.

She paused to catch her breath. Both of Kral's friends were as gorgeous as he was. They were also every bit as naked.

"High time you got back," the taller of the two said, one hand still raised in greeting. Savannah struggled to keep her eyes on his face. "Bariah and I were about to go looking for you."

"Not true," the other shot back. He was shorter, though not by much, with a broader and more muscular build. Unlike his friend, who wore his blond hair loose and long, this man sported a short, dark cut. The salt water plastered his spiky bangs to his tanned forehead. Savannah noticed odd slash marks on the sides of his throat, too even to be scars. Some sort of tattoo, she supposed. "We weren't the least bit worried. Joquin wanted to spy on you—or maybe muscle in on your date."

Joquin scoffed. "Look who's talking. He hasn't let up for five minutes all day." He assumed a lovesick air. "'Wonder when Savannah's coming. Wonder what Savannah's like.' Drove me crazy."

Savannah gaped at them, stunned that two naked men had risen from the depths and started discussing her as if she weren't even present. Meanwhile, Kral stood with an annoyed smirk.

"I think I'm missing something," she said to him.



"I suppose you are." Gingerly, he eased her feet down into the water. She felt a bit wobbly at first, having spent so long drifting through the currents on his back. The two men beamed at her as she swayed in the waist-deep sea, blinking in confusion. Kral, however, fixed them both with a dagger-like stare. "These are my...ah...business partners, Bariah and Joquin. Please excuse their total lack of manners. Civilized behavior is a concept they have unfortunately not grasped yet."

His explanation left her more confused than ever. Where exactly were they? How did Kral know these island people?

Now that she thought about it, she never had been able to establish him as a passenger on the cruise ship. Was it possible that he had sneaked aboard three different times...to see her?

Kral motioned toward the shoreline. "Why don't we go someplace more appropriate to talk? Besides, I want to show Savannah around our own little slice of paradise."

"All right." She was acutely aware of their eyes on her back as they followed her onto the sand. How much of her could they see through her soaked dress? She forced herself to shrug off her self-consciousness and project confidence as she walked. After all, they were stark naked and seemed perfectly comfortable with it. She'd always heard that people in hot climates had different attitudes toward their bodies. Apparently that was true.

A trail led past the swaying palm trees to the row of huts she'd seen earlier. Kral led her into the largest hut, which seemed to be a place of business.

Or at least, it had the potential to become one. Diving equipment lay in chaotic heaps on various tables and desks, and charts showing undersea features and tide schedules hung crooked on the walls. A large window faced a driveway composed of crushed white shells, and through the smeared glass she spotted a faded sign bearing a picture of a diving mask superimposed on a pair of crossed flippers.

"The three of us run the dive shop together," Joquin explained.

“That must be fun,” she said. “You don’t seem as busy as I expected in a tourist area.”

“We do what we need to get by.” Bariah shrugged. His expression had turned sullen. “We’re not too fond of strangers, but we tolerate them when we have to.”

“He doesn’t mean you,” Joquin added.

Kral stared at his friends with his arms crossed over his chest.

“Get yourselves decent,” he ordered, and they quickly pulled two pairs of cutoffs from a row of pegs on the wall. Kral himself unfurled a colorful towel around his waist as the two of them stepped into the shorts.

“I realize this has been a strange experience for you,” Kral said to her, knotting the towel and then holding his hand toward her. “I can only ask for your patience while I attempt to make everything clear.”

Without hesitation, she rested her palm against his. She still had no idea whether he was a con artist, the long-lost heir to the throne of Atlantis, or stark raving mad. All she knew was that when she touched him, a calmness she’d never experienced before came over her, and she was willing to believe just about anything he told her.

A smile stole over his face as his fingers closed around hers, and he tugged her close to him. Bariah and Joquin watched closely, not bothering to hide their curiosity.

“Walk with me,” he said, and she nodded. He led her toward another door, this one set in the side of the room behind one of the desks. As she stepped through, he cast a threatening look over his shoulder at his friends. “You two can occupy yourselves elsewhere for a while. I will call for you when I require your presence again.”

On the other side of the door, Savannah found a scene of extraordinary beauty. The back of the dive shop was enclosed by a tall bamboo screen, in front of which they’d planted rows of pineapple-shaped palm trees. Along the edges of this natural barrier, colorful vines and exotic flowers ran wild, blocking any view, or even any thought, of the mundane world. Occasionally a small lizard would

skitter down a delicate green tendril and disappear into the lush foliage.

As delightful as that was, the lagoon in the center of the enclosure was even more breathtaking. A perimeter of flat white stones would make walking around it both easy and pleasurable, and on one side, a staircase fashioned of stacked rocks descended into the pool. The clear green water looked as soft and inviting as a bed, and Savannah suspected it was a good deal cleaner than any hotel swimming pool.

Kral seemed pleased by her open admiration. “This place serves two purposes,” he said. “We use it to train our diving students when we have them. A tunnel under the staircase leads into the ocean. Once they’ve mastered the basics, they can slip right through to the real thing. More importantly, though, and more often, it’s a sanctuary for the three of us. We even sleep in here sometimes.”

Savannah raised her eyebrows. Inviting as the place looked, she couldn’t picture sleeping among the lizards and, without a doubt, the bugs. And no hammocks or tents hung anywhere. “You sleep on the bare ground?”

“No. In the water.”

“That doesn’t sound safe.”

He laughed. “It’s quite safe—for us. Let me back up a bit. You’ve probably figured out by now that I was never a passenger on your cruise ship.”

“I had begun to suspect that. How did you—”

“I climbed up the side,” he said, shrugging, as if such a feat were the most unremarkable thing in the world. “The first time, I wanted to make sure you were all right. The next two times, I did it because the temptation was too great to resist. And you have to admit, the masquerade party was the perfect cover. No one questioned my presence.”

Savannah felt her stomach flutter. As impossible as it sounded, her instincts had been correct after all. “Your costume...” she

stammered, almost unable to get the strange words out. “That wasn’t a costume, was it?”

“I’d have to call it an exaggerated version of the truth. I certainly had fun with it. Carrying it on board and keeping it dry presented quite a challenge.”

Suddenly, he reached up with both hands and pushed the long strands of hair back from his shoulders, hooking them behind his ears. On his neck, tucked below his jaw, she noticed the same shadowed lines Bariah had. This time, up close, she could see that they weren’t tattoos.

“They’re a sort of gill,” he said, confirming the wild speculation she would never have dared to voice. “We’re not like you, Savannah. We can pass among humans, and in fact it gives us pleasure to do so occasionally. I’ve swum out to watch cruise ships sail by before. It’s become a kind of game for me, to see how close I can get. Sometimes Joquin and Bariah come with me. But I’ve never boarded one before. I never had the slightest urge to...until I saw you. Please tell me you’re glad I did.”

She hesitated for a moment, because it took her that long to shake off the effects of having her entire understanding of the world and its people turned inside out and upside down.

“I am,” she told him when she finally found her voice. “I might be crazy for saying so, never mind believing it, but I definitely am.”

Kral’s tense expression relaxed as he removed his hands and let his hair fall back into place. Stepping forward, he drew her against him with one arm around her middle and the other around her shoulders. Savannah leaned into his solidness, reveling in his strength and delighting in the palpable force of his lust. She also undid the towel at his waist. It dropped between them, and Kral kicked it away with a growl of impatience.

She gasped against his kiss as his freed erection jabbed her, hot and thick. In the space of a heartbeat, he had grasped the fabric of her dress and pulled the garment up over her head, tossing it away

without a backward glance. His hands returned to her back, then slid down to grasp her buttocks. He kneaded her flesh roughly, like a sculptor fashioning a dream from wet clay.

She was wet, all right, she mused, though not just from their impromptu swim. Desire boiled from between her thighs in a sticky wave. She longed for him to enter her there and then, with both of them still standing upright, not even sparing a moment to drop to the ground.

Kral seemed to read her mind. His grip tensed on her rear end, pushing upward, and in a single motion she was in the air, her legs wrapped around his waist, her swollen labia cocooning his thick cock. Her inner muscles flexed and squeezed with anticipation. She expected him to penetrate her in one relentless thrust.

Instead, he headed for the water, cupping her to his chest. The plump tip of his cock brushed against her cleft as they descended together into the lagoon, moving down the stone staircase one agonizing step at a time.

When Kral reached waist-deep water, he stopped and settled himself in a seated position. Understanding that he was inviting her to take charge, Savannah spread her hands on his shoulders and knelt on top of him with her thighs spread wide. Slowly, she arched her hips forward, swallowing him whole.

Knowing his hunger burned at least as hot as her own, she knew he expected, and wanted, to take her swiftly and recklessly. She decided to surprise him by slowing everything down once he was inside her. Her thrusts against his groin were long and languid this time, rather than hard and staccato. Kral moaned as she slid herself up and down on him, pacing herself. It took every ounce of self-control she could muster, but she wanted to enjoy the friction of his shaft for as long as she possibly could.

The plan seemed to work to perfection. His cocktip rubbed her slowly, more like a probing finger than a raging hard-on. Every time she eased up, she could feel the thick ridge of his crown catch her

swelling clit. More than once the first stirrings of orgasm intruded, but she resisted and pushed herself down on him again.

“Need...need to...” He gritted his teeth as he, too, struggled to preserve the moment.

“I know,” she gasped back, barely able to articulate the syllables. “And you will. But...not...yet.”

Eyes shut, he reclined in the water, the muscles in his legs and torso trembling. Deciding to reward his patience, she began to move up and down on him more briskly, letting the thick veins on his shaft ignite her from within.

The moment she quickened her pace, though, she realized her mistake. Though her mind accepted the need for restraint, her body had other ideas. Climax, heavy and full, flowered inside her. As she’d hoped, it didn’t rush over like a wave and leave her stranded and panting, but stopped to gather force before pulsing outward in a steady surge. A powerful current of absolute pleasure filled her mind and body, and it dawned on her that she hadn’t experienced even the slightest tickle of a headache in the entire time she’d been with Kral.

Finally, inevitably, Kral eased himself out of her. Though her eyes were still closed, she felt his hands sliding up from beneath the water to cup her breasts. His thumbs tweaked her nipples, making them tighten along with the muscles between her legs.

Strangely enough, she also seemed to feel him stroking her thighs. Now and then a finger darted across her clit, setting off fresh sparks of need.

Impossible, she thought, puzzled. Whatever sort of otherworldly creature he was, Kral couldn’t be in three places at the same time. Unless...

She opened her eyes to see Joquin step up and kiss her full on the mouth. His hands had been the ones on her breasts, and his fingers pressed and squeezed as he ran his tongue along her lower lip, then suckled it gently.

Savannah barely had time to register her astonishment at his presence before she realized that Bariah had swum up beside her, too. The two of them eased closer until they sandwiched her, running their hands over the various curves of her body with startling familiarity. While Joquin nibbled her mouth, Bariah began licking her shoulder.

From his spot on the stone steps, Kral watched with one hand casually slung over his abdomen, stroking the tip of his cock without a hint of jealousy.

At last, Joquin broke the kiss and gave her what she could only define as a worshipful gaze. His fingers remained on her nipple, turning in a slow circle that was driving her wild.

“When Kral told us about you, we didn’t believe him,” he gushed. “But he wasn’t lying! You really are here, with us.”

“What’s he talking about?” she asked, looking up at Kral, breathless from the kiss. Bariah’s hands had moved to her hips now and were inching around to her front. Obviously the cutoffs hadn’t stayed on long. She could feel his cock and low-hanging sac brush the backs of her thighs. He was as hard as Kral had been earlier.

Bariah paused with one hand on the crease of her thigh and the other wedged between her legs. One finger was a third of the way inside her, while his thumb rested against her clit. “She doesn’t understand. Kral’s leading us both through the coral garden, as usual.”

“No, I’m not,” Kral insisted, sitting up and propping his elbows on his knees. His erection sprang upward, brushing his stomach. “Well, not exactly.”

Savannah found herself more bewildered than ever. “What is this about?” she demanded. “Kral, what’s going on?”

“See? He’s too much of a coward to tell her the truth,” Bariah groused. He drew his hands away, making her gasp. The muscles between her legs clenched as if trying to pull him back in. “We should have known.”

“The truth about what?”

“About us,” Joquin said. His expression had grown worried. “The four of us. Didn’t Kral tell you why he brought you here? Aren’t you going to be our new mate?”



## Chapter 5

Kral glided off the steps and hovered nearby, wordlessly treading water. Savannah noticed that his body seemed to have taken on a silvery sheen again, as though immersion in water brought on a pigment change.

This was crazy. There was no such thing as a merman...never mind three of them, all intent on sexing her up at the same time.

"I suppose you're waiting for an explanation," Kral ventured.

"You could say that."

Kral made a cutting motion with his right hand, and his friends reluctantly drifted away. Feeling awkward, Savannah swam to the edge of the lagoon and clambered out, wrapping herself in the towel Kral had left on the ground. She seated herself on the smooth stone walkway, wiping the water from her face and hair. Joquin and Bariah crawled out, too, but kept a cautious distance as they stretched out on the grass.

Kral remained in the lagoon. His stern gaze flicked from Joquin's nervous, lovestruck expression to Bariah's skeptical frown, then finally to Savannah's questioning look.

"The story I told at the costume party was a simplified version of the truth," he began with a sigh. "Joquin, Bariah, and I are descendants of the original Lemurians. Since our ancestral land no longer exists, our species is referred to as Aquans by those few who know about us. We live in small groups we call pods, like the social units preferred by other marine mammals we have learned to coexist with."

“Pockets of us exist all over the world,” Joquin added. “Most favor the tropics, for obvious reasons, but we can and do exist everywhere, in hot and cold climates alike.”

“Within reason, of course,” Bariah clarified. “You wouldn’t catch me planting my bare ass on an iceberg, for example.”

“I think Savannah gets the idea,” Kral said. “Anyhow, as you can imagine, the disadvantage of living in populated areas is the need to blend in. Fortunately, we are able to use our knowledge of the sea to our advantage. Our people run a large number of dive shops, salvage companies, underwater photography services, and the like. The more intellectually inclined pursue careers in marine research and environmental protection. Such professions have been our cover for decades, even centuries.”

“Tell Savannah where she fits in,” Joquin prompted.

“I was getting to that. As I mentioned at the party, our women are nomadic,” Kral went on. “Some have the nesting urge, but those are few and far between. Most pods are predominantly male, usually with a single female who...ah...looks after all of them. A sort of queen, as one might find in an ant or bee colony in your world.”

Or a den mother for a troop of seriously overgrown Boy Scouts, Savannah thought. She suppressed a naughty smile.

“They like to flit from harbor to harbor, and pod to pod,” Bariah said. “They’re never satisfied. We decided a while ago to find a human woman instead.”

“Is that common?” Savannah asked.

“Not really, but it’s not unheard of, either,” Kral replied. “Joquin’s mother is a land-dweller.”

“It’s true. She gave it all up to join my father’s pod. They’re all very happy to this day. I swim up to California to visit now and again. Never heard a single complaint from any of them.”

“Exactly how many are there in your mother’s...ah...pod?”

“It’s a small one, as pods go. Just her and two guys. My stepfather’s pretty cool, though. He taught me everything I know about bodysurfing.”

She was trying to think of an appropriate response when Bariah held up a hand for silence. “What Kral is trying to say, and Joquin is trying to obfuscate, is that we’d like to start a colony here, but we need a female figure to anchor us. Kral thinks you would be the perfect choice, and I would venture to say Joquin and I share his enthusiasm. However, it has become apparent that no one thought to ask you. It seems now might be a good time to broach that tricky but essential subject.”

“We do need you.” Joquin spread his palms in a pleading gesture. He glanced at Kral, who nodded his approval. “I mean, look at the mess our shop is in. We can’t agree on anything, so nothing gets done. That applies to every area of our lives. Without a mate, we’re like fish swimming in circles. Literally.”

“I find it hard to believe you’d have such difficulty finding someone,” Savannah said, shaking her head in wonder. “Granted, you’re a little eccentric, but obviously you’re all very attractive men.”

“See?” Joquin grinned at Bariah, who rolled his eyes. “Told you she liked us.”

“We thought we’d found the right one two years ago,” Kral said. The muscles in his jaw tensed. “Unfortunately, life in our pod didn’t appeal to her. She left us one afternoon and never returned.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“It’s all right,” Joquin assured her. Beside him, Bariah looked far less certain. “Most things happen for a reason. If she’d stayed, we all would have suffered. She’s happier now, and we’re better off without all that drama. Why go through life miserable?”

“True.” Savannah nodded, trying to process everything she had seen and felt in the past twenty-four hours. Her head spun as logic, emotion, and physical desire danced madly in her skull. However, she sensed no onset of an actual headache. That was a relief.

Joquin continued to gaze at her, his clear blue eyes wistful. “So what’s the verdict? Would you be willing to give us a try?”

“I don’t know,” she answered honestly. “You’ve given me a lot to think about. And I will think about it, I promise. I just can’t make such a huge decision so quickly.”

Bariah sighed. “Sure. We understand.”

Joquin, however, wasn’t ready to give up. “Maybe we should put it in terms you can understand better,” he said.

Tentatively, he crawled across the grass, crouched beside her, and slid his arms around her shoulders. The sweat that broke out over her body wasn’t only from the tropical sun pounding down on them. She was acutely conscious of his nakedness as his erection jabbed against the towel covering her.

A sharp twinge of physical arousal raced through her as Joquin drew her close and cuddled her with genuine affection. “We want you, Savannah. All three of us. We were hoping you would want us, too.”

With the slightest tilt of his head and shoulders, he pulled her into a full-on, openmouthed kiss. His lips were hot and demanding, his tongue flavored with salt water. Savannah felt no need to resist. In fact, she felt a powerful urge to respond. So she did.

The towel slid halfway down her body as his embrace grew tighter and his kiss deeper. Her heart pounded with excitement, blotting out every other sound except her own rapid breathing. Her own brazen behavior surprised her. It was as though he—or all three of them—had cast a spell on her. Was this place magical? Were they? Or was it just because his mouth on hers, and his hands on her breasts, felt so right?

Bariah had taken the spot at her other side now. He, too, slid his hands over her without a trace of inhibition. Savannah thrust her hips forward as the two men whisked her last vestiges of shyness away along with the towel. Delighting in the shimmer of the sun across her

torso, she lay down on the damp terry cloth. Willingly, she opened her arms and then her legs to them.

Joquin's lips moved from her mouth back to her right breast, picking up where he had left off in the water. His tongue circled her nipple, sucking and teasing, while the tips of his teeth grazed her contracting areola. When he had coaxed the first one into a state of rigid arousal so intense it was almost painful, he moved on to its counterpart.

While Savannah lost herself in that sensation, Bariah slid down between her legs. His mouth glided along the insides of her thighs, alternating from one to the other, then closed around the tender folds in between. He opened the fleshy layers as gingerly as he might have tongued apart some exotic fruit, savoring the texture and taste of a longed-for treat. When he exposed the swelling bud inside, he bore down with even greater enthusiasm, flicking and suckling, tugging and prodding until she writhed with the sweetness of his torment.

"There's no rush," Joquin whispered, lifting his head and grinning as she shuddered and whimpered. "Just relax and enjoy. We can keep going like this all day."

To demonstrate his point, he leaned up to kiss her again. His lips felt every bit as fresh and eager as they had before. This time, his fingers roved over her nipples, massaging and tweaking them.

Where, she wondered, was Kral?

He seemed to hear her question, even though she hadn't spoken it aloud. She heard the water in the lagoon slosh as he crossed to the bank with his usual long, powerful strides.

His effect on their intimate little tableau was immediate. Joquin's mouth left her skin, and he slid back as if to make room for his friend. Bariah likewise paused in his attention to the lower part of her body, his tongue pausing in the middle of a deliciously naughty sweep. Savannah tipped her head back to look up at Kral, now towering over their helplessly entwined forms.

His face was calm, his eyes bright with lust. The sheer force of his desire must have been painful, to judge from his expanded girth and the dark, mottled purple of his cockflesh. The plump tip drooled with anticipation. Savannah lifted her arms to him as he knelt down beside her then moved into the spot Bariah had vacated. The warm water from the lagoon dripped from his skin and flowed over her like another set of hands. His kiss tasted of the sea and of a simpler world...a world she suddenly longed to join.

His urgent erection slid between her legs and penetrated her in a single, well-placed thrust. A jolt of pleasure rocked her as Kral began a vigorous movement in and out. Joquin and Bariah crouched on either side of her, watching in silence. Their bare chests rose and fell in time with her own, as if they somehow shared in the physical sensations she and Kral experienced.

Slowly, Joquin's hand moved between his legs, and he began to pleasure himself in rhythmic, almost hypnotic motions. Within moments, pearly droplets of his seed shot forward and spattered his thighs and knees. She assumed Bariah was doing the same, but she couldn't look around to be sure.

Then her vision blurred and her mind went blank as her spasming pussy dissolved in a surge of wet heat around Kral's pistoning cock.

\* \* \* \*

Later, they sat on the beach around a bonfire Joquin had built, enjoying a meal of roasted shellfish and fruits plucked from their own trees.

The guys were once again attired in cutoffs, while Savannah had pulled her rumpled, sun-dried dress back on. It seemed a little strange to affect even that minimal degree of formality, considering how they had spent the last few hours, but she supposed there were no strict rules of etiquette after a round of open-air four-way sex.

The three Aquans listened intently as she talked about her life back in the real world. She told them how she had earned a college degree in business at her father's insistence, about his efforts to involve her in the North Carolina textiles company he had founded, and his ultimate disappointment when she failed to absorb his passion for his work.

"He left me enough money to live on for a long time, but in a way I feel guilty even accepting it," she confessed, inwardly marveling at how easy it was to talk to this group of men she barely knew. She had never even opened up to this extent with David and Angela, who had stood beside her at the funeral. "The sad thing is that my father and I always wanted to be close to one another, but for some reason we didn't find that connection. Sometimes I think he was afraid to love me because he was afraid of losing me the way he lost my mother. I guess in some ways he never got over her death."

Kral took a bite of breadfruit and nodded. "He knew the kind of love that cannot be replaced or forgotten. We all long for that, but at the same time we dread finding it. Even imagining its loss can bring us pain."

"Sounds like you know firsthand," Savannah observed.

"I've never experienced it personally, no. But I know what it is like to anticipate loss. Remaining alone is an imperfect solution, but at times it seems preferable to the alternative."

"Kral is such a cynic." Joquin hugged his knees to his chest and rested his chin on them. "I don't see the point in giving up on passion just because it might not work out in the long run. Isn't it always better to try?"

"That's because you've never had your heart torn out, stomped on, and kicked into the gutter," Bariah shot back. "When you've been through that, bring it up again and we'll talk."

Joquin laughed. "You see what I have to put up with?"

Despite the serious turn the conversation had taken, Savannah found herself amused by their bickering. Flashing Joquin a sympathetic smile, she wolfed down another scallop.

“By the way, do you guys eat seafood every meal?” she asked, eyeing the scattered remains of their feast. Assuming she did spend some time with them here, she wasn’t sure how many clams and scallops she could stand. On the other hand, their supply of homegrown tropical fruit ensured that watching her weight would become a thing of the past.

“No, we eat regular human food, too,” Bariah said. “Pizza is Joquin’s favorite. He got addicted to it back in California.”

“I even learned how to make it myself. Fresh pineapple on top and all.”

“That sounds wonderful,” she said and meant it.

Kral suddenly got to his feet. “I need to get you back to the ship, Savannah. If we wait much longer, someone might miss you.”

Savannah wondered why he was motioning toward the waves until she realized that he meant to carry her back the way they had come—through the open water. The fact that the prospect didn’t bother her this time only confirmed how much closer she’d come to losing all touch with reality. Then again, she’d always thought reality was overrated.

“You’ll come back, won’t you?” Joquin asked as he and Bariah followed her down to the water’s edge. Kral pulled off his shorts and tossed them onto the sand. Savannah tried not to look over at his muscular body, shimmering proudly naked in the afternoon sun. If she did, she knew very well that she might have second thoughts about returning to the ship.

“Don’t pressure her,” Bariah said. “If it’s meant to be, it’ll be.”

“I believe in taking a more active approach to life.” Charging forward, Joquin threaded his fingers through hers as they walked toward the water. “We can make you happy here, Savannah. I promise you that.”



“I believe you,” she said.

A few feet away, Kral stood in the surf, fists propped on chiseled hips.

“Come on, Savannah. Don’t let those two distract you.”

Joquin raised her hand to his mouth. “Safe journey until we meet again. I hope it’ll be soon.”

“I get the sense it will,” she said, then followed Kral into the balmy waves. He waited for her to settle her arms around his bare shoulders and then slid forward into the current.

She glanced back to see Joquin and Bariah standing on the sand, watching their friend bear her away. Joquin’s hand was raised in a sad little wave, while Bariah’s arms were crossed over his bare chest. Savannah felt a twinge of sorrow as they grew smaller and smaller, then vanished in the bright sunlight. The day had taken strange turns she had never expected, but now that the adventure was over, she wished it could start all over again.

\* \* \* \*

An hour later, she still clung to him as he climbed up the side of the ship and deposited her safely beside the rail where she’d first spotted him. She could hardly believe how much her life had changed since then.

He followed her toward the door of her cabin. Savannah paused to peel off her wet dress and leave it on the back of a lounge chair outside.

“No need to get the floor all wet,” she rationalized. Before the last syllable had left her lips, Kral had pressed his body to hers and covered her mouth with his own. The fingers of his left hand slid between her buttocks, prodding and teasing the warm plane of flesh just below her crevice. His insistent erection jabbed against the honey-colored curls between her legs. Already she was growing wet again.

“Can you stay a while?” she asked.

“I shouldn’t.” He held her at arm’s length. “Savannah, do you recall what I said on the beach about holding back to avoid pain? I was speaking for Joquin and Bariah as well as myself. I consider it my duty to protect them.”

“I could see that. I admit I don’t quite understand this whole pod thing, but your concern for them showed me what kind of man you are. Not that I had any doubts.” She moved closer, sliding both hands over his chest. This time he didn’t move away.

He tipped his head back and growled with gratification as she knelt, wrapped her lips around the thick head of his cock, and then slithered her tongue down its underside. Kral slipped his hands into her hair and massaged her scalp while she caressed each throbbing vein and tasted every drop of sea salt that clung to his shaft, coaxing him to a shuddering release. When he finally went rigid and spewed hot cream down the back of her throat, she found equal pleasure in swallowing his tangy seed.

Afterward, they lay on her bed together. Savannah covered the back of his hand with her palm, guiding his fingers in slow circles over her pussy. She caught her breath as he slipped first one and then two fingers inside and slowly stirred her to a fresh boil.

“There are worse things than relocating to the tropics,” he whispered against her lips as he bore down on her, his precise movements quickly bringing her to her peak. “From what you told us this afternoon, you have almost nothing to keep you in the States now.”

A few more flicks of his wrist had her writhing against him, utterly lost in the sweet convulsions of lust.

When she settled against the blankets again, she considered his words. In some ways, he was right. Now that her father was gone, she did have very little binding her to American soil. Even her condo in Charlotte was rented. Besides, right now, Kral’s run-down dive shop appealed to her more than a private suite in Buckingham Palace.

She could think of only one complication. “I do have my friends to consider.” Her buoyant mood turned serious. How would she tell Angela and David about Kral? More to the point, exactly what would she tell them? That she was thinking about running off with a water-breathing merman and starting a four-way relationship with him and his pod?

He nodded, his forehead creasing. “You refer to the two people you came on board with. They are important in your life.”

“Probably as important as Joquin and Bariah are to you.”

He fell silent, digesting the information. Finally he raised his free hand and trailed it down the middle of her body, between her breasts. She shivered.

“If they truly care about you, they’ll want you to find happiness in whatever form it greets you.”

“I know they will, but...this is a big decision, Kral. I need to think about it some more.”

“I understand.”

He stood to go. Savannah saw that the light had shifted in the cabin. Evening was fast approaching.

“When will you come back?” she asked.

His mouth moved in a half-smile. Or perhaps it was a grimace. Since he was standing in the shadows, she couldn’t quite tell. “Don’t worry,” he said. “I’ll find you.”

Then he was gone. Closing her eyes, she listened for the telltale splash of him returning to the sea. She didn’t hear it. Perhaps that was because she was so close to sleep.

The next thing she felt was a hand under her head, roughly jerking her into a half-sitting position. She heard muffled voices and felt something hard click against her front teeth. Only then did she come awake enough to struggle. The room was pitch black and someone else was wrenching her arms behind her.

“Keep her still,” one of the voices, a man’s, barked. “Almost there.”

A splash of burning liquid hit the back of her throat, making her gag. Struggling did no good.

“One more,” the voice growled. She heard liquid being poured from one glass container into another, and a second blast of pain rolled down her throat. She tried to scream and started to cough violently.

“Okay, good enough,” the male voice pronounced. Then she was in the air, being carried from the room and out onto the verandah. The wind on her bare skin felt much colder now. The moon was bright enough that she could see the lounge chairs, one of which still had her dress hanging over it. She saw the white metal railing, and just beyond it, the dark nighttime sea.

It rushed up to meet her as whoever was carrying her suddenly let go.

## Chapter 6

“What happened?”

The words came out in a moan as Savannah opened her eyes. Though her surroundings floated in and out of focus, she knew she was no longer in her cabin. The sleek, ultramodern furniture of her stateroom had been replaced by weather-beaten bamboo fixtures, and a cotton blanket with a loud tropical print had taken the place of her beige comforter. A few more moments and she realized she had nothing on under that same blanket. Strangest of all, for some reason her hair felt damp.

Shadowed figures crowded around her. The gray tint to the room suggested it was just before dawn. Had she slept here? Oddly, she thought for sure Kral had taken her back to the *Caribbean Dream*. But maybe “dream” was in fact the operative word, and she’d remained with him the whole time.

Why couldn’t she remember?

“I think she’s coming around,” Bariah said, and they seemed to move closer. One of them jostled the other two aside and knelt beside her. A familiar hand glided over her forehead.

“Thank Poseidon.” Kral’s voice was filled with relief. “She looks a lot better.”

“I still think we should have taken her to the human hospital,” Joquin put in.

“No need,” Kral snapped back. “We handled everything just fine. There’s your proof. She’s awake. Savannah, can you sit up?”

“You shouldn’t rush her!”

"It's all right," she said, struggling to prop herself up on one elbow while holding the blanket in place with the other hand. Her voice sounded odd and scratchy, and the back of her throat ached as if she'd swallowed something unpleasant. She coughed a little as Kral reached out to steady her. "Um...where am I?"

"You're in the guest hut behind the dive shop," Joquin answered before Kral had a chance to.

"Oh." She frowned, even more bewildered. Though she'd seen the row of little bungalows on her visit to Kral's home, she couldn't recall entering any of them. "But I don't remember—"

"Understandable," Kral soothed her. "Try not to worry about it."

This time, Bariah interrupted. "Kral found you floating in the sea," he said. "He thought at first you were dead, or would be before he could get you back here."

A jolt of surprise brought her all the way to a sitting position. Her head spun as if her ears were filled with salt water.

"Was there an accident?" she asked, looking around at their grim, worried faces.

"That remains to be seen." Kral grimaced. He stood, wiping his hands on his cutoffs.

"You weren't with me when it happened? But how...?"

Dizzy, she slumped back onto the bed and rubbed her temples with both hands. As hard as she tried, she just couldn't remember anything. She wasn't even sure what was a dream and what wasn't. That included the conversation they were having right now.

"It must have been another one of my spells," she said in a choked voice. "You saved me from falling over the rail once, Kral. This time you couldn't." Tears slid from the corners of her eyes. Maybe it was time she faced it. She would eventually end up like the mother she had never known. Her defective mind would turn in on itself and implode. Her life would be over before it had truly begun. Nothing Kral, Joquin, or Bariah did could save her from the inevitable.

The figures were jostling each other again, and she looked up to see Bariah pushing Joquin from the room, murmuring something she couldn't understand. Only Kral remained with her. Instinctively, she lifted her arms to him. He darted toward her, folding her in a tight, comforting embrace.

"Was what Bariah said true?" she asked as soon as she could control the tremor in her voice enough to get the words out. "Did you really save my life?"

He kissed the top of her head and then leaned his cheek against the spot his lips had touched. She clung to him gratefully. "I held you above the waves while I brought you here. Beyond that, I cannot speculate about what might have been."

He released her and she lay back again, drawing the blanket around her. She realized there was nothing to be ashamed of—Kral, not to mention his two friends, had seen every inch of her and more. Still, in her present state of weakness, she felt exposed and vulnerable.

"Will you take me back to the ship later?"

"Not a chance. Not until I find out what is going on."

"But I need to let them know I'm all right. Angela and David will be frantic with worry once they discover I'm missing."

"Perhaps." Kral shrugged. His indifference shocked her. "Perhaps not."

"Kral, what are you implying? You were there before when I slipped and almost went overboard. I have these blackouts every now and then. It's no one's fault."

"I'm not so sure about that. The situation seems suspicious to me. I know I left you in your cabin with the door locked. Yet somehow you ended up in the water only moments later. Fortunately I was close enough to hear you hit the surface. Otherwise..." His mouth turned downward in the most ferocious scowl she had ever seen.

"I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation. Maybe I was sleepwalking and wandered out on the verandah. Maybe I decided I

didn't want you to go and tried to follow you to the rail. Anything could have happened." She shook her head furiously. "Still, that's no reason to assume the worst, and I certainly won't let you accuse my friends of not caring whether I live or die."

"Tell me this," he said, standing and crossing his arms over his massive bare chest. She couldn't suppress a twinge of desire for him in spite of how shipwrecked her whole body felt. "Would either of them have anything to gain from your...ah...disappearance?"

"My death, you mean," she corrected. "Well, the answer is no. They wouldn't benefit in any way."

"And they are aware of that, I assume?"

"Yes, of course. Kral, really! I want you to stop this. It's crazy!" Savannah blushed as a fresh volley of unwanted tears spurted down her cheeks. Her hands returned to her face, this time hiding her distraught expression from Kral.

His hands moved to cup her face, his fingers comforting and firm. "Rest," he said, wiping her tears with his thumbs. "We'll resolve this later. For now, you must trust me enough to remain here. As far as I am concerned, your safety is more important than your friends' discomfort."

She opened her mouth to argue with him, but another wave of light-headedness came over her, and she decided to let the matter drop. Sinking back into the pillow, she closed her eyes and drifted. Her mind forced away disturbing images of black, choppy water and hostile, grasping hands.

\* \* \* \*

The next time she opened her eyes, the room was warmer, and strong tropical sunlight was flooding through the single window's rickety wooden shade. Her head felt much clearer now, though she still wasn't certain whether the images crowding her mind came from



dreams or actual events. At least her room on the cruise ship hadn't mysteriously reappeared around her.

While she struggled to make sense of things, she heard a knock. Joquin entered, more dressed than she had ever seen him in white jeans and a salmon-colored T-shirt. He carried two canvas shopping bags, which he dropped on the edge of her bed. Savannah detected the enticing aroma of coffee coming from one of them.

"Kral and Bariah will be away for a while," he told her, not bothering to conceal his glee. "A group of tourists showed up with plenty of cash, so they've all gone off in the boat. I'm in charge of you until they get back." He blushed. "In charge of looking out for you, I mean." He patted the bags he'd sat down. "I went to one of the hotels up the road and bought you some supplies. I'll come back and check on you a little later."

"Thanks," she said, holding the blanket over herself until he'd retreated again. When she opened the first bag, she was delighted to find an assortment of breakfast pastries, a jumbo cup of take-out coffee, and a travel kit containing a toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, and shampoo. The second bag contained a charming tank top and shorts ensemble decorated with silk-screened palm fronds. Joquin had even had the foresight to include panties and a pair of flip-flops. Not bad for a guy, she had to admit. Never had she been so delighted to receive such simple gifts.

The guest hut contained a perfectly serviceable bathroom, she was relieved to discover, and after a quick shower she emerged in her new clothes and settled down on the beach to enjoy her breakfast. Kicking off the flip-flops, she dug her toes into the sunbaked sand and gazed out at the water while she sipped her coffee.

Joquin returned before she finished it. He'd changed back into his usual attire of shorts and nothing else.

"I just can't get used to feeling clothes on my skin," he said when he noticed her eyes traveling down his body. "I don't know how you can stand them."

"I suppose it's a matter of what one is used to. For most people, clothes provide a certain level of protection, not to mention dignity."

"What could be more dignified than a body in its natural state?" Sadly, he plucked at the leg of his shorts. "I wouldn't bother with these, either, except Kral says I have to be a gentleman around you."

"So far, I'd say you're doing a perfect job."

"Thanks." Leaning closer, he slid his arm over her shoulders. "Whatever happens, we'll protect you. You can count on that."

"I'm still not convinced there's anything to protect me from," she insisted. "Kral doesn't want to believe it, but I'm pretty sure what happened to me was the result of some kind of accident."

Joquin shook his head. "I don't think you'll be able to convince Kral of that. It's all he's talked about since he got back with you." He paused, and she heard him take a deep breath. "He's crazy about you, you know. We all are."

Joquin's hand suddenly strayed to her tank top and brushed her right breast. Her nipple contracted under the thin cotton, and she knew that Joquin felt it harden, too.

"Even Bariah?" she asked, struggling to keep her voice steady. "He doesn't seem to like me much."

"He got burned pretty bad a while back. He's more careful about showing his feelings now. But he agrees with Kral and me. We all think you'd be perfect for the three of us."

His arm shifted, leaving a patch of her shoulder free to accept the touch of his lips. Savannah lifted a hand to his hair as he kissed his way up the side of her face and then focused on her mouth. He seemed to sense the twinge of guilt that rushed through her, because he pulled back to flash her a reassuring look.

"Kral won't mind."

"You know, I wondered about that. How come you three don't seem to experience any jealousy? I mean, most guys wouldn't want to share one woman. They'd consider it cheating."

“It’s the way of our people. Aquan males have always outnumbered females, and the fact that our women don’t care for the domestic life hasn’t helped matters. Culturally, we’re secure in having one female per pod. And there’s another reason, too.”

“What is that?”

Joquin bent to nuzzle her throat again, his tongue making tiny circles on the tender flesh below her ear. Savannah shivered as she struggled to concentrate on his words. Her pussy throbbed as erotic images seared her mind. “I’m not exactly sure how it works.” He paused to lick a slow line up her shoulder and neck. “But there seems to be some kind of psychic link between the members of a pod. It’s the same with my parents and my stepfather. Even when one of them isn’t actually...uh...present, he can experience the pleasant emotions the other two generate. I guess you could say that we all get the benefits, though only one of us is actually doing the work.” He sucked her earlobe into his mouth, the tips of his teeth grazing the sensitive flesh.

“Are you saying Kral and Bariah can...um...figure out what we’re doing right now?”

Joquin lifted his hands to her breasts, kneading and caressing the soft globes as he pulled her closer. Her knees wobbled with her excitement as his cock pressed against her belly. Grabbing her hips, he ground his rock-hard erection against her mound.

“Probably.” Smoothly, he peeled her top off and let it flutter to the sand. The sun, along with his mouth, trailed over her bared breasts with a steady burn that aroused her. She reached for his shorts, only to find that he was already halfway out of them. His erection was strong enough to force its way above his waistband on its own. He nipped her shoulder as she caressed the smooth head of his cock. “What do you say we mess up their boat trip a little?”

“That...would be...kind of cruel, wouldn’t it?” she murmured as his palm slid down her abdomen. His fingertips slipped under her new panties, stroking the downy thatch inside.

“They chose to leave,” he replied, biting back a laugh. “Anyway, they’ll enjoy it in their own way. They might even thank us later for livening up their time on the water. Being in the boat with those tourists can be painful sometimes.”

Swift hands removed what remained of her outfit and chucked his shorts out of the way. He lowered her to the ground, pressing her into the soft white sand with his weight. Breathless, Savannah closed her eyes as delicious sensations rioted through her.

She touched the dark indentations beneath his jaw.

“Can you really breathe underwater with these?”

“Yes. They aren’t exactly gills, but close enough. When we’re on land, they sort of...retract. Most humans don’t notice them, or just think they’re bruises or tattoos.”

Savannah remembered when she had assumed the same thing. How far she’d come since then!

“Does it hurt when I touch them?”

“There’s some sensitivity. But no. It’s nothing more than a tickle. Kind of nice, really.”

She dropped her hand, and Joquin kissed his way down her body, pausing to suck her puckered nipples. He spent extra time on each breast, suckling each nub in turn and kneading the soft curves with strong fingers. After lying back and enjoying his attentions for a few moments, Savannah had an idea. Clearly, Joquin had a favorite part of her body. A naughty impulse inspired her.

Reaching up, she wrapped her own hands around her globes and pressed them together. With a ragged moan of excitement, he pulled himself up so he was straddling her middle, one knee on either side of her rib cage.

As he moved into position his cock jutted out in front of him, tapping against her lips. She opened her mouth, licking him from root to tip before sucking him deep into her throat. He plunged into her moist cavern, holding her head in both his hands as he thrust deeper. Her excitement ramped higher, her arousal a pulsing, living thing. She

closed her eyes as she swallowed around his thick erection. He groaned but pulled from her mouth quickly.

Unlike Kral's ultrasmooth skin, Joquin's body glowed a dusting of fine reddish-gold hair, presumably the result of his mixed ancestry. A silky trail ran from about the midpoint of his chest to the space between his legs, framing the fleshy treats nestled there. Already his cock had thrust up against the flat of his stomach, its ruddy tip drooling with excitement. Grasping it in his fist, he steered it toward the sunwarmed pocket formed by her compressed breasts.

Hurriedly, Joquin moved down her body, his smile wicked as he encouraged her to palm her breasts again. "Pinch the nipples," he ordered in a coarse voice. Surprised by his unexpected order, she eyed him a moment. He smiled at her hesitation and lifted her hands into position, squeezing her fingers against the hard nubs. She gasped breathlessly but did as she was told.

He eased the head in slowly, almost self-consciously. When she jiggled her hands, creating friction on his shaft, he relaxed and began a tentative thrusting motion. In a matter of moments, he was sawing back and forth with complete, delighted abandon.

Savannah hadn't been sure what to expect, but the sensation of his stiff cock sliding along that surprisingly responsive pouch felt wonderful. Joquin's pleasure-dazed expression and his periodic groans told her that he was enjoying it, too.

Soon she felt his thigh muscles go rigid against her middle, and his thrusting slowed again. When she looked up at his face, she saw his intense concentration, as though he were holding back. Understanding, she let her hands drop, releasing him.

Quickly he slid lower, pushing her legs wide. His cock pressed against her entrance but held still. She glanced up to see the question in his eyes. No sooner had she nodded than he slid deep and hard into her slippery flesh. He pulled out and slammed back in. Again and again he thrust into her. Breathing hard, he grabbed her ass and held

her still for his invasion. Heat snaked through her, scorching her insides as her climax neared.

Joquin sat back on his heels, pulling her ass higher, possessing her completely.

“Come for me,” he growled. He shifted, pressed his thumb against her clit, pumped harder into her welcoming flesh. Sensation burst inside her, racing through her veins as every muscle quivered with release. Shaking, shivering, moaning, Savannah felt Joquin swell, his cock leaping as he released his seed deep into her body.

Joquin collapsed against her, his weight pressing her deeper into the sand. Exhausted, Savannah enjoyed the feeling of being surrounded, possessed, loved by this man. Lazily, she caressed his back with her hands, enjoying the intimate moment, learning his unique shape.

Almost before she’d time to recover, Joquin was on his feet and pulling her up as well.

“Let’s swim,” he suggested. Savannah didn’t protest. They waded into the ocean together. The warm currents stroked between her legs, caressing each of the nerves he had already left throbbing. Aroused all over again, she turned to him and drifted into his embrace, allowing him to lift her off her feet and float with her into deeper water.

The first time she had ventured into the open ocean with Kral, she had experienced a nervous fear at times bordering on panic. How much had changed during such a short span of time, she thought. Now she knew nothing but delight as they rode the gentle waves, clinging and laughing together. She began to see why the three of them loved their life here, with no worries beyond the gleaming line where the sea kissed the sky. Perhaps she, too, could find peace here. True contentment had certainly eluded her in her old workaday life, just as it had always eluded her father. Perhaps his true legacy to her was not his fortune, but the knowledge enabling her not to make the same mistakes he had.

Later, dressed again, they rested on the beach and watched the horizon for Kral and Bariah's boat. Eventually she spotted it, and they waited as it sidled up to the dive shop's sloping dock. Kral and Bariah soon appeared on deck, helping the group of tourists disembark. There were four of them, two men and two women, all of them in their late twenties or early thirties. Savannah wondered idly if they were on a joint honeymoon. Would they be able to swap partners as easily and enthusiastically as she and her three suitors did? The idea amused her.

One of the women proved unsteady on her feet as she clambered from the boat onto the dock. Bariah jumped out ahead of her, and Kral moved in behind her. Working together, the two men took hold of her and helped her keep her balance as she left the boat.

Something about the way their hands moved along the woman's arms, lifting her out over the water, made her blood run cold in spite of the tropical heat.

Joquin sat up, too, frowning. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know," she answered. As quickly as it had come over her, the adrenaline rush passed. The woman on the boat started down the dock, unharmed, surrounded by her friends and followed by Bariah and Kral. The six of them headed down the path toward the dive shop. "I thought I remembered something for a minute. But now I'm not so sure."

"Like what?" he asked. His fingers, coated in rough sand, moved over to squeeze hers.

"Like someone picking me up and tossing me overboard," she said. Her voice caught at the terrible implications of the words. But when she searched her mind, she found nothing in the way of a solid memory she could trust.

All the same, her heart began to pound. She tried to hide her reaction from Joquin. Surely the three of them hadn't been involved in her apparent accident? Had they been so sure she would join them in paradise that they'd actually abducted her?

The concern in Joquin's eyes seemed genuine enough, and his grip on her hand felt loving, not possessive. At the same time, the image that had flashed into her head suggested two people hauling her out of her bed. Had a third accomplice waited in the water to catch her?

She didn't know what to believe anymore.



## Chapter 7

While the sunny morning rolled into an even brighter afternoon, Savannah arched her back against the soft sand and let the three men worship every inch of her. She didn't think anything, in real life or in a dream, had ever felt quite so delicious. As their tongues, hands, and assorted other body parts caressed her, her nerves sang with pleasure, and her blood rushed like the sea.

Joquin had been correct about the link between the three of them. Kral and Bariah had returned from the boat trip in an exceptionally upbeat mood. When they'd sent the tourists on their way and jogged down to the beach in the attire they liked best—meaning none—her emotional misgivings had yielded to physical temptations.

She no longer believed that Kral and his friends had played a role in her impromptu dunking. They attended to her so loyally, and loved her so enthusiastically, she couldn't imagine them conspiring to put her in a situation with potentially deadly consequences.

Luckily, she could easily banish such negative thoughts from her mind at the moment. Bariah and Joquin stretched out on either side of her, Joquin feeding her moist slices of mango and Bariah sneaking kisses in between bites of the tangy fruit. Kral lay between her legs, stroking the rest of the mango over the equally juicy pulp between her legs. Periodically he leaned over to lick it off.

Just as she suspected they did in every aspect of their lives, the three of them coordinated their efforts to perfection. They applied the kind of precision they might have applied to a musical performance. Joquin fed her the last slice of mango just as Kral coaxed the first spasms of orgasm from her pussy. Bariah's tongue stroked her own

with exactly the right pressure. Soon enough, she was bucking and thrashing against them, every orifice humming with excitement.

When she stopped shaking, they rested together, heaped on the sand like a group of naked—and happy—castaways. Savannah extended her sun-soaked limbs far enough to force the kinks out and let the trade winds dry her.

“You could learn to like it here, I think,” Bariah said, propping his cheek on his fist. His other hand strayed down her front.

“I already do,” she admitted.

“We’ll fix up the guest cottage for you,” he continued. “You can have everything you need there, even a kitchen. And when you get sick of fruits and seafood, Joquin can make you a pizza.”

“Sounds great.” She smiled, but a cloud soon passed over her mind. Tossing aside everything about her previous life, and starting over in this balmy paradise, offered a delightful fantasy. Unfortunately, reality could never be so simple.

She remained behind as the guys got up and went for a swim, laughing and pushing each other as they waded into the surf and disappeared under the surface. She imagined them flexing their strange gills down there, at home among the other creatures drifting along.

Kral returned first and plunked himself in front of her. “Tell me what you’re thinking about,” he said.

Savannah shook her head. “It’s been wonderful with all of you, in spite of the strange way I ended up back here. But I still need to get in touch with my friends on the ship. I’m sure someone has noticed me missing by now. They might have assumed the worst. I don’t want to cause a panic, especially since I’m fine.”

“Maybe there’s something to be said for letting them wonder,” he suggested. “You could just leave it alone and start over. Even if they came looking for you, no one would think to look here.”

“You can’t be sure. Imagine how uncomfortable it would be if they did. Someone might even think you’re holding me against my

will.” She watched his face for any flicker of guilt but saw none. That, at least, came as a relief. “Besides, that isn’t who I am. I have responsibilities to my old life and the people in it. If I wanted to stay here with you, I’d want to do things the right way. It needn’t be an either-or situation.”

Bariah and Joquin had returned, their expressions worried. Either they had sensed Kral’s discomfort from afar or they had overheard enough to guess the gist of the conversation. They stood side by side behind Kral, dripping wet and gleaming in the sun. Their skin had taken on the vague silvery sheen she’d noticed on Kral the first time she’d seen him. Savannah let her eyes travel across their three exquisitely bare male bodies and wondered how she could even think of leaving. Plenty of other women might have accepted Kral’s suggestion and happily vanished from the known world. Too bad she couldn’t.

“At least let me call the ship and let them know I’m okay,” she pressed. “No harm in that, right?”

Kral’s scowl deepened. “Well, we don’t have a phone here. Never saw the need. We’ll have to take you to one.”

“You mean...?” Joquin shot a stressed glance at Bariah.

“Yes,” Kral snapped.

“We haven’t been there in a while,” Joquin observed.

“It’ll be okay,” Bariah said, though he didn’t sound at all convinced. Savannah found herself more puzzled than ever.

“Fine. Everyone get ready. I’ll meet you at the truck in fifteen minutes.” Kral rolled to his feet, turned, and walked off. Savannah’s eyes followed his taut rear end wistfully until he slipped through the back door of the dive shop.

Bariah stood where he was for a moment, grumbling to himself, then curled his hands into fists and stalked off in the same direction.

“Man, this ought to be good,” Joquin said, biting back a smirk.

“Why? What’s going on?”

“Oh, you’ll see. Listen, get washed off and dressed. I’ll come back for you in a few minutes. And prepare yourself—riding in Kral’s old truck can be quite an adventure in itself.”

Sorry as she was to end their afternoon of pleasure, Savannah couldn’t help but be curious about this next phase of her visit. With Kral and his friends, even making a phone call could turn into an adventure.

\* \* \* \*

An hour later, after a bouncy ride along a winding dirt road in a rattly white pickup, they pulled up beside an innocuous thatch-roofed building tucked between the ocean and a screen of palm trees and rocks. Savannah assumed it was someone’s home until they entered the front door and stepped into a barroom decked out in a nautical theme, complete with fishing nets and plastic fish hung on the walls. A sullen-looking older man stood behind the counter, looking up at a TV perched on a shelf between the bottles of colored liqueurs. Savannah noticed that her three companions looked relieved to discover they were the only patrons. She also noticed that the bartender sported a row of telltale dark stripes just under his jawline.

“Aquans congregate here,” Bariah whispered, wiping his palms on his white jeans as they made their way to a corner table. He flicked his eyes up at the TV, which was displaying a weather forecast map. “It’s as close as some of us ever get to mainstream human society. And they have a phone.”

“You’ll probably want something to eat,” Kral said, pulling out a chair for her. He remained standing. “They offer regular meals here in case unsuspecting tourists wander in. Might I recommend the...cheese fries.”

He pronounced the words carefully, as though practicing a tricky phrase in a foreign language. Savannah’s stomach lurched with happiness at the mention. She figured it had to be close to dinnertime.

Angela and David were probably sitting down in the dining room on the *Caribbean Dream* right now and wondering where she was, assuming they weren't already engaged in a full-blown search of every deck and rec area on board.

"That sounds perfect. And about the phone—"

"I'll ask when I order the food. Sharkey wouldn't appreciate my demanding to use it without buying something first."

"His name is Sharkey?" She glanced at the bartender again. He'd turned from the TV and was now staring at her instead. Kral went over to speak to him in a quiet tone she couldn't hear. "Um...he isn't part shark or anything, is he?"

"Nah. It's just a nickname." Joquin laughed. "He does like to swim with the critters, though. He says he prefers them to the human tourists."

"I still don't think we should have come here." Bariah shredded a paper napkin from a dispenser on the table and darted a nervous gaze around the room.

"So far, so good," Joquin said. No sooner had the words left his mouth than the front door opened again. His expression crumpled while Bariah went pale. "Damn. Looks like I spoke too soon."

A red-haired woman with an overly wide smile strode toward them. Two lanky guys in baggy bathing suits and tank tops trailed after her. All three of them were strikingly beautiful, and all three had the now-familiar silvery tint to their skin.

"What a nice surprise," the woman purred as though it were anything but. "Haven't seen you guys here in a while."

Kral had returned from the bar. "Hello, Cyra," he said wearily and then nodded to the two men.

"Aren't they exquisite? I picked them up on the Great Barrier Reef last month. They said they'd always wanted to see the Caymans. I figured no time like the present, right?" Cyra pointed first to the blond, then to the brunet. "This is Jhoad, and this is Zoeb."

“Cyra is an old friend of ours,” Kral explained to the two men and Savannah.

“I see you’ve brought a friend, too. Tourist, is she?” Cyra spoke as if Savannah couldn’t hear her.

Bariah got to his feet. “Savannah is visiting the island, true. But I wouldn’t exactly call her a tourist.”

Her smile widening, the woman grasped the front of his T-shirt. Her long, graceful fingers pulled him toward her. “Come and dance with me, Bariah. For old times’ sake.” She glanced up at the two men who still waited uncomfortably beside her. “You will excuse me,” she said. It wasn’t a request.

Bariah looked ready to object, but he ended up saying nothing. Cyra led him through a bead curtain at the back of the room.

“Who in the world was that?” Savannah asked, though she already had an idea.

“Cyra, Bariah’s ex,” Joquin said, confirming her suspicions. “She’s quite a handful.”

“She’s the type I warned you about,” Kral put in.

“You mean...?”

“Yup,” Joquin continued. “A mermaid, I guess you’d say. Kral and I told Bariah he was better off without her. We knew she’d just use him and move on. It’s what they all do.”

The man referred to as Zueb finally spoke up. “We should dance, too.” He held out a hand to Savannah.

“I don’t know,” she said.

“Go ahead,” Joquin whispered, nudging her with his elbow. “It’s a sort of pod etiquette. We...um...borrow their woman for awhile, and they do the same. We don’t get jealous, remember?” He glanced at Kral, who nodded. “Go on. You’ll enjoy it.”

“We’d consider it a great honor,” Jhoad added.

“Um...all right. Why not?” Though the situation unnerved her, Savannah couldn’t think of a reason to refuse. Kral seemed to have no objection, and Joquin seemed giddy at the prospect. She pushed her

chair back from the table, and both Zoeb and Jhoad leapt forward to assist her to her feet. Each of them held one of her hands as they escorted her through the bead curtain.

In the back room, Bariah and Cyra stood on a fifteen-foot square of scuffed linoleum, gyrating to upbeat Calypso music blaring from a speaker in the corner. Though more chairs and tables lined the walls, no one occupied any of them. Savannah saw Cyra's brows lift when her two escorts guided her to the opposite end of the dance floor and began writhing around themselves. Each man still held on to one of her hands.

Soon Bariah was watching them, too, his expression one of absolute misery. Kral had said his kind were free of jealousy. All the same, something quite like it played across Bariah's face. And a similar emotion crept through her as she observed Cyra's obvious bid for his attention. Forcing herself to concentrate on her own companions, Savannah turned her back to them and began swaying her own hips to the jaunty beat.

Jhoad and Zoeb danced wildly and seductively. At one point, Zoeb reached out, whipped off Jhoad's shirt, and flung it away in Cyra and Bariah's direction. Zoeb's own tank top was so tight that he might as well not have had one on anyhow. The thin fabric rode playfully up his torso as he pumped his arms and twisted back and forth.

Savannah knew they were using her to make Cyra jealous, but as things heated up and spiraled sensuously out of control, she found that she didn't care. When the song changed, Zoeb circled behind her, slid his arm around her waist, and pulled her against him without ever missing a beat. Savannah, too, went on dancing, giving no sign that she noticed his erection brushing the base of her spine through his shorts.

She found it more difficult not to react when Jhoad moved in as well, sliding his hands down the straps of her own top. Before long, insistent fingers plucked at her nipples through the cotton, sending a

bolt of arousal straight to her pussy. Zoeb's hand soon followed the same trajectory, moving down her thigh to burrow under the leg of her shorts.

She let them feel her up. Soon Zoeb was kissing the back of her neck while his hand dipped into her waistband. Jhoad tugged down the front of her shirt and kissed her breasts with open enthusiasm.

Kral walked onto the floor. He stood watching with arms folded, but didn't interfere. Savannah forced herself not to look at him as Jhoad and Zoeb became more and more familiar with her, their hands traveling freely over the most intimate areas of her body, thick hard-ons prodding at her through two layers of clothes that seemed almost ready to drop away at any moment. A thin layer of sweat sealed their bodies together.

She gasped when a finger slid inside her, closely followed by another. While she danced, she opened her legs to allow him greater access. A single push of his wrist and he was deeply imbedded. The urgent movements of his fingertips ignited her entire body. When they spun in Kral's direction, their bodies throbbing together in time to the beat of the music, he wore a smile of encouragement.

Savannah didn't think she'd ever felt so free—or so wicked. Jhoad was now sucking on her nipple, his tongue curling around the areola and squeezing. Caught up in the moment, she bent her mouth to his shoulder and nipped at him as if she, too, were some wild she-creature fresh from the sea. What held for Kral's pod seemed to hold true for theirs, too. Zoeb churned his hand faster against her pussy as though he could feel Jhoad's excitement. The prominent evidence of his enthusiasm jutted straight out and lifted his shorts from his groin.

Was it possible for her to come right here, standing up, mostly dressed, and in a public place? Savannah decided it was as her nipples tightened and the muscles between her legs squeezed with raw need. Her clit burned and throbbed, aching for release.

Zoeb knew the score, too, and was playing her like a game fish on the line. Every time release seemed within reach, he slowed down and



eased his fingers away. Moments later, they would return and start the same process over again.

At that rate, it didn't take long to push her over the edge. Calypso music swelled in her head, drowning her in visceral sensation. Pleasure turned her inside out, exposing every nerve for Jhoad and Zoeb to suckle and caress.

Her hips bucked around Zoeb's hand, and her nipple contracted against Jhoad's tongue. Her blood ran so hot that she imagined she was burning them. If so, they didn't seem to mind.

Long before she was ready for them to stop touching her, they did. She stepped back from them, looking around in some confusion. They were peering over her shoulder at the back of the room. When her thudding pulse quieted, she heard the muffled sounds of an argument competing with the loud music. No surprise there, she thought—Bariah and Cyra had started bickering, and her own companions were watching with amused interest.

Soon Bariah slapped Cyra's hands off his chest and pushed his way back through the bead curtain, its glossy strands flapping in his wake. Cyra was right behind him, still shouting words she couldn't make out. She paused to shoot Savannah and her new friends the most infuriated glare Savannah had ever seen.

Knowing the dance was over, Savannah smoothed her clothes and followed with as much dignity as she could muster. She didn't check whether or not Zoeb and Jhoad accompanied her from the floor. She knew they would.

She emerged from the back room in time to see Bariah slump into his seat, folding his arms and staring at the table in a sulk. The cheese fries had arrived, which reminded Savannah to ask about the phone. First, she planned to stuff her face with food. In all the excitement, she hadn't noticed how hungry she was.

Before she could grab some, though, Cyra moved in front of her and practically shoved her out of the way. Ignoring Bariah, Cyra bent

instead over Joquin's chair, leaning over until her scantily covered breasts touched his face.

"Maybe you have better manners, Joquin. Buy me a drink," she demanded. "Something with an orange on the side of the glass. Those are so quaint."

"Sorry." Grinning, Joquin patted his denim cutoffs. "No money."

"I'll take care of it," Kral said. He stalked back to the bar. Sniffing in offense, Cyra straightened and moved away from the table. Gratefully, Savannah reached out and grabbed a handful of fries. She would have enjoyed them much more if Cyra hadn't been watching her with an unmistakable look of disgust. Whether it was directed at the fries or at Savannah herself she couldn't tell. When she tried to move away, heading back toward the bar, Cyra followed her.

"You may think you have them wrapped around your finger now," she growled under her breath. "You'll find out soon enough just how different they are from you. You won't like their way of life one bit. Trust me."

"I like them. A lot. Doesn't that count for something?"

Cyra rolled her wide green eyes. "You like their filthy dive shop? That tiny lagoon?" She rolled her shoulders in an exaggerated shudder. "Talk to me in a month or so. You'll be singing a different song then."

"Don't count on it." Savannah's temper flared. "Anyway, what about Zueb and Jhoad? Don't they keep you busy enough that you don't have to butt into my pod?"

"So they're your pod now?" Cyra laughed unpleasantly. "They're also boys, at least Joquin and Bariah are. Only Kral is a man. You'll notice that he didn't fight for you when you were back there making a fool of yourself with my men. That's because he doesn't really want you. He knows the arrangement would never work out. He's just having some fun with you. They all are."

Savannah opened her mouth to object, but stopped herself before she blurted out something foolish. Much as she didn't want to admit

it, Cyra's words stung. Maybe she did know what she was talking about. After all, she was one of them. And no matter how Savannah looked at it, the very idea of sharing three—or more—men bore no resemblance to anything she'd ever learned or imagined about relationships.

Cyra started to say something else. She stopped when Kral, leaning against the bar, barked out a curse.

Everyone turned, their gazes following his to the TV mounted above the bar. A local news show had come on, and a female announcer with a British accent was introducing a story.

To Savannah's shock, a videotaped image of David filled the screen. He stood in front of a row of uniformed officials, sobbing. The words "Honeymoon Tragedy" flashed across his chest. Though Savannah couldn't hear every word, the announcer had begun to detail the shocking disappearance of a tourist from a cruise ship presently anchored off the island.

Then her own picture appeared.

"Honeymoon?" she repeated out loud. Surely this was some kind of mistake.

The camera returned to David, who wiped at his seemingly dry eyes and shook his head.

"My wife, Savannah," he choked out between sobs. "She just disappeared."

## Chapter 8

“Wife?” Kral’s voice caught in his throat. He whirled on Savannah with a stricken expression. “You and this human are married?”

“No! Of course not!” She felt her face turning red, probably convincing him of her deceit. The whole situation was surreal. “I told you before! David’s a friend and nothing else!”

Beside her, Cyra laughed. “So she’s already lying to you. Your little party is off to a good start, isn’t it, Kral?”

“Stay out of this,” Kral snapped.

“Maybe if we could hear the report, we could find out what’s going on,” Joquin suggested. “Sharkey, turn up the volume.”

All eight of them listened, transfixed, as the TV unfolded a stunning tale. According to David, he and his lovely fiancée, Savannah Godfrey, had become engaged after her father’s death back in the States. After a suitable period of grieving, they had planned their getaway wedding to the Cayman Islands and invited a friend along as a witness. Finally, the ship had arrived in the tropics and they had exchanged vows at one of the many quickie nuptial spots favored by American tourists, though their friend had taken ill and missed the ceremony. Locals had served as witnesses instead.

Back on board, the new Mrs. Culliton had waited in the bridal suite while David returned to his own room to retrieve his wedding gift to her—a dazzling gold necklace studded with the sort of diamonds most people took out a loan to purchase. Savannah could only gape as he flashed the baubles in front of the camera.

“He didn’t buy that for me,” she said, gaping. “No way.”

Sadly, David went on to relate, the presentation never took place. By the time he returned to his new wife's room, she had vanished without a trace. A painstaking search of the entire ship, not to mention repeated questioning of both David and the American friend who had accompanied them on the trip, had failed to yield a single clue. Authorities had now begun investigating the possibility of suicide.

"I know she would never have taken her own life," David blubbered as the segment ended on this mysterious note. "Savannah loved me. We were looking forward to our future together."

"How interesting," Cyra chirped as the program faded into a commercial.

Savannah grasped Kral's arm and turned him to face her.

"There, you see? Proof that David is lying. I wasn't with him yesterday. I was with you—all of you. The only part he was right about was my disappearing from my cabin."

The softening in Kral's eyes told her he'd realized the same thing.

"A puzzling situation, to be sure. You really have no idea what he is talking about?"

"None, I swear. We planned the cruise as a relaxing getaway, not a wedding trip. I can't imagine why he would say such a thing!"

"Maybe it's some misguided way of protecting you," Joquin suggested. "Could someone be after you? Like an enemy of your father's or something?"

"You watched too many stupid crime shows when you lived in California," Bariah snapped.

"I guess anything's possible," Savannah conceded, "but that doesn't make sense. My father's enemies, assuming he had any, would gain nothing by hurting me. I don't even have a controlling share in his business anymore. I sold everything and walked away long before I signed up for the cruise."

"Maybe the guy's just plain crazy," Zoeb offered. "Plenty of people convince themselves they're in some kind of relationship with

someone who secretly can't stand them." He darted a pointed look at Cyra, who bared her teeth.

"But a whole wedding? Dude must be seriously deluded," Joquin said.

"Well, I think one thing's settled, at least." Savannah scanned the faces of the bewildered group. "I have to present myself to the authorities. They need to know I'm all right. Please get me that phone you promised, Kral."

He shook his head. "We can't tell anyone where you are. If people think you're dead, they're not likely to come looking for you. You'll be safe until we can make some sense of what's going on."

"But we need to tell people that David is lying. And what about Angela?"

"I seriously doubt either of them is too worried about you at the moment."

"You don't know that."

"Don't even bother." Joquin waved his hand in surrender. "When he's like this, there's no changing his mind."

"Maybe we should continue this discussion in private," Kral said. "I'll get the truck."

"What a bore this evening has turned into," Cyra complained. She grabbed Jhoad and Zoeb by the wrists. "Come on. I want to dance some more."

Neither of them even glanced at her. "If you want us to come with you, we'd be happy to help," Zoeb said to Kral.

Kral gave a curt nod. "We can use all the help we can get."

"Count us in, then." Jhoad flashed Savannah a reassuring smile. "Don't worry. Zoeb and I are professional treasure hunters. We love a good mystery. We'll figure out what's going on."

"Un-freaking-believable!" Cyra huffed. Dropping the two men's wrists as if they had suddenly turned toxic, she whirled on one heel and stalked away. The bead curtain clattered as she sailed through. No one looked around.

“I guess we’re on our way, then,” Bariah said with obvious relief.

“Wait. There’s just one thing.” Joquin hustled back to the table. He grabbed the plate of appetizers and held it up over his head. “Hey, Sharkey, can we get these wrapped up to go?”

\* \* \* \*

Bariah, Zoeb, and Jhoad climbed into the back of Kral’s pickup, while Savannah and Joquin joined Kral in the cab. As the truck rumbled and bounced over the winding dirt road that led to the dive shop, they continued to debate the matter.

“I’m sure David has a reason for what he’s doing,” Savannah reflected. “Maybe he thinks the authorities will look harder for me if he pretends we’re married.”

Kral’s brows lifted. “You honestly believe that?”

“Well...no.” Slumping back in the seat, she leaned her head dejectedly on Joquin’s shoulder. Who was she trying to kid? That explanation sounded foolish, even to her. Yet the possibility of her two most trusted friends conspiring against her made no sense, either.

They reconvened in the dive shop soon after sunset, Kral motioning everyone into a circle. Savannah noticed that the three passengers from the back of the truck looked extraordinarily pleased with themselves, no doubt having spent the entire ride swapping accounts of Cyra’s misdeeds. Their expressions grew serious, though, when Kral fixed them with a menacing look.

“Our first step will be to gather information,” he announced, linking his fingers with Savannah’s in a gesture she found comforting. Somehow, she had no doubt he really could sort everything out. However painful the facts turned out to be, he would make sure all of them came through okay. “I doubt the authorities are releasing all the information they have, but it’s going to be our job to find out what we can.”

Jhoad raised a tentative hand. “Zoeb and I have some contacts at the Royal Police Service,” he offered. “We had to clear a couple of our treasure hunts with them. We can pretend we have a lead on a sunken pirate vessel and strike up a conversation about the scandal. Might catch them off guard, get them to blurt something out.”

“Sounds good. Why don’t you get on it right away?” Kral said. The two of them nodded and headed for the door. He turned to Joquin next. “I want you to find out about this supposed wedding that took place. We know it’s a lie, but maybe David paid someone to forge a certificate. You’re good at putting humans at ease. Go and mingle with people who might know and ask them questions. See if anyone heard any rumors or saw him around the port.”

After Joquin, too, had departed on his mission, Kral gave Savannah’s hand a squeeze. This time, she recognized that the warm flutter in her heart resulted from something deeper than just gratitude. “I’m going into town, too, to get some newspapers we can study together. I can’t swim with them, obviously, so I’ll use the truck. You’ll be all right?”

“I guess I’ll have to be. I don’t suppose there’s any chance of you taking me along.”

“No. You’re officially missing, and I intend to keep it that way until we figure out what’s going on.”

Bariah had drawn back toward the wall as the others left the room. He watched Kral and Savannah’s exchange with his arms folded and a frustrated look on his face. “What about me?”

“You actually have the most important job,” Kral told him. “You’re responsible for Savannah. Make sure she doesn’t leave and no one comes hunting for her. That sounds a lot simpler than it is.”

Bariah gave a dismissive snort. “Don’t worry. I got her covered.”

“Good. I’m going to take her to her cabin now. Come on, Savannah. Let’s get you settled.”

They walked together down the path to the row of bungalows, Kral’s fingers gently entwined with hers. The moment they stepped



into the guest cottage, though, his manner changed. His grip on her hand tightened, and he spun her around roughly to face him.

“Savannah,” he growled, one moment before his urgent mouth swept her breath away. She met his kiss with equal fury, giving vent to the arousal that lingered after her interlude with Jhoad and Zoeb on the dance floor.

He left her mouth burning when he pulled back. His chest rose and fell with visible emotion.

“When I thought...you and that human...I nearly went mad.” His words came out in a groan.

He lifted her against the wall of the cottage, his strong arms bracing her with her feet barely touching solid ground. One flip-flop slid off and hit the floor, followed by her shorts. His cutoffs fluttered on top of hers a moment later. He peeled up her shirt and pulled it over her shoulders, not even bothering with his own.

He dipped his head and took not just her nipple, but half of her right breast into his mouth. He sucked her desperately and chewed her flesh as if he wanted to devour her.

She reached for him and opened her legs, guiding his plump cock head to her inner lips. She rubbed him against her wet pussy folds a few times, just to tease him. She felt every nerve in his groin spark.

Soon his thick shaft slipped inside her. She moaned as he pushed deeper into her. Her feet lifted at least an inch off the floor as he tilted back, driving his way upward. Soon he was encased to the hilt, his hot balls wedged against the outer folds of her cleft.

“Don’t worry about anyone else,” she whispered in his ear as she hugged his body close to hers. “I’m yours. Only yours.”

She clamped around his shaft, her private muscles rippling, rubbing him down like a pumping fist. She could feel his veins spidering along the shaft, flaring as his blood rushed through him with the fury of an erupting volcano.

They came together, writhing against the wall. Her fists hammered his shoulders as she wailed in pure pleasure. She felt as

though she were riding a wave. Kral soon unloaded a hot volley into her that left her thighs shaking and her knees buckling.

He set her feet on the floor and leaned her shoulders against the wall. Good thing, she thought, because she could hardly stand on her own after that.

“Stay here,” he ordered. “Do you understand me? No leaving. You’re Bariah’s responsibility until I get back.”

He yanked his pants and sandals back on, walked out, and slammed the cottage door behind him.

Savannah faced the empty room with agitation. How could she stay here when so much was going on around her—about her? She knew the real answers lay on the one place none of them would go—the ship.

She tried to pass the time by showering and fixing up the cottage. Her new clothes had gotten quite the workout today...so much that she didn’t think she should wear them again after she had just showered. Luckily, she found a spare T-shirt in one of the drawers and pulled it on. The garment might have been Kral’s, since it reached halfway down to her knees, but that suited her present purpose fine.

The view from her window had gone dark by the time Bariah arrived to check on her.

“Doing okay?” he asked, leaning in the doorway.

“No! I hate having to stay here! Where are they?”

He shrugged. “Not back yet.”

“They’re not going to find anything out, you know. I can’t imagine how wandering around town asking nosy questions will resolve anything, especially if I’m in real danger.”

He crossed his arms and sighed. “If you ask me, I think Kral’s going about this all wrong. I tried to tell him that his plan might even make things worse.”

“I agree.” She nodded. “If David is pulling a con, he’d be too clever to blab the details all over town. He’d be more likely to plant false clues. No offense, but how could any of you guys know what’s a

real lead and what isn't? You don't know enough about my previous life, or my friendship with David. At least I know how his mind works."

She let that sink in. Bariah's troubled expression suggested that her strategy was working.

"I want to go back to the ship, Bariah," she finally announced. "Will you take me?"

He winced. "Kral will be furious."

"Not if we straighten this out. Then I can come back here and we can start fresh...build the kind of life we all want. No baggage. No one looking for me. It's the only way, Bariah. Surely you can see that."

"What you say makes sense," he admitted. "But Kral..."

"He'll never admit it, but Kral doesn't always know what's best. You can get me back on the ship, Bariah. We can solve this together. What do you say?"

He finally nodded. Squaring his shoulders, he held out his hand.

"Come on."

## Chapter 9

Although Bariah lacked Kral's ruggedly muscular build, he carried her through the dark, churning water with swift efficiency. During every forward stroke, Savannah expected to feel the sharp bite of some nocturnal predator on her own legs. Thankfully, whatever marauding creatures shared their space had sufficient consideration to leave them alone.

At last, they swam into the circle of brilliant light cast from the *Caribbean Dream*.

"Which railing is yours?" he asked. She pointed out what she hoped was the right one, then bit her lip as he glided in that direction.

"What if someone sees us?" she whispered. In a way, she was surprised not to find a crowd of officials and volunteers searching for her, since they believed she had thrown herself overboard. Either they had postponed such activity until morning, or the news report had been mistaken. How ironic that they had actually guessed the truth, but misinterpreted the way she had ended up in the water.

"Don't worry," Bariah said as he took hold of the side of the ship, digging his fingernails into the steel in a way she would have thought impossible if she hadn't already seen Kral do the same thing. "We're safe. In a way, it was a good thing we waited until dark to swim out here."

She clung to Bariah's straining shoulders as he scaled the side of the ship, her knees clamped around the waistband of his cutoffs. The T-shirt she wore clung to her in an uncomfortable and embarrassing way, and she could tell that the waterlogged fabric added to the weight on his back. To his credit, he didn't complain or even grunt

with the effort. Though it would certainly have been easier to swim clothing-free, she'd convinced him of the drawbacks of boarding the ship, and possibly confronting David, in a state of undress.

They reached the small deck where she had originally spotted Kral and clambered over the railing. Kral would have returned to the dive shop by now, she reflected, and was no doubt livid at her and Bariah both. She was prepared to handle his anger, but she hoped he wouldn't be too hard on Bariah when he finally caught up with them.

They stood on the deck, surveying the sliding glass doors that led to the suite's three staterooms. All the curtains were drawn, with no sign of activity behind any of them.

"Maybe they're not here," Savannah said. "They could be off looking for me somewhere."

"Suits me fine," Bariah said. "We can check things out at our own pace, then."

She nodded. "Come on. This one's my room."

Stepping forward, she keyed in the code number for the middle door and pushed it open. Bariah gave her a warning glance and preceded her inside. She followed him. The two of them stopped short the moment they cleared the threshold.

Savannah's room looked as though it had been thoroughly searched, with the drawers pulled out and her luggage spread over every available chair and table. That in itself didn't surprise her—after all, she was, for the moment, a missing person. She expected security officers and her friends to do whatever was necessary to uncover clues.

What shocked her was the sight of David and Angela together in her bed.

As her eyes adjusted to the dim light, they widened. The floor around them was strewn with the remnants of a romantic room service, including empty fluted glasses and an upended champagne bottle. Angela, as far as she could see, was wearing nothing but the diamond necklace David had flashed in front of the TV camera.

“So much for the grieving widower.” Bariah snorted and moved to turn on the lights in the room.

The sudden burst of illumination roused the sleeping couple. David sat up first, then fumbled to pull the sheet over himself. Savannah averted her eyes from his nakedness, repulsed in a way she never was when Kral, Joquin, and Bariah walked around in their natural states. Seeing David this way seemed...well, completely unnatural, to say the least.

“Savannah...my god...I thought you were dead!” David stammered as Angela curled up beside him. Trying to hide the necklace, Savannah decided. David noticed Bariah a second later. “Who the hell is this?”

“He’s a...a friend. Unlike the two of you, apparently,” she answered. She could still barely comprehend what she saw. They had all been so close for so many years. If David and Angela had fallen for each other, why hadn’t they told her? She would never have objected.

Sweat gleaming on his forehead, David scrambled out of bed and hastily grabbed his bathrobe, which lay draped over a chair. He tied it shut while Angela shimmied into her discarded nightgown. She swept the necklace under the bedcovers in the process.

“It’s not what you think,” David insisted. “You’ve got it all wrong. Angela and I were just so worried about you that—well, we just kind of fell into bed together. It was a mistake. It won’t happen again.”

“David, I saw you on TV. What’s all this crap about us being married?”

“As a matter of fact, you are married,” Bariah said. He retrieved a piece of paper from the top of the bureau and held it up. “Here’s your wedding certificate, made out in both your names and signed by the witnesses. Somehow, you managed to become David’s wife without really being there.”

The sight of the bureau triggered the memory of her rifled drawer, which she had blamed on Kral. Now things began to make sense.

And Angela's hair was back to its old color. She'd even cut it so that it no longer resembled Savannah's at all.

"You stole my identity," she blurted, too shocked to play things cool. "You pretended to be me when you went ashore, and then you married him in my place. That was the whole reason for this cruise. You figured no one here would know the difference or even check all that carefully. When you got back, you tried to kill me. You two drugged me and threw me over the rail. You didn't think I'd live to tell anyone." She glanced at Bariah, who had moved closer to her.

"You were wrong about that," he said.

Kral had guessed the truth, after all. It had been about money from the beginning. "This way, as my surviving spouse, David can lay claim to my inheritance once he gets home. Then he and Angela can be together," she explained to Bariah.

"You idiot," Angela snarled. "I told you not to talk to those vultures from the media."

David looked from her to Bariah and finally back to Savannah again. "Did anybody see you come in here?" he asked.

"No," Savannah said. Too late, she realized her mistake.

"Well, then...I guess they never will."

She managed to leap aside just as he lunged forward, only to be waylaid by Angela, who grabbed her by both wrists. David went straight for Bariah, who put out his arms and slammed his attacker to the floor. Barely fazed by the impact, David rolled to his feet, grabbing the champagne bottle as a weapon. He swung it at Bariah, only to miss and shatter the glass against the edge of the bureau. With a vicious laugh, he arced it again, cutting deeply into Bariah's right forearm.

A wave of blood splashed across the room, the majority of it landing on Angela. She screamed and released Savannah, who rushed to shield Bariah's body with her own. He was holding his wound,

blood dripping through his fingers. It didn't look like normal blood, however. Its color was a dark, silvery black.

David and Angela paused in their onslaught, expressions slack with horror.

"What the hell is this guy?" David asked. "Some kind of mermaid?"

"Don't be stupid," Angela snapped back. She began wiping the odd substance off her own skin. "There's no such thing. It's a trick. Now get her!"

"Right." David handed Angela the bottle, lowered his shoulder, and hurtled forward. He crashed into Savannah, knocking her into Bariah and sending them both sprawling beneath him. She heard Bariah moan, his continuing loss of blood apparently rendering him too weak to fight back. And her own strength, she realized, was no match for both David and Angela as they grabbed her and held her down.

"Tie her up," Angela said. "Use the belt from your robe. Come on, David! Do I have to think of everything?"

"But I—" he started, then thought better of arguing and reached down to yank the terrycloth sash free. His robe fell open, revealing his fat, flushed erection only inches from her face. Savannah felt her stomach churn and turned her head. David used her momentary distraction to roll her over and bind her wrists behind her. They pushed her off Bariah, who lay beside her, pale and still, in a spreading puddle of his otherworldly blood.

"I'm sorry," he croaked, struggling to keep his eyes open. "Tried to stop them..."

"Bariah, don't pass out! Please! Stay awake!" she sobbed.

"Don't worry," he rasped. "I won't leave you."

Standing over them, David and Angela began to argue.

"David, I thought you had this all planned out. You really fucked up, you know that? And now I'm caught in the middle."

"Shut up! Everything will be fine. Just give me a minute to think!"



“We need to get rid of the guy first,” Angela said. “Even if they find him later, they can’t connect him to us. They must have come in a boat—people will just assume he fell off.”

“Yeah, okay. Good thinking.”

Quickly, the two of them moved to lift Bariah off the floor and carried him outside. Savannah choked back a sob when she heard the telltale splash. When Angela and David returned, they were still quarrelling.

“But what if they can determine the time of death when they find her?” Angela was saying. “And now she’s covered in bruises, thanks to your clumsiness. It’ll be too hard to explain, David.”

“You’re right,” he replied after a moment, his voice much calmer. “We can’t stick to the original story. Too much has happened. Someone probably heard you scream. Security will be here in a few minutes, no doubt.”

“Damn! I didn’t think of that! Now what do we do?”

“Don’t worry. I have an idea.” David smiled and ran a hand down Angela’s arm. Savannah felt like throwing up. “What we need is a new scenario, one that fits the facts. For example, maybe Savannah had been somewhere on board the whole time. She always was a sneaky little bitch. Maybe she planned out this entire thing to make sure her new husband was faithful to her.” His grip suddenly tightened, and Angela gasped. “Maybe she came back and caught you putting the moves on me. Maybe a jealous brawl broke out between the two of you.” Without letting go of her, he picked up the broken bottle and slowly raised it over her head. “Maybe you both ended up killing each other. What a terrible tragedy this whole wedding trip turned into, huh? And it all started off so romantic and innocent.”

“You—bastard!”

Before he could bring the weapon down, Angela’s hand shot out and grabbed his exposed privates. Savannah watched as she mercilessly twisted his balls, forcing him to his knees while he shrieked in agony. David still gripped the bottle, which he swung at

her bare legs until she was forced to let go. Angela snatched up the room service tray from beside the bed and battered him with it.

Recovering from her assault, David got to his feet and swept the tray aside with a powerful swipe of his free arm. Angela screamed as he lunged toward her, holding the bottle in front of him like a knife. The jagged edge was aimed straight for her heart.

Savannah closed her eyes to avoid witnessing the bloody death blow, only to open them again when a shadow moved past her and another crash rocked the cabin. She found herself looking into Joquin's face as he knelt and untied her. Behind him, Kral had knocked David to the bed with a powerful fist to the jaw. Angela cowered, unharmed, in the corner by the bureau.

"It's okay," Joquin told her, massaging her wrists where the rough cloth had torn into them and cut off her circulation. "He didn't hurt you, did he?"

"No, not me," she wailed, breaking into a fresh round of sobs. "But I think he killed Bariah!"

Joquin froze, his mouth hanging open. He stared at the silvery puddles all over the floor. Tears of shock filled his widening eyes.

Kral left David crumpled on the bed and hurried over to Savannah. "What did you say about Bariah? Where is he?"

"He stabbed him and pushed him overboard," she went on, pointing at the open glass door the men had charged through. "Please, I'm all right! Go and find him!"

"I'll go," Joquin said, leaping to his feet. In a moment he had vaulted back into the water. Kral rushed over to subdue Angela, who was struggling to her hands and knees.

"It wasn't my fault! This was all David's idea!" Angela shrieked as he grabbed both of her wrists in one powerful hand. He used the discarded sash to tie them together the same way she and David had tied Savannah's. Poetic justice, Savannah thought as she wiped her tears away and tried to stand.

Outside the cabin door, they heard scuffling and murmuring as passengers gathered in the corridor, apparently summoned by the sounds of the fight and alerted by Angela's screams. Someone began pounding on the door. "Security! Open up or we'll break it down!"

"Kral, you have to go," Savannah said, using the edge of the bureau to steady herself. "They can't find you here."

"I don't care," Kral said. On the bed, David was coming around, crawling to his knees and gripping his head. The bathrobe had fallen away in the struggle, leaving him completely naked. "I can't leave you here."

"No." She shook her head, forcing herself to stop crying. "I can handle this. They need to see that I'm alive. They need to see what David and Angela did. Go and help Joquin find Bariah. Maybe you can still save him."

Kral's dark brows drew together. "You want me to leave you here? What about us?"

"I'll come back to you. I promise."

Reaching up, she grabbed his face and kissed him hard. The pounding on the door intensified, followed by a cracking sound as ship's security began to force their way inside.

"Go," she repeated, pushing Kral away. After taking a last, grief-stricken look at her, Kral turned and fled.

"Wait! I'm coming!" Savannah called, staggering across the room to the door. She placed her hand on the knob and had already given it a half-turn when an unexpected impact hurled her to the floor again. Her vision blurred for a moment and then cleared just in time to see David shove past her and follow Joquin and Kral's path over the rail. His body hit the surface just as the door to the cabin came down in splinters.

A crowd of people surged inside. Some paused to help her up, while others rushed to the verandah. She got to the rail and saw David's dark form disappear into the night, swimming furiously.

She'd had no idea he was so athletic. Apparently, there was a lot she didn't know about her alleged friend.

A pair of uniformed officials appeared on either side of her.

"Look! It's the woman who ran off," a female passenger cried, pointing at Savannah. "She isn't dead after all!"

"It was David," Savannah told the security officers. "He tried to kill me and Angela both. Then he jumped."

A collective gasp rose from the onlookers.

"We'll never get him back now," the officer on her right said to the one on her left. "Drowned for sure."

"Drowning's too good for the likes of him," one of the passengers commented, to the general agreement of the others.

They stared at the water for several minutes, no doubt trying to catch a glimpse of David's fleeing form. However, he had disappeared. Had he really drowned? Frankly, Savannah would have preferred the intervention of sharks. Maybe they would never know for sure.

She was about to turn away with the rest of the crowd when the warm breeze carried a shout from the water up to the deck.

"Hey! Down here!" a familiar voice hollered.

Everyone returned to the rail and leaned over.

Jhoad and Zoeb bobbed below them in a small fishing boat, waving excitedly.

"Look at what the tide dragged in," Zoeb called to her. He gestured toward Jhoad. The two stepped apart to reveal a dripping, naked David trembling between them.

## Chapter 10

“Well, it was fun while it lasted.” Bariah traced his feet in the sand and plucked at the bandage on his arm, which had prevented him from swimming for the past twenty-four hours. “She got her kicks and soon she’ll be gone. And why not? She doesn’t need us anymore.”

“No way,” Joquin said. “She’s nothing like Cyra. She’ll be back. You’ll see.”

“Maybe it would help if you guys had a phone installed,” Zoeb suggested. “I mean, what did you expect her to do? Lead the cops straight here? She wouldn’t do that to you. Probably thought it best to lay low for a couple of days.”

“Makes sense to me,” Joquin reasoned, though his tone sounded less confident than his words.

The story had been all over the news. Reporters described the stolen ID and phony marriage, reveling in the dramatic return of the woman thought dead. For months, Savannah’s two supposed friends had been drugging her, causing blackouts and headaches in order to make either a fatal accident or a suicide more believable.

The *Caribbean Dream* was scheduled to depart that afternoon, and as far as anyone knew, Savannah Godfrey would be aboard. David and Angela, on the other hand, would remain behind in custody while authorities settled the matter of jurisdiction for their various crimes, including fraud, identity theft, and attempted murder.

The three of them had watched the story unfold on the TV at Sharkey’s bar, noticing the absence of their own names. The silver blood on the floor of the cabin wasn’t mentioned, either.

“They have no tests to identify it,” Kral had said at the time. “They’ll never know what it was.” He hadn’t said much since then. Even now, he sat on the beach with his arms draped over his bent knees, a perfect picture of stoic misery.

“So, did you two guys come to a decision?” Joquin asked Zoeb, who lay stretched out in the sand beside him.

Their two guests exchanged glances. “Looks like we’ll be hanging around for a while,” Zoeb answered.

“Yeah. We want to check out some of the local wrecks,” Jhoad added. “Plenty of pirate ships at the bottom, from what I hear.”

“They’re hoping she’ll come back, too,” Bariah grumbled. “Don’t get your hopes up, guys. Been there, done that.”

A distant rumbling sound that grew steadily louder and closer interrupted their conversation. The five of them looked at one another, shrugging.

“Car,” Joquin guessed.

“Tourists?” Bariah asked with a hopeful catch in his voice.

The group rose and jogged to the front of the dive shop to see a battered taxi pull up. They watched, breathless and transfixed, as it rolled to a stop and the back door opened.

Suddenly she was there, dressed in a neat white linen skirt suit, walking down the driveway while the driver circled around to take her luggage from the trunk. Everyone rushed over to grab a suitcase for her, though Bariah hung back because of his arm. When she saw him, she gave a happy shriek and ran to embrace him.

“I knew they’d get to you in time!” she wept after covering his stunned face with grateful kisses. “Are you all right?”

Grinning, Bariah patted his bandage. “Looked a lot worse than it was. Takes more than a creep and a broken bottle to kill me.”

“Kral stitched him up by hand,” Joquin said, wincing. “You were lucky you missed that little scene.”

“I’m so sorry I couldn’t get back here until now,” she said, spreading her hands toward them in apology. “When everything

happened on the ship...well, the police came, needless to say, and the Tourist Bureau got involved, and I had so many questions to answer. Never mind that I never got the exact address of this place! It took me hours to find a taxi driver who knew what I was talking about.”

She turned and nearly crashed into Kral, who had come to stand beside her after sending the cab on its way.

“You did come back,” he said with a sort of wonder in his voice. His cheeks twitched as though he were suppressing a smile.

“Didn’t I tell you I would?” She stroked her palm against his face, tears dripping freely down her own.

“Good thing, too,” Joquin said. “Kral was a mess without you. Just about died of grief. Of course, the rest of us knew it was just a matter of time.”

“Well, I had a chance to think while I was hanging around in the police station,” she said. “I’ve decided to help you get this dive shop organized. Before immigration clears me to stay for good, we need to have it up and running as a functional business. Being gainfully employed will make the paperwork much easier, I’m told.”

“You want to turn this old dump into some kind of tourist attraction?” Bariah asked skeptically.

“I think it’s a good idea,” Zoeb said. “Between the diving and our salvage business, we could actually do pretty well here.”

“I don’t know.” Joquin shook his head. “We’ve let things slide for quite a while. Going to take some serious time and money to fix it up.”

She turned and smiled at him—at all of them. “Don’t worry about that. Turns out I have plenty of both.”

Then all six stepped forward into an awkward, but utterly sincere, embrace.

\* \* \* \*

That evening, they gathered on the beach to celebrate the beginning of their life together. The ritual was an ancient one, Kral had explained, but it still held great significance for his people—or at least those who took Aquan heritage seriously. More importantly, it would make her one of them. Savannah had never wanted anything quite as much.

She stood in the middle of a ring of flaming tiki torches, barefoot but still wearing the white linen jacket and skirt and the light blouse underneath. The guys, however, had reverted to their favored primitive state, each sitting cross-legged and naked beside one of the torches. Only Kral stood, presiding over the assembled group, a bright red sarong wrapped around his hips. The sight of him made her heart beat faster and her pussy moisten with anticipation. She still thought it something of a miracle that this serious and powerful leader had devoted himself to making her happy.

As she waited for him to begin the joining ceremony, Savannah let her eyes travel over the group of men. How different her five lovers were. Each of their bodies was a distinct shape and build. Joquin was the leanest and most delicate-looking, while Kral's broad frame seemed packed with muscle. Their hair ranged from blond, shoulder-length, and baby-fine to Kral's black tresses and Bariah's dark, spikier cut. Even their cocks were amazingly different from one another—Zoeb's plump and rounded, Jhoad's long and pointed at the end, with every possible variation in between. Each contributed something entirely unique to her sexual pleasure. Having sampled such variety, how could any woman ever be satisfied with just one man—or even two or three?

"Long before written history, the pattern of our lives was set," Kral began at last. "The wise ones of old decreed that the unmatched strength of Lemuria's strongest warriors would be balanced by the gentle nurturing of the woman they chose. Throughout the centuries, each pod has sought its perfect leader. The search has been long, exhausting, and painful. Now the struggle is over and we have our



mate, our queen. We promise from this night on that we will live only to worship her, honor her, and please her in every way possible.”

The four men on the ground nodded. “We promise you this,” they said as a group.

Then they got up and moved toward her. Within moments, they had stripped her naked. Savannah closed her eyes, tilted her head back, and luxuriated in the feel of the soft cloth peeling away from her body. The fragrant night breeze caressed each inch of her flesh left bare by their expert hands.

When her clothing was gone, she waited in place as the two newest members of the pod stepped forward. They must have choreographed their moves ahead of time, she thought as Jhoad knelt in front of her and Zoeb flattened himself against her back. She could feel the thick, moist tip of his cock rubbing the curve of her buttocks. His fingers dipped into the honeyed crevice between her thighs and then pulled back again.

Soon Jhoad pressed his mouth to her pussy. His tongue slid over her and poked inside as his warm lips covered her outer folds and teased her clit. Savannah caught her breath as hot jolts of pleasure raced through her, turning her legs to jelly. Luckily, Zoeb held her up while the two of them worked together, tantalizing her until she didn’t think she could hold out a moment longer.

Soon they both pulled away. She was left standing alone, shuddering and sweating, until Bariah and Joquin moved in to take their spots. Both of them remained on their feet, and Joquin lifted one of her thighs to wrap around his waist while he positioned his cock against her inflamed entrance. To her surprise, Bariah embarked on something entirely new. Sliding one arm around her waist, he leaned forward until his lips rested against her ear. His other hand slid over the rounded plane of her rear end and then eased inside her crack.

His breath shuddered against her ear. “I want to fuck you here,” he rasped, wedging his hand more tightly inside her rear cleft. “I promise I won’t hurt you. I think you’ll like it. Let me try.”

Savannah could tell from the quiver in his voice that it took great effort for him to control himself long enough to ask the question. The fierceness of his need for her came through not only in his strained voice, but in the throb of his pulse and tightness of his balls as they brushed against the sweat curve of her ass cheek. Not too long ago, such a request would have shocked her to her very core. Now it seemed perfectly reasonable, not to mention incredibly tempting.

“Don’t be afraid,” Joquin whispered, moving in closer on the other side. She was cocooned between them now and reveled in every tingle of her skin against theirs. “We’ll make sure you love it as much as we do.”

As if to illustrate his point, he wrapped his hand around his cock and guided it inside her just enough to make her gasp with need. Her legs wobbled with the intense rush of pleasure, but they held her up when she started to sag between them.

“Yes,” she murmured, the word coming out as a half-moan as Joquin swept his mouth over hers. “I want this. I do.”

She couldn’t form the rest of the words out loud, but she hoped they could sense what she meant—that she wanted not just the unique sexual experience they offered, but she also wanted to belong to them fully. She wanted them to cover and fill every inch of her, both inside and outside. She wanted to be one with them, all of them.

She felt Bariah’s mouth curve into a smile against the side of her face. He shifted his position a little, giving himself some room to prepare both of them. Savannah gasped as he slid his hand down and squirmed two fingers into her pussy, pushing them inside right next to Joquin’s cockhead. The sensation of fullness was almost too exciting to bear. Her inner muscles clenched as he moved his fingers back and forth as far as he could. Then he dragged his hand backward again, using her own copious wetness to lubricate her back entrance. The same two fingers boldly dipped, circled, and teased the last unclaimed spot on her body. Savannah felt herself open willingly to his masterful touch. Her body seemed to coax him inside on its own. Not soon

enough, he was pressing his domed cockhead against her winking pucker.

Once again, she reflected on how much she had changed since she had first boarded the *Caribbean Dream*. Back then, she'd had little or no idea of real pleasure and how important it was to seize the opportunity for fulfillment when it arrived. She knew now, though. As far as fulfillment went, she had a feeling she was about to experience as much of that as she could handle.

With a growl of excitement, Bariah tilted his hips and pushed his way inside. "So tight," he whispered, struggling to insert himself a fraction of an inch at a time. She could tell he was struggling, and in all honesty the sensation was a little painful at first, but also so exotic that it felt completely right. Where else could she experience all the delights her body had to offer if not here, with these exceptional men?

She braced herself against Joquin, squeezing her eyes shut and willing herself to take more and more, and finally all of Bariah inside her. All the new sensations zigzagging up and down her body made it difficult to concentrate on any one feeling or control any one muscle in particular, but luckily the guys seemed perfectly capable of handling the situation...and her.

Just as Bariah eased what she figured was the last inch of his cock inside her, she felt Joquin start to push deeper inside her pussy. The tender flesh gripping him stretched and expanded as he fed inch after delightful inch of his vein-streaked hard-on into her. She was so attuned to him that every throb of his shaft triggered a similar rush that ran straight to the center of her clit. She could only imagine how flushed and bulging it must look, like a cherry jammed between her pussy-lips...a cherry so ripe it was about to burst.

"Okay," she heard Joquin growl. He seemed to be talking over her shoulder to Bariah. "I'm in. You?"

"Yeah," Bariah managed to say between gasps. The timbre in his voice told the whole story. He, too, was experiencing pleasure just as overwhelming as hers.

“Let’s go, then,” Joquin answered.

She felt both men tense up on either side of her.

Gradually, her two lovers’ cocks began to fuck her in a slow, controlled rhythm. Somehow, they kept perfect pace with each other. When Bariah would press forward, Joquin would pull back, drawing his shaft an inch or so out of her. Then he would push it back in and Bariah would slide partially out. Though she sensed some chafing and the ghost of a little pain, overall the dual sensation of being thoroughly and perfectly fucked from both ends resembled nothing short of heaven.

Soon an orgasm as powerful as the rip currents circling the island churned inside her and surged higher, seeking an outlet. Hot, sticky wetness poured from her body, coating both of them as they slid in and out on a lust-slicked wave. For one wild moment, it almost seemed as if her inner membranes had dissolved and the entire lower half of her body had become a single, open orifice for the three of them to enjoy together.

Once again, though, they stopped just as she was about to come. Like their friends before them, they pulled away and tugged themselves out of her in tandem. Their slow withdrawal, perfectly timed to happen simultaneously, seemed like the worst torment she had ever experienced. She was so close to coming she almost couldn’t bear it.

“No,” she pleaded. “Don’t stop.”

“Just hold on,” Joquin said, running his lips down her throat as he helped Bariah ease her to the ground. “Just a couple more minutes and it will all be worth it, I promise.”

“Trust us,” Bariah said.

She did. She had to. But it took every ounce of self-control she had not to reach between her own legs and coax herself to the explosion she craved. The slightest touch of her fingers would do it, she sensed.

Instead, she lay stretched out in the sand, her body quivering as raw, primal need threatened to drive her mad, while each of the men drew one of her limbs outward and knelt. Bariah and Jhoad each held one of her feet while Joquin and Zoeb took her hands. Spread-eagled and exposed to the sky, she soon realized that a fifth pair of hands was on her, too—Kral. He took his place between her open legs, tossing the sarong aside while he hunkered down.

He skimmed his fingers around her entrance first, pacing himself and exciting her beyond belief. She watched the top of his head move as he bent low over her, this time arousing her with his tongue. Again, stars danced in front of her eyes as she came close to losing herself for the third time. The sensations were so intense that she left all rational thought behind and became a single throbbing nerve. The sea, the stars, this island, and the five men around her all contracted into one blur of otherworldly bliss.

Though she couldn't see exactly what was happening, thanks to her hazy vision and his broad shoulders blocking the way, she knew the outline of his cockhead when it nestled against her slit. Eager to feel Kral's hard length inside, she opened her legs as wide as they would go and bucked her hips. Her attempt to entrap him would have succeeded had he not drawn back with a brief, guttural laugh. He soon slipped back into place, though, inserting just the head of his cock and using it to tantalize the shallows of her pussy.

"Kral...please...take me," she moaned.

"Soon enough," he rasped against her shoulder.

He lay like that for a moment, his cock wedged in her only up to his crown, using the thick ridge to torment her. Meanwhile, the other men held her limbs down in the sand, their fingers massaging her flesh at every point of contact. The playful restraint made it all the more exquisite. Kral could do anything he wanted to her, she realized, and what he wanted to do most, along with the others, was love her. Forever.

When her orgasm came at long last, it seemed to turn her body to pure spirit, launching her all the way into the tropical sky. She imagined she could see herself and them from far above, melting together in perfectly synchronized contentment. Then she plummeted back to Earth, landing in the center of their mutual embrace.

Drifting among the stars was nice, she mused as the five Aquans continued touching and kissing her everywhere, but for now she preferred to be right here, anchored firmly on the ground with them.

# THE END

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cassandra Pierce has been a fan of Gothic literature for most of her life, even studying the origins of the genre in college and graduate school. Before long, she got the urge to create paranormal romances of her own and is now hard at work on the third Darkisle novel (among other projects). When she is not writing, she teaches English (including a course on Vampire Lit) at a small New England college and is active in a charity that rescues and rehomes abandoned pets.

Read more about Cassandra's upcoming books at [www.CassandraPierce.com](http://www.CassandraPierce.com), and visit her on Facebook!

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