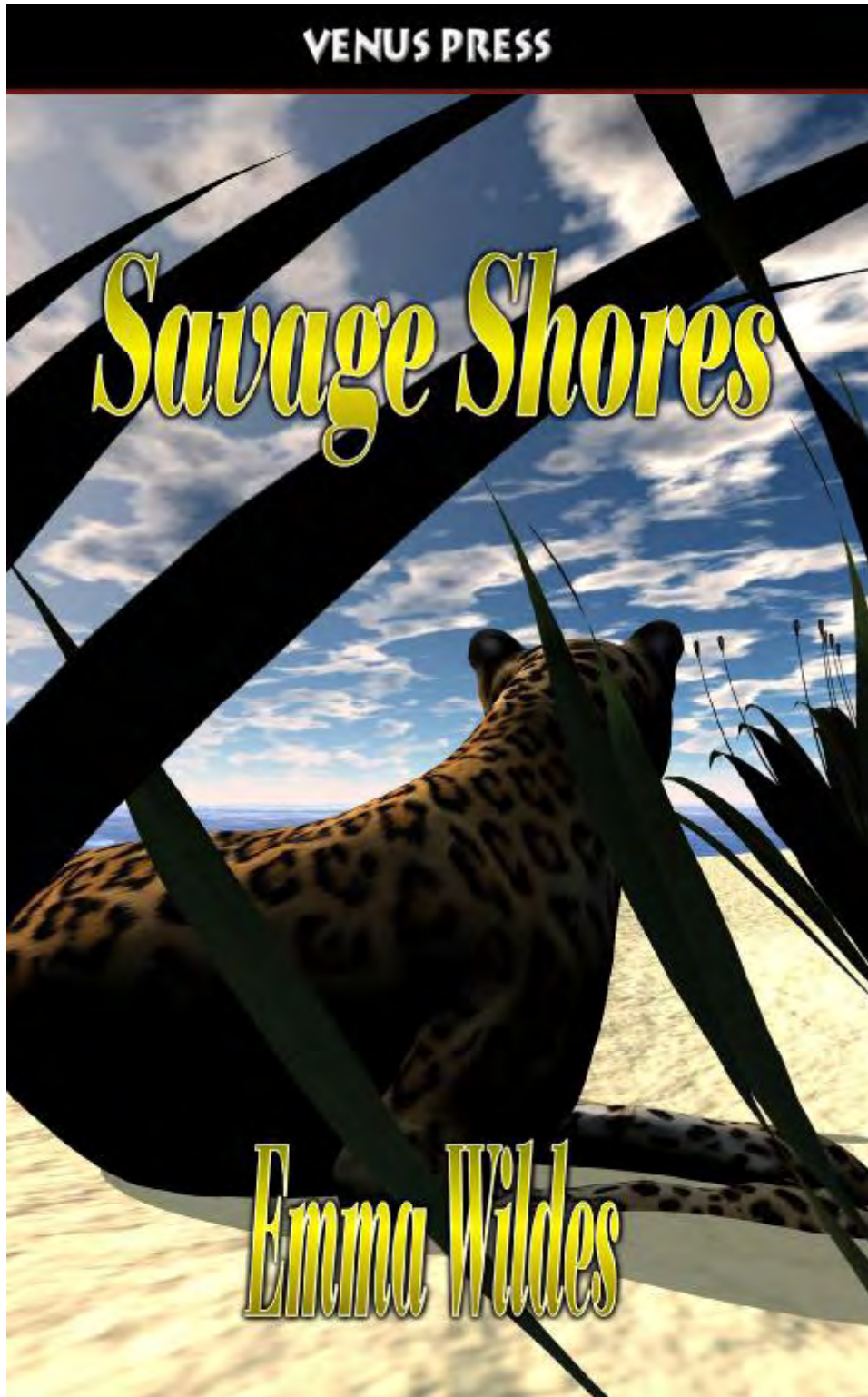


VENUS PRESS

# *Savage Shores*

*Emma Wildes*



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# **SAVAGE SHORES**

**BY**

**EMMA WILDES**

Venus Press LLC

## SAVAGE SHORES

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## SAVAGE SHORES

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*Emma Wildes*

Dedication:

With thanks to Tracey and Scarlett, two very great ladies.

## SAVAGE SHORES

### Chapter One

The storm sounded like a roaring beast, bellowing in fury.

Unable to walk, to even breathe, Jenna Hayward struggled to gain the deck, stumbling and bouncing off the doorway as she realized what was happening. A huge wave rose up before her horrified gaze, sweeping across the deck. Everywhere, people screamed; agonized cries rising above even the howling awful wind.

The main mast cracked like thunder under the onslaught, coming down in a crashing fall of splintered wood and mangled sails.

*She was going to die. Even the thought seemed to be muted by the roaring of the storm overhead, lashing around them.*

The water towered over her for one long suspended second before it descended in a tidal wave, slamming her backwards. Stunned, unable to breathe, she flailed helplessly in that relentless tide, swirling upwards, caught up in a raging torrent of seawater and foam. Flung like a doll, it took her as it rolled backwards, and she fought to grab the rail, a wail of despair escaping her lips as she was carried over and dropped into the roiling water.

Lights flashed before her eyes as lightning cracked and waves slapped her face, filling her mouth with water every time she tried to gasp for breath. She struggled, her long skirts dragging at her limbs, pulling her into the depths. In a haze of movement and noise, she fought the sea, a strong swimmer but losing the battle with an inner panic. She was barely even aware when strong hands seized her, and an arm came around her neck.

“God help us,” a male voice muttered in her ear. “She’s going down.”

It was true, even as she desperately tried to tread water, Jenna heard the ship groan like a dying man, the vessel shuddering visibly before her streaming eyes. A scream locked somewhere deep inside her, unreleased but potent of her paralyzing fear.

The order came in disembodied harshness above the slashing rain. “Let me swim and don’t struggle. If it comes down to your life or mine, I’ll leave you, my lady.”

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It didn't matter, Jenna thought, going limp with terror as the ship listed and began to sink. Her life was over. She might as well drown.

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The bit of flotsam was little more than five or six planks still lashed together, but it kept them afloat. His body was so exhausted from battling the stormy waves that it was all Jonathan Richmond could do to hang on, one arm around the limp and possibly lifeless body of the girl, the other looped over the debris. It was still raining, but not nearly as windy. The sea was calming after the snarling rage of the night, turning into a simmering pout, bobbing them up and down but no longer beating them half to death.

*Death*, he thought, that was a cheerful notion.

"The sun is coming up."

The words were faint, and Jon squinted at the young man a few feet away from him, half-prone on the impromptu raft, his legs trailing in the water, his shirt almost completely torn from his lean body. He was bloody, a gash showing at his temple that trickled red down his cheek, but his teeth shone white in a sudden smile. "I think we might make it, my lord."

His valet tended to be cheerful, which he usually liked, but right now was irritating. Jon said shortly, "Devil take it, Charles, must you always be so optimistic? We're out in the ocean, hell knows where, and what we will make it to, I haven't a clue. Our blasted ship just sank. For all we know we're the only people to survive." It took effort to speak and Jon could barely growl out the words, trying to breathe normally despite his weakened condition.

"He's right. We can go only a day or two without fresh water." The other passenger on the debris was a man named Anthony Reeves, a highly decorated officer in the Peninsular War. Apparently having learned the lesson of survival, Jonathan had actually seen the major leap from the ship seconds before it relinquished itself to the briny depths. Hanging on to the bobbing planks, Reeves said gravely. "How's the girl? Is she alive?"

Shifting his grip, Jon let her head trail back in the water, observing the slow beat of her pulse in her slender throat. "Barely at a guess, but yes. For now."

"It is a miracle she survived that wave. I saw it take her."

"She's heavy as Hades with all these clothes," Jon muttered. "I have half a notion to take off her bloody dress, if I could find the energy. To hell with her modesty. I am not

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certain it will matter anyway. She has been in a swoon for several hours, who knows if she will recover.”

“Damnation, I think that’s Hayward’s daughter,” Reeves said, shaking his head against the sprinkle of rain and staring, his face streaked with droplets. “Now that the dawn lightens the sky, I can see her a little better.” Then he added, “It would be a damned shame if she died. She’s a beautiful young woman.”

“Hayward?” Jonathan asked, staring at the girl hanging so lax against him, her lashes sticky against her alabaster cheeks. “The famous general? I’ve met him once or twice. Some say he might be our next Prime Minister.”

“It would not surprise me. As a soldier, I can tell you he is a brilliant man.”

“An unlucky man,” Jonathan corrected cynically, shifting her a little to ease the ache in his arm. “His daughter was just lost at sea.” Her loose hair moved like seaweed, long and pale in the shifting water and her face was ashen, the delicate features washed like bone. “Charles, now that the sea isn’t so rough, can you help me disrobe her? I don’t want to lose her because my arm goes numb. I have been hanging on to her for hours now.”

“I’ll take her,” Reeves offered.

“No need,” Jonathan said gruffly, not sure why he didn’t want to give up his unwanted burden. “If we remove her clothes, I’ll be comfortable enough.”

Obligingly inching closer, Charles lay on his stomach and grasped her under the arms, allowing Jonathan to unfasten her evening gown. It was heavy velvet, sodden and slipping away easily under the sheer weight of her skirts. She wore no corset, so naturally slender it was unnecessary, and her head lolled to his shoulder when he pulled her back into his arms. “Better,” he announced. “She weighs more than I do with all that confining cloth around her. Now there’s nothing to her.”

“Her beauty,” Major Reeves said over the prick of the falling rain, “is such that her father forbade her to visit him in Spain again. In fact, she caused such a distraction among our Spanish allies that he sent her home at once. I believe her mother died when she was a child. The poor man, he dotes on her. When he learns of the ship lost, he will be devastated.”

“Her beauty,” Jonathan said in a low, dry voice, “will cause no riots here. I wonder where the hell we are?”

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“Perhaps *in* hell,” Reeves responded, lifting his face and looking up at the opaque sky, beginning to lighten but still sullen and moody. “For if I can imagine anything worse than dying of thirst in the middle of a huge body of water, I don’t know what it might be.”

“Sharks could be worse,” Charles said, even his cheerful gaze darkening. “I don’t much fancy the notion of sharks. Nasty vicious creatures, I’m told.”

Tightening his hold on the young woman floating next to him, Jonathan said sarcastically, “Thanks for that particular vision, you young idiot. I was worried enough about dying of thirst because of the major here, now between you, I picture myself parching as I am being served up wholesale to some monstrous fish.”

Both men laughed, a surprising thing considering their dire plight.

Gazing at the half-naked, unconscious young Miss Hayward, Jonathan said soberly, “I hope, for all our sakes, my lovely burden is a good luck charm. Surely the gods have some reason for flinging her into my arms from our doomed ship.”

“Let’s hope so,” Reeves murmured.

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There was sand stuck to her face, her legs, and her almost bare breasts. Lifting her head, Jenna blinked and stared, unable to register where she was or how she might have gotten there. As far as she could see there was glistening beach licked by the tide that even now lapped against her prone body.

And she wasn’t quite alone. Three other bodies littered the shore.

Levering herself upright, she told herself she should go for aid, looking around dazedly, trying to figure out just where that assistance might come from. On her knees, she saw nothing but a thick line of trees beyond the sand, and when she wildly cast around, behind her a glittering blue sea.

“Oh God ...” she moaned, remembering suddenly the awful storm, the rocking unstable ship...the wave that swept her into a watery hell.

And strong arms ...that memory came too, a lean body holding her tight and safe as the sea gnawed hungrily around them.

Looking down, she saw her dress must have been torn clear away for she wore only her thin chemise and absolutely nothing else. The lacy material was only half-dry and clung to her body like glue.



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The farthest person away was a man, medium height, his thick sandy hair mussed against his neck, naked from the waist up, his well-muscled back pink from the sun. Near him lay another sprawled figure, this one dark haired and broad-shouldered, his torn shirt dried and wrinkled, one sleeve completely missing. The closest man lay on his back, his eyes closed. He was young, not much older than herself at a guess, slim and almost boyish, though his shoulders were wide enough and the breeches plastered to his legs showed defined muscle. He had dried blood on his face and a nasty gash near his temple. The rags of what had been a fine lawn shirt clung to his chest. Kneeling by the limp figure, she prodded him with a tentative finger and gasped at once when his eyes flew open, a hand shooting out to grasp her wrist painfully.

"Beg pardon, Miss," he said at once, stammering, releasing her. "I was startled, that's all." Then, sitting up groggily, he asked in obvious confusion, "Where are we?"

"I have no idea," she confessed, shaking her head. Considering that she was half-dressed and stranded in parts unknown, the quiver in her voice was not surprising.

The young man blinked and focused, scrambling up, "My lord," he said in alarm, crawling across the sand to shake the shoulder of the dark-haired man. Jenna heard a low groan, indicating the man wasn't dead at least, and his lashes fluttered, finally opening. "Bloody hell, Charles," he said in a low growl. "I feel as if I've been flogged, stop shaking me."

So did she, if the truth be known. Her entire body ached and she was terribly thirsty. Nonetheless, concerned for the third man, she bent over him, and tapped his naked shoulder, getting no response. Rolling him over proved to be difficult because he was too heavy for her, so she said urgently, "Help me ...I can't tell if he's breathing."

Both men responded, the young one called Charles coming over with alacrity, the dark-haired man slowly getting to his feet, his hands swiping ineffectually at the sand that coated his body. Together she and Charles rolled over the unconscious man and she was surprised that even with all the sand and his wet hair, she recognized him. "Major Reeves," she exclaimed, brushing the particles from his cheek. It was almost shocking to see the handsome immaculate man she knew so disheveled and pale.

"He's alive, Miss Hayward, don't worry. Undoubtedly it's just exhaustion and weakness from being in the water so long," the dark-haired man said, kneeling beside her, putting his fingers on the major's neck and feeling his pulse with what looked efficient expertise. "We could all use a drink of water I'm sure...the question being, of course,

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where to get one.” He stood, brushing off his hands again, doing no good and uttering an inaudible curse under his breath.

“You know who I am?” she asked in surprise, gazing up at him. He was tall and lean, with eyes the same color of the sea behind them. Handsome even in his still sodden clothes, his features were classically shaped; ebony brows to match his thick hair, a straight arrogant nose, lean jaw and a modeled mouth. His smile was ironic. “Major Reeves recognized you earlier as we floated through the storm. You were insensible for hours after the ship sank.”

“I remember only a little. You grabbed me in the water,” she said, shivering though the sun was hot and high. “And kept me from drowning. I can swim, but not in long skirts.”

“You fell on top of me. I didn’t have much choice.” With a bit of dry humor in his voice, he spoke coolly. “When one is being pelted with beautiful young ladies, one should accept the delivery.” The corner of his mouth lifted a fraction more.

That huge wave would live in her nightmares. “As I am sure you saved my life, I will thank both you and providence, sir, for where the wave deposited me,” Jenna said quietly. “Do you suppose anyone else survived?”

“Reeves was the last person I saw come off the ship. I am afraid everyone else went down. The vessel sank in seconds.” His mocking half-smile vanished instantly. “Let’s hope I’m wrong, but I would say we are the lone survivors. Living, but,” he glanced around, his blue-green eyes narrowing, “stranded for the moment. I suppose I should introduce myself, though formality seems a little out of place when one is washed ashore and dripping with sand, but I am Jonathan Richmond, seventh Earl of Charbeau.” His bow was formal and graceful.

Jenna blinked registering the name. She’d heard of the earl somehow...but in her current state of almost disoriented disbelief over both being alive and having no idea where she was, she couldn’t recall where. “Pleased to meet you, my lord,” she said automatically.

“The pleasure is mine.” For the briefest of moments, his gaze flicked lower to where the material of her shift clung to her breasts.

Jenna felt heat climb into her neck and face. In fact, she realized both men must be able to see her practically naked, her legs were bare from mid-thigh down, and the material of the lacy chemise was still wet enough that her nipples were clearly visible. It

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seemed ridiculous—since she had just been rescued from a horrible death at sea—to be embarrassed, but she certainly was not used to appearing before anyone but her maid in such a state of undress, much less two strange men.

Charbeau looked amused at her blush. “There, the introductions are done. See how painfully polite we English are? Come, Charles, let’s go scout around and see if we can’t find a source of fresh water. Miss Hayward, stay with the major, if you will. I would hate for him to wake and wander off, thinking he is alone. We will all be safer if we stay together.”

Safer...it was true, the setting was exotic and unfamiliar, but with the sunshine and tropical breeze, it felt like paradise, not dangerous.

The younger man smiled engagingly at her and said earnestly, “I am Charles Blake, at your service,” before dutifully following Charbeau, who was already stalking off down the beach. He was almost as tall as the earl, with brown hair so wavy it almost curled, and he moved athletically and purposefully to catch up to his companion.

Watching them walk down the beach, still kneeling by the prone body of the major, Jenna pondered their possible location and the fate of the others on the ship. Her duenna, an elderly friend of her father’s, was surely gone, poor woman. They had been asleep when the storm hit. The older woman had refused to leave their cabin, and forbade Jenna to do so, but though she normally followed the dictates of the proper Mrs. Cavanaugh, this time she had disobeyed, unable to stay amidst the groaning wooden walls without seeing what was happening. Wishing she had put on more underclothes than just her chemise was pointless now; she had grabbed her evening gown, still laying over the chest and slipped into it, not bothering with anything more than her shift in her hurry.

Suddenly the man still lying on the beach next to her coughed and gave a small moan. Reaching out, she touched his face lightly, saying reassuringly, “You are all right, Major. We are safe now on shore. Our companions have gone for water.”

“Miss Hayward?” His eyes were a light brown as they opened and he struggled to sit up immediately. She helped him, one arm around his broad shoulders, and he said thickly, “My mouth is full of sand and I feel worse than after Talavera, when I took a ball in the leg and another in my shoulder, nearly bleeding to death on the field. What companions? I assume you mean Charbeau and his valet?” At her nod, he added weakly, “So, we all made it, a miracle.”

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“It is indeed,” she agreed completely, still helping to steady him. “Though, the earl thinks no one else probably survived.”

“It was a nasty scene as I’ve ever seen.” Reeves rubbed his face, grimacing at the scrapes and cuts there. “God alone knows where we are. We drifted for hours and hours. I hope you are uninjured?”

When he too, glanced at her half-nude body, Jenna flushed predictably, dropping her arm at once from around his shoulders, knowing he was not being anything but solicitous but unable to control her chagrin over the amount of bare skin visible.

Reeves was not quite as tall as the earl or even the young Charles Blake, but he was powerfully and compactly built, not an inch of fat on his body, the impressive muscles defined in his shoulders and arms. Blond and good-looking, he was the type of man women noticed and more than one fan was fluttered his direction when he entered a room. Jenna did not know him well, but her father thought highly of the major and he had been decorated for his valor in battle by the king.

Trying to suppress her blush, she reminded herself she was alive, she was not hurt, and though she was a castaway in unknown parts, it was infinitely better than a watery grave. Still, surreptitiously tugging on her hem to try to pull it lower, she realized with resignation, it was disconcerting to be half-naked and surrounded by attractive men.

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The fire crackled, the weathered driftwood burning quickly, hopefully sending out a signal to anyone at sea with the height of the dancing flames. Above, the sky was vast in a way foreign to his native England, sprinkled with a million glittering stars and the soft rush of the surf filled the air.

Not, Jonathan thought morosely, that there would likely be anyone to see the light they had labored to build. As far the eye could see, there was nothing but ocean, and he had walked around a good deal of the circumference of what looked to be an island. Not sure whether to be relieved or unhappy that there were no natives here, he thought they were probably quite alone.

Next to him, looking just as grim, Anthony Reeves said reflectively, looking around the beach, “We were way off course already. The captain had told me the last storm had shoved us literally hundreds of miles in the wrong direction and this one followed so soon he could not correct the error in our course. We could be anywhere in the Indian Ocean.”

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“The island is not that small,” Charles spoke up with his usual enthusiasm, “there could be still be people living here. We couldn’t really explore very far today.”

“As long as they don’t want to eat us or make our heads into ornaments for their huts,” Jonathan said, lifting a brow. “There are tribes out there with customs that would make your hair curl.”

“There is fresh water, fruit, and small mammals, so we should be able to eat. I am personally just happy to be alive.” Reeves prosaically lifted his shoulders. “We are all incredibly lucky. We have all we need to survive, even if we are never found.”

*All we need....*

“Bite your tongue,” Jonathan murmured sardonically, fighting to keep his gaze from straying toward the girl reclining on a matt of leaves to protect her from the sand, her slender body glistening in the leaping light. “I cannot endure the idea of never tasting cognac again. In fact, I could use a stiff drink at this moment.”

However much he didn’t want to be acutely aware of the very lovely Miss Hayward, he found could not help it. Her hair was long and golden, reflecting the firelight in glinting waves, her body lax and her eyelids shut as she slept, pillowing her long lashes on high delicate cheekbones. Reeves was unerringly correct in his earlier assessment, she was gloriously lovely, and far too much of her delectable body was visible because of her scanty attire. Her breasts were full and lush under the lace of a garment not meant to be worn as exclusive covering, her hips shapely, and her legs long and slender. Taking her dress off while they clung to their lifesaving bit of debris had certainly made her easier to keep afloat, but now he wondered at the wisdom of it. Three healthy young men trapped with a gorgeous young woman. That detectible package lying just feet away had all the makings of trouble.

Especially since he was not the only man there to let his eyes stray that enticing direction. In fact, he could confidently place a wager that both Anthony Reeves and Charles were also all too aware of their lovely companion. He said coolly, “They will report us overdue before long. I assume efforts will be made to search for any survivors.”

“Miss Hayward’s father is powerful and well-respected. He will send out a fleet, at a guess. She might be our salvation.” Reeves spoke quietly. “However, that will be weeks from now, and let us face facts, they will be looking for us far from here, expecting us to be in entirely a different place when we sank. Also, even if they looked

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here, this area is littered with tiny uninhabited islands. No one will search them all, it isn't reasonable to expect it."

"So we must prepare for living here indefinitely?" Charles said, furrowing his brow. "I think we need a shelter then, something at the least to give Miss Hayward some privacy."

"Shelter, yes. And we need to be resourceful. Without tools, we are at a disadvantage. At least we each carry a knife in our boot," Jonathan spoke cynically. "A symbol, I suppose of our mistrust of the general populous...but well-served here. I cannot help but think that since the island is not overrun with rodents but they exist here, there are at least some forms of large predators in the jungle. Snakes, certainly. What else is a guess. I have been to the corners of the world and back, and there is always danger when you are in uncharted territory."

"So one of us on guard at all times?" Reeves nodded. "I'll do first sentry tonight, if you wish."

The girl should never be unattended," Jonathan added. "We still don't know if we are alone here either."

"I have to say," Charles said gravely, "she is game, isn't she? Not one tear or tantrum, though, I vow most refined young ladies would swoon upon finding themselves in such a fix."

"It's in the blood. Her father is a stalwart man." Anthony said stoutly, his blond hair licked by the light of shadowed leaping flames. "As brave as she is beautiful."

"Yes," Jonathan smiled cynically, "I just wish one of us had some clothing to donate to our courageous cohort. Not a shirt survived among us, more is the pity. Speaking for myself, I find her a bit ...distracting. I usually only see female undergarments when I am removing them for a predictable and immensely enjoyable activity."

"It is our duty to protect not only her life, but her virtue, my lord," the major said sharply, glancing up in quick challenge. "You have a wicked reputation for seduction with the noble ladies of society, but this isn't about lust, but honor."

"His lordship has never touched an unwilling woman," Charles said hotly, leaping to his defense with endearing fierceness. "On the contrary, women fling themselves at him. I have seen it."

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“Thank you, Charles.” Jonathan elevated his brows in open amusement, reaching over to pick up another branch and toss it on the fire. Flames hissed upward. “Rest assured, Major, I do not molest innocent young ladies, if I did so, I undoubtedly would have been forced to the altar years ago. However, I am pragmatic enough to realize that Miss Hayward is more tempting than an average woman, and having her around, day and night, barely dressed, will probably wear on the *honor* of each one of us. Look me in the eye and deny you haven’t caught yourself looking at her, wondering what it would be like to be between those long lovely legs, taking your pleasure.”

“Sir...” Reeves began to sputter, looking as if he would leap to his feet, his mouth tight. Then suddenly he settled back into the sand and sighed wearily. “Christ, I suppose I admit I am flesh and blood, too. She’s very alluring. I have never seen such a lovely woman.”

Cocking a brow at his young valet, Jonathan asked with humor, “How about you, Charles? Any lascivious thoughts?”

At first it looked like the younger man would deny it, but then he simply grinned and ruefully shook his head. “What man wouldn’t?” he asked simply.

What man wouldn’t indeed, Jonathan thought, his brooding gaze shifting to where Jenna Hayward lay in innocent slumber just feet away.

*Trouble.*

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Chapter Two

Jenna had to admit it. She liked bathing in the waterfall much more than even a luxurious hot bath in the tub back home.

Jenna stretched her neck, the water cascading over her shoulders and back, stinging her scalp with the force of the current. She rinsed her hair, and then lay there for a while against the rocks smoothed by centuries of abrasion, the water slipping in a soothing stream over her flesh, seeping over her bare breasts in wanton streams, her eyes half closed. It was cool, a contrast to the inevitably steamy temperature under the creeping foliage of the jungle, and when she got out she used her chemise to dry herself before slipping it over her head and pulling it down over her hips.

Two weeks. It had been over fourteen days since they had all washed on to this deserted shore. Or it might even be longer. She tried to make a mark on a tree trunk every day, borrowing a knife from one of her companions, who all seemed indulgently amused at her need to keep track of the time. Once or twice already she wondered if she had forgotten to make the little mark.

And as time passed on, she worried she might lose interest in doing it at all. Her existence had shifted in a short time to nothing but eating, sleeping, and bathing in the ocean or the coolness of the waterfall. The days were sunny, the nights filled with stars, and she was suddenly simply a creature like any other animal, one that lived and existed but disdained higher purpose.

“How was your bath?” The cool voice made her look up as she picked her way across the path that had been hacked out of the dense vegetation. Jonathan Richmond stood there suddenly, tall and bare-chested in the gloom of the tropical forest, his body powerful and well-defined, his eyes like the sea green depths of the lagoon. “I distinctly recall asking you to not go off alone, yet somehow you must have forgotten. Miss Hayward, please realize we are doing our best to make sure you are safe. Making it more difficult is not a show of gratitude. I was supposed to come with you.”



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Stung by his chiding tone and stopping by a tree thick with winding vines, she took in a breath and stared up at him. “Did you watch me just now?” she asked sharply, already knowing the answer.

“There are leopards,” he said in indirect confirmation, looking completely unrepentant, “we have seen two in our time here. And let’s not forget the snakes, some as big around as my arm. By the gods, do you want to fall victim to an attack?”

*From you or the creatures lurking in the branches of the jungle*, she wanted to demand suddenly. It was true, her three male companions had been perfect gentlemen, building her a hut-like shelter out of tree limbs and the planks from the wreckage that had rescued them, so that she could sleep safely. They all did everything; gathering and fixing the food they all ate, building fires every night to attract any rescue effort and discourage roaming animals... but they also all *watched* her.

With civilized discretion, each one tried to hide it, but she could feel their unrelenting regard at every moment. And while part of it might be protective, part of it was something else. *Lust*.

She might have been raised in a genteel home, her family’s wealth giving her a sheltered existence of private schools and efficient servants, but this was a whole new world and she had to face the fact that all three of them wanted her physically. At nineteen, she was already aware that her beauty affected men in a predictable way. However, dancing at a party and having a young man gaze at her with open admiration was one thing, her current situation something else entirely.

Her voice sharp, she said, “I need privacy.”

The earl answered smoothly, “You have the hut. We all sleep on the beach, without shelter.”

“Bathing is something one should do unobserved.”

“In our normal ordered world, yes. But we aren’t in that world any longer, are we? Bathing at home does not involve risking one’s life.” Again came that dry tone that made her want to kick him. It infuriated her when he lifted his brow in that arrogant manner, his handsome face an amused mask. Standing there, her head thrown back and her waist length hair streaming water, she snapped out, “I have no desire to have every one of you see me naked when I am practically that way all day in front of you anyway. Please, have a care for my modesty or what is left of it. I do not complain, because none of this is the fault of any one of you, but...” her voice caught unexpectedly and she felt

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her eyes suddenly swim with tears, "I cannot stand the way you all stare at me, I am growing to hate those awful yellow fruit things we eat, and the howling sounds that come from the jungle keep me awake...my poor father, he thinks I am dead ..."

To her mortification, for the first time, she broke down, weeping uncontrollably, the whole thing taking her by surprise. The horror of the shipwreck seemed to consume her suddenly, tremors racking her body. Seconds later she felt herself lifted in his arms, a gentle hand threading into her tangled wet tresses, a warm mouth whispering in her ear. "Cry, go ahead. I'd say it is a long time coming, my lady. You have been yanked wholesale from your pampered, secure existence, and you are human. Anthony, Charles, and myself have discussed how brave we think you are, but don't make yourself ill over trying to impress us."

He was strong, his bare flesh warm and comforting. Winding her arms around his neck and settling against the hard ridges of muscle, she sobbed in surrender, clinging to his chest as he stood there in the gloom of the vegetation, feeling safe and secure in his capable arms. Anthony Reeves was a natural born officer, decisive and efficient, and Charles Blake was also intelligent and just as capable despite his inferior social standing, but it had been Lord Charbeau who had taken command of their little band, not doing so by forceful action, but by his confidence and ingenuity.

"I am sorry," she hiccupped eventually, pressing her face into his damp neck. "I usually don't cry."

"On the contrary, you cry most beautifully," he said with tender amusement. In the shadowed light, he looked dangerously attractive and she found herself staring at his well-shaped mouth, so close to hers. Suddenly she felt quite breathless, realizing that her very lightly clad body was in his arms, and that his gaze was intent and riveting. He was large, powerful, and very male.

"I..."

"You...what?" he asked. He delayed her answer, dipping his head, his mouth brushing hers seductively. One arm was under her knees and the other under her shoulders, and he held her effortlessly.

"I feel...odd." Breathless at that caress, she could feel the strength in his arms as they held her.

"You feel wonderful," he whispered against her lips, kissing her lightly.

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“We shouldn’t do this,” she murmured just before his mouth claimed hers again, this time more forcefully, his tongue pushing against the closed line of her lips, slipping inside. To her shock he explored her mouth with abandon, dipping into each crevice and sliding across her teeth, touching her tongue with scandalous friction. When he finally released her, she was breathing unevenly and her heart pounded. Worse, her nipples had hardened, poking against the damp material of her thin shift. Confusing roiling emotions filled her as she looked up at him, cautiously saying, “My lord, perhaps you should put me down.”

“Perhaps I should,” he agreed, his aqua eyes alight, his grin rueful. “That was undoubtedly a mistake, though I have felt since the first moment I saw you I was doomed to make it. I am not sure how to proceed now. I want to toss you down and ravish you, as would any savage living on an island far from the reaches of civilization. I don’t suppose the idea appeals to you, does it?”

The problem was, it did in a secret, forbidden way. For the past days she had become very aware of her femininity and the differences between men and women. Whether she wanted to admit it or not, living in close quarters, under such conditions, the four of them were bound to each other for survival and a desire for sex was a natural part of life. The trouble was, she could hardly choose only one of them. If she chose one, possibly causing any of them to turn on each other, it would perhaps spell the doom of them all. In a way, her concern was selfish, for right now she had three very capable men ready to defend her, providing for her, and ...in the course of all that, wanting her.

Not answering, Jenna continued to look at him.

“Jesus,” he said softly, his azure eyes darkening, “don’t look at me that way. I am doing my best to be a gentleman, we all are. But if you are willing—”

“You have to put me down,” she said firmly, averting her gaze. “Now.”

“I will touch you again,” he growled, his voice husky with passion denied. “We both know it is inevitable.”

“Put me down,” she said again, more distinctly.

“Yes, Richmond, put her down.”

There was lethal warning in the soft order, and Jenna stiffened, though she felt no real response in Jonathan’s body. He leisurely let her slip out of his arms, setting her on her feet, before he turned around. “Reeves, it was a simple kiss.”

Jenna said quickly, “He’s right.”

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“It didn’t look particularly simple to me,” the major said, his gaze darkly challenging. He must have recently been in the ocean, for his bare chest gleamed with moisture and his breeches clung to his powerful thighs. His blond hair was damp and wind-tossed, the expression on his good-looking face tinged with anger. “I wondered what the devil was taking you two so long and started to worry. I guess I have my answer.”

“We were arguing over the way you all follow me about,” Jenna told him, unable to keep the flash of irritation out of her voice. “The pool is barely inside the jungle, just paces from the beach. I do not understand why one of you has to lurk there and watch me. I can scream for assistance if I need to, I have a voice.”

“It’s rather hard to argue with his lordship’s tongue in your mouth, isn’t it?” he said coolly. “Besides, whether you like it or not, my lady, we aren’t going to let you go even a few paces into this jungle alone. You are in our care and it is our duty to see you safe every moment.”

“What did you do, have a meeting and assign bodyguard schedules?” she asked caustically. Next to her, Jonathan simply lifted a brow in his signature-mocking arch and she had her answer. She muttered, “I am surprised one of you doesn’t insist on sleeping in the hut with me.”

The two men exchanged a swift glance. It was the earl who remarked, “Not a single one of us has the willpower for that, my dear. We are all on the edge as it is, sweet Jenna.”

As she walked away and felt their burning gazes follow her, she realized fully, he spoke the exact truth.

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Lightning flashed in the far distance, a storm far out to sea evident in the show of light and low murmur of thunder. Jenna sat primly by the fire, her lusciously long bare legs tucked underneath her, her hair a glorious riot of golden curls around her delicate face and shapely shoulders. Charles had cleverly fashioned a comb for her out of a shell by using his knife, and she sat and worked the tangles free, brushing it through the shining strands. Under the thin material of her chemise, her breasts thrust up firm and high each time she lifted her arms, emphasizing the mounded fullness, her nipples visible through the thin cloth. They all watched the very feminine act, each of them trying to

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pretend they contemplated the fire, and... Jonathan thought with an inward curse, undoubtedly not fooling her a bit. The tension in the air was nearly visible.

Adjusting his position to ease the discomfort of his half-rigid erection, he said, "It looks tonight like we might sleep in the rain. Perhaps we should build a second shelter. In monsoon season we could be miserable otherwise."

"That's months from now," Anthony said in objection, then resignedly agreed, "but you are probably right. With not one sighting of a ship in all these days, I begin to wonder how long we'll be here. I have heard of stranded people thought lost being found after years."

"Years," Charles muttered bleakly, his young face morose as he sat cross-legged by the leaping flames. "No liquor, no..." he shot Jenna a sidelong look and obviously substituted, "cards, no beefsteak. I hope I don't go mad."

"If you start frothing at the mouth, don't worry, Anthony and I will dispose of you promptly," Jonathan murmured. His valet always had a pretty young maid dangling after him, and he had discreetly occupied the beds of several society ladies, as well. Having a healthy sexual appetite himself, Jonathan understood his frustration over their plight completely.

"Are any of you married?" The soft question took them all by surprise since Jenna had been remarkably quiet all evening.

Anthony shook his head. "No, my lady. I was engaged a few years ago, but she contracted cholera and died while I was fighting with Wellington in Spain."

"I am sorry," she said, looking sincere.

Charles gave her one of his winning boyish smiles. "The word marriage isn't in his lordship's vocabulary and I am too young yet to tie myself to one woman. None of us are wed. Why do ask, my lady?"

Setting aside the comb, she visibly squared her slender shoulders. Her voice was even and she glanced around the fire, looking each of them in the eye one by one. "Because it seems to me that we cannot exist together peaceably without coming to some sort of...arrangement. I am naïve I suppose, in many ways, but not quite as much so as before the shipwreck. Men's bodies seem to have a...wayward need for copulation. I cannot help but notice--that is--sometimes--it is obvious--" she stammered, two spots of color visible high in her cheeks even in the firelight.

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Realizing she meant that she had noticed the telltale bulge of an erection at some time or another, every single one of them probably guilty of, Charles flushed too and shifted uncomfortably. "We apologize most sincerely but it isn't something a man can help, my lady. I don't which one of us offended you, but it wasn't on purpose. You are...very beautiful," he finished lamely.

"Thank you," she said in a hushed voice, her gaze lowered demurely, "and I wasn't offended particularly, I was a little surprised, I suppose. It seems like such a basic response."

"Men," Jonathan admitted wryly, "are basic creatures. Enforced abstinence is difficult at any time, but a little more so when one spends time with a lovely half-dressed woman. It is simply a fact."

She nodded. "That is my concern. I do not want you fighting over me, which is what I feel might eventually happen. We are not in a London drawing room any longer. You are all gentlemen, but that is learned behavior, not innate." Jenna took a deep breath, her breasts swaying provocatively under her shift. "Your urges are not tempered here by the opportunity for a discreet affair. I might be innocent but I have an older brother and have been around soldiers before. Each one of you is attractive, so I have no doubt you are rarely...abstinent. However, I would not ever give myself to any man if it would betray his marriage vows."

For a long heartbeat, no one spoke. Jonathan felt a frisson of pure anticipation run through his body. His voice sounding a little odd, he said, "What exactly do you propose, Jenna?"

Her hand shook slightly as she lifted it to smooth back a shimmering strand of hair caught by the light breeze. In the distance thunder rumbled again, growing closer and the sea licked the shore nearby in a sibilant whisper. She said simply, "You could share me. Back home, I suppose that would make me a whore—"

"You are the farthest thing possible from a whore," Jonathan interrupted shortly, not even certain how to feel about what she had just said. "Don't be ridiculous."

She continued with impressive dignity, "However, I cannot think of another way to prevent discord. My virtue means nothing if we never leave here. If we are rescued, I will have been here with the three of you all this time, so my reputation will already be tarnished even if you never touch me."

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“You do not have to do this,” Anthony Reeves said, but gaze suddenly glittered, his wide shoulders tense. “We can behave ourselves.”

“I realize you would try.” She shook her head, moving her luxuriant hair. “But already this afternoon I saw the fury in your eyes, Major, when you found me with Lord Charbeau. Besides, this is not exclusively your problem either. I am a normal female and I cannot help but be curious over what it would be like to lie with a man. Who knows now, with this twist fate has given us, if I will ever marry. I enjoyed Jonathan’s kiss this afternoon and could probably be convinced to allow him greater liberties.” Her smile was faint and slightly ironic. “I have a feeling he is a most persuasive man and recall hearing rumors of his romantic exploits while in London last year. Do you honestly think he will not be able to seduce me eventually? And when he does, will you not be frustrated and angry?”

Reeves looked uncomfortable, shoving his fingers into his thick hair, his mouth twisting. “Since you are being so forthright, I cannot deny you affect me. But I feel as if we are forcing this upon you.”

She rose, graceful in the firelight, framed by the eerie flickering lights over the water, daintily brushing a little of the obsequious sand that seemed to be everywhere from her arm. “We are comrades, so to speak, trapped in a most unusual situation. You all take care of me right down to providing food and shelter. I suppose this is my contribution, if you will. All I ask is that you work things out between you so there is no rancor.”

Out of sheer habit, they had also gotten politely to their feet when she stood, old habits deeply ingrained and exercised even on a wild island in the middle of a foreign sea.

Jenna stood there, a vision in her lacy attire, all soft voluptuous curves and glorious beauty. She said softly, “I am retiring now. I assume one of you will join me soon enough. Good night, gentlemen.”

“Jesus,” Charles said explosively as they watched her slip into the hut, brushing back the fronds that covered the simple doorway. “What the devil are we going to do, my lord?”

“There is no way on earth I should ever lay one finger on Hayward’s daughter, no matter how powerful her allure. Further more, I should kill either one of you should you touch her,” Anthony Reeves said in evident frustration. “However,” he conceded, “I am a little afraid she is right. The longer we are here, the less we will remember the constraints of polite society. All three of us want her. There is little to prevent one of us from

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murdering another, either by design or in a quarrel over her favors. We are all armed, all healthy males. The longer we go without sexual release, the less reasonable we will become. This afternoon,” he admittedly slowly, looking towards Jonathan, “I was angry to see her in your arms, embracing you back, Richmond.”

“It’s too bad we are not monks, any of us, but you are right, we aren’t and we will end up at each other’s throats. Perhaps we if had washed up in the Artic and she wore a fur coat buttoned up to her neck it would help, but that isn’t what happened.” Jonathan gazed at the hut, his cock swelling just knowing she was there, waiting. “I think we should handle this with strict rules. Jealousy is still possible between us, so we need to be scrupulously fair.”

Both men looked at him expectantly in a way he was becoming accustomed to. Rubbing his jaw, he murmured, “I think we should make it simple. She belongs to one man each day, say from midday—which is when it is hottest and she prefers to bathe, to the next sunrise. That man fulfills the role of guarding her, just as we have been doing now, but with the added bonus of enjoying her favors. He exclusively gets to woo her, and share her bed. Always, of course, only when she wishes it.”

“That sounds fair, though the whole notion, when I think of it rationally, is too bizarre for words.” Reeves muttered, “Are we animals or men?”

“Unfortunately, both,” Jonathan answered with a humorless laugh. “Like you Major, I wish I could refuse her. But, it is impossible, I’m afraid.”

Charles looked at him with a small grin. “She favors you, my lord. Also, since you were the one to actually rescue her, I think tonight should be yours.”

Reeves nodded curtly after a moment. “Go ahead, join her. Blake and I will work out tomorrow.”

Thank heavens, Jonathan thought, he was already so tightly wound with need he wasn’t sure he could wait another day anyway. Inclining his head, he said, “I will see you in the morning then.”



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### Chapter Three

Jenna lay, her heart pounding, wondering if she had completely lost her mind. The suspense over what was going to happen had her practically shaking and not knowing which man was going to make love to her was even more nerve-racking. The truth was, she liked them all. Charles; with his boyish smile and lean body, Anthony Reeves; with his strict sense of honor and blond good looks, but she was unwillingly fascinated by Jonathan Richmond. He was the least kind of the three on the surface, starkly aristocratic and confident, but he had certainly saved her from disaster and he was considerate in small ways without drawing attention to it. She noticed that she was served none of the yellow fruit that she could hardly stomach this evening, but he had brought her some steamed fish and sweet berries instead, his wicked smile recalling their earlier kiss.

That kiss...she quivered just thinking about it and the sensations it had evoked. The handsome lord certainly knew how to use his mouth to render a woman breathless...

There was a sound outside, a light footfall muffled by the sand, and she swallowed, lying back on the pallet made of interwoven leaves, somehow not surprised that it was Jonathan who pulled back the curtain of fronds and stepped inside. Not by any means a large space, still he filled it, his head touching the ceiling so he had to duck to enter. He said, "I hope you are not disappointed that I am the chosen one?"

"No," she admitted, but didn't add that she had hoped it would be him.

He dropped down beside her, an enigmatic look on his face, visible through the chinks in the ceiling of the makeshift dwelling. "You are a virgin...can you accept that I want to give you pleasure? Will you allow me that much so I won't hurt you needlessly? The last thing I want is you to be frightened." His voice was soft, almost pleading as he looked down at her, his face cast in darker shadows.

"I am nervous, my lord, but not exactly frightened," Jenna said truthfully, gazing at him, realizing that compared to what she had seen before he was extremely more aroused. The impressive bulge between his legs, lifting the material of his breeches, was

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intriguing, but intimidating as well. She knew how people came together in the act of sex, but not the exact mechanics of it.

“Here,” he reached over and tugged up the hem of her chemise, pulling it over her head, leaving her nude in front of him. “I am glad there is enough starlight still to see you,” he whispered, “though I have seen you naked before and wanted you with a powerful hunger. My God, Jenna, you are too beautiful, no wonder we are all half-mad.”

Since she had been practically naked before all three men all week, she wasn't as embarrassed as she should have been, in fact, she reveled a little in the stark yearning of his glittering gaze. He touched her lightly, running his fingers over her cheek, down the line of her jaw and neck, until he cupped one breast in his warm hand. Compliant and almost holding her breath, she let him fondle the pale mound, his tanned fingers dark against her pale flesh as she watched him touch her through half-closed eyes. It felt sinful when he rubbed his thumb over the crest and she was surprised at the sensation of enjoyment she experienced. Leaning forward, he kissed her, his mouth as gentle as his hand holding the weight of her flesh, and she opened at once to his tongue, putting her hands on his shoulders, shifting closer and inviting further intimacy.

Her senses seemed alert all at once, her body registering both the kiss and his insidious caress with a slow drifting pleasure. He felt male, he smelled male, and his size dwarfed her much smaller body and made her welcome the coming possession. It felt good to be desired, good to know this man wanted to pleasure her, and their primitive surroundings suited the moment. She touched his hair, weighing the silky texture, liking the difference between the soft thickness and the heated strength of his neck. Over and over, he kissed her mouth, her throat, the curve of her eyebrows...and all the while his hands wrought magic with both breasts, making them ache strangely, the flesh beginning to pucker and grow taut. He finally lifted his head and stared into her eyes, his hand still cupping one tight breast, the nipple tingling where he touched it. “You respond to me,” he said with obvious satisfaction. “Do you feel how your body betrays your growing arousal, just as a male will become erect around a female he desires? Your breasts, they are swelling...your nipples turning into hard buds. You will feel it between your legs also, my sweet castaway. Your sex will soften to welcome me, lubricating itself as your body readies for me.”

Jenna said, a dreamy note in her voice, “I feel as if I want something but am not sure what exactly it is.”

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His teeth gleamed in the gloom of the hut as he smiled. "Let me show you what you want, my lady. Spread your legs for me and let me touch you."

It was wanton to obey, but it was also extremely wanton to offer her body to three virile men. Jenna closed her eyes and did as she was told, opening her thighs, at once feeling the glide of his fingers across flesh so sensitive, she gasped out loud. He ignored the fact that she had gone very still at that shockingly intimate touch, rubbing her in her most private place, stroking her labia with his long, skillful fingers until she could feel the very effect he had described. Like a flower opening in the morning, her cleft seemed to slowly become receptive to his touch, growing slick and hot as her breathing quickened, her legs falling further apart. When he touched her in a certain spot, parting her folds and circling it, she moaned out loud, the sensation intense and joyous.

Breathing in her ear, he said, "I need to taste you, my sweet. Hold still and do not be shocked, this will be...sublime. Think of nothing but what is happening between your legs. I have never known a woman who did not love it."

Already panting, a fine sheen of sweat over her body, Jenna didn't quite understand what he meant until he removed his hand replaced it quickly with his mouth, moving his body to lie between her open thighs, gently licking where he had touched her before.

At the first brush of his tongue her breath seemed to catch in her chest—the world tipped sideways and she slid off, into some unknown paradise of physical bliss. He teased and probed her folds, suckling gently, until her body arched involuntarily and stiffened, rapturous pleasure invading every pore, making her cry out as she shook and trembled in unmitigated joy.

It was savage erotic sin, she decided when he finally withdrew and she lay in sated weakness, to feel such utter wild happiness in such a scandalous kiss. No wonder his lordship had a reputation for seduction, it was well-deserved.

And she was utterly glad he was the chosen one.

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Jonathan stripped out of his breeches, smiling despite his throbbing and insistent cock reminding him that the woman they both desired lay with her legs still open, her beautiful body covered with a gleam of fine perspiration from her first orgasm. Fighting the request for instant penetration and release from the sexual tension of the past days, he tossed aside his trousers, staring down at her, the apex of her legs golden and gleaming

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with the fluids of her sexual release. Jenna had been very aware of him as a man all along, he'd known that from the beginning. Not experienced enough to be completely coy, she had been unaware of the way she looked at him, laced though it was with uncertainty and virginal innocence.

Innocence due to be lost at this very moment. Moving over her, he pushed her legs a little farther apart with his knees, taking his penis in one hand and finding her vaginal entrance with the swollen tip. She was very wet from her climax, unresisting even though her eyes came open as she felt him poised there, her pink mouth parted and her eyes very wide. Testing the tight opening with a slight push, he said, "You are as ready as any woman can be for this moment. Don't tense up on me, but instead keep your knees apart as wide as you can." Leaning down, he kissed her lightly, savoring her soft lips, and began to enter her.

She was tight, but hot, and so soft he closed his eyes in sheer carnal bliss. Not rushing even though his body was clambering for him to simply pump inside her and find relief, he invaded her passage inch by slow inch, pausing to kiss her again, braced above her, watching her expression for a signal that he was hurting her. She did stiffen when he reached the barrier he had to breach to proceed and found himself checked, but he chided, "It will be over at once, relax, my dear."

Pushing inexorably forward, he felt it give and slid farther in, a low whimper from her the only indication of the passing from girlhood into glorious woman.

"It stings a little," she whispered, her throat a pale arch in the darkness beneath him. "But it is negligible. Tell me, my lord, are you overly large or do you simply feel that way?"

He laughed, her body so soft and tempting around him he could hardly breathe. "When erect we are all about this size, I think. I haven't done a study on the matter, but I have had no complaints either. Are you all right, Jenna? I am almost there."

Pushing in another little bit, he finally found himself completely embedded in her body, delicious satisfaction gripping his senses. When he began to slide backwards, she sucked in a breath, letting it out slowly as he sank back in.

It was too good, he thought hazily, and she was simply too perfect for him to last long. Her heated walls held him closely, her breasts pale and trembling with each thrust as he moved forward, her long lashes veiling her dark eyes. He pushed in and out with measured urgency, not able to find his usual finesse and stamina, his need amazingly

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adolescent and swift. Lifting her hips to accept the rhythm of his lovemaking, Jenna didn't help matters with her small breathy cries, the scent drifting from her warm flawless skin enticingly female.

"Jonathan," she moaned when he drove in deep, "oh...it's happening again...I feel it coming ..."

So did he, in a relentless tide that consumed his body. Reaching between them, he fingered her swollen bud as he pushed forward once more, stroking her cleft with a practiced touch, hearing her choked scream with relief as she shattered around his surging cock. Her vagina clenched in small waves as he erupted inside her, his release unbelievable and so infinitely pleasurable that he groaned and locked his muscles, rigid and pulsing for what seemed a blissful eternity, spilling his seed deep against her trembling womb.

Gradually he began to be aware again of the restless sea outside lapping the shore, the cries of night birds and rustling of the animals in the jungle not far from them...and the woman still beneath him, her luscious body damp with his sweat, her thighs quivering against his hips. Gently withdrawing, he gathered her into his arms, kissing her lips, his body satisfied and replete. "You are a passionate woman," he murmured against her silky hair. "And infinitely generous."

With a sigh, she turned willingly into his embrace, putting her arms around him, snuggling close. "I suspect you are generous as well, my lord. And I am glad you are here with me."

As she drifted off to sleep, he wondered cynically if he would be able to share her now that he had tasted her incredible passion.

Not that he had a choice. She was not his specifically; she belonged to none of them.

And to all of them.

It was similar to being trapped on a beautiful island by a tragic shipwreck. He felt both lucky and supremely cursed.

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Walking slowly behind Major Reeves as he skirted the path into the forest, Jenna was glad for the first time someone was accompanying her to the waterfall pool for her bath. That morning she had awakened disappointingly alone, the sound of a small commotion outside making her almost rush out the door stark naked. When she did peek

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out the doorway, she saw a large cat on the beach, almost disdainful of the three men with sticks and knives that stood between her and the creature, its muscles rippling under a sleek coat as it finally slunk back into the foliage. Shivering, she remembered how huge it had been, not realizing leopards were so large. Having seen with her own eyes one of the dangers of the jungle gave her a new acquiescence to being accompanied.

Besides, they were all now going to know her body intimately, so privacy didn't seem quite such a concern. She blushed when she thought of the things Jonathan Richmond had done to her the night before. Now that it was too late, she wondered if the act of sexual intercourse was possible to engage in with detachment of emotion. It must be, if women everywhere plied their trade as harlots, though she hardly wanted to compare herself to them. It wasn't as if any of the men who would bed her were strangers, but she had been unprepared for the sheer intimacy of the act itself.

Or the blissful physical joy she had experienced.

"Stay here for a moment," Anthony ordered, his gaze narrowed on the plunging water ahead. "Let me make sure it is safe."

The waterfall was the result of a small stream seeking the ocean, coming out of an outcropping of rocks, the water crystalline and only waist deep. Stopping by a tree twined with thick vines, she watched him scout the small area and rippling water, searching the ground and looking in the pool itself, before he turned and motioned her forward. Feeling sticky from the heat and between her legs from the night before, Jenna looked at the water longingly, pulling the tie to her chemise loose, the ribbon growing so frayed that it wasn't going to serve the purpose of keeping her bodice together much longer.

Anthony watched her intently, a different light in his brown eyes than ever before, a soft blond beard gracing his lean cheeks, though all three men kept their faces closely cropped by using their knives. Jenna recognized the difference in the way he regarded her, respectful deference having given way to male speculation in even a man as polite as Major Reeves. After her night in the hut with Jonathan, she was no longer the innocent virgin to be desired but not touched. She was a woman who could accept a man with pleasure and his expression told her he knew it. Blood rushed into her face as she wondered if he and Charles had heard her abandoned cries of joy.

"There is no need to turn your back," she said with as much dignity as possible considering her shift was open and her breasts visible, "as I have a feeling you have seen me before anyway, and that tonight, there will be no secrets between us. Will it be you?"

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“Whoever is your bodyguard for the day, my lady,” he responded, “is the only man who can touch you that night. And even then, it will always be only if you wish it.” A sudden smile lit his usually serious expression. He added softly, “And I am hoping very much you will wish it tonight with me.”

Looking at his honed, muscular body, she wondered what it was going to be like to have him inside her and blushed more deeply. “I will not withdraw my offer, Major.”

His bow was cultured and polite, but incongruous when his gaze had strayed to where the curves of her breasts were visible through her gaping chemise. “You cannot know how I am looking forward to it. Here, I will hold your clothing while you bathe. It is hot as Hades today and the water looks cool.”

Taking off her shift with only a modicum of embarrassment, she gave it to him and slipped into the pool. He was right, the water felt marvelous and she sighed, moving back so the cascade poured over her nude body. Though she knew he watched her, he was also vigilant, his keen gaze periodically scanning the foliage as she washed and luxuriated in the streaming fall, standing only a few feet away, his knife strapped purposefully to his trim waist.

Shaking the water out of her eyes after rinsing her hair, Jenna sat up, the water swirling around her waist, her bare breasts uplifted and exposed, realizing there was a lovely freedom in letting him freely stare at her, the tension of the past days completely gone. She laughed out loud, and said truthfully, “If you had told me, Major, that the last time we met...when was it, at that reception celebrating my father’s new command? Any way, if someone had told me that in a few short weeks I would be bathing naked in front of you, I would have thought them insane.”

His gaze riveted on her streaming curves in front of him, Anthony’s mouth quirked. “And if someone had told me I’d be guarding you from leopards on a deserted island and anticipating paradise in your arms, I would have been equally staggered. However, if there is one thing I have learned in the course of my career as a soldier, Miss Hayward, it is that life can change in a blink of an eye and one has to adapt.”

Standing to let the water stream off her body, Jenna said softly, “That is what I am doing. Adapting. The drawling room rules I was raised with seem useless and silly when one chances at every moment being pounced on by feral cats and eats fruits shaped like gnomes from grim fairy tales. I never imagined in my life I would sleep with anyone other than my husband, and only after our vows were properly taken.”

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"I am ashamed to admit it, but you truly are probably preventing us from going after each other eventually." He looked ruefully honest. "Have you noticed, the tension is already less?"

"I noticed," Jenna admitted. "And if I don't have to continually be aware of the three of you watching me so intently, it will be a relief."

"I hope Richmond was gentle with you."

Honesty seemed in place since she was being so candid. "I never dreamed of enjoying it so much."

"It sounded a little like you might have," he smiled, a teasing light in those brown eyes. "Of course, from all reports, the earl has been practicing a great deal of his life. I am glad. What a boon for us all if you are sensual as well as giving. I promise you, Jenna," he lowered his voice a notch, using her given name for the first time, "to give you as much pleasure as I can."

And her stomach tightened a little in anticipation as she extended her hand for her worn chemise. "And I vow the same, Major."

"Somehow," he said wryly, his gaze sliding over her gleaming body, "I don't think that will be a problem."

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Lifting his arm, Jonathan slashed at a low branch, cursing as something large slithered away to his left, seeing the tail disappear into the leafy boughs above his head. "Damn serpents everywhere," he muttered. "Hell and blast, Charles, I agree this part of the island is worth exploring, but it is riddled with snakes and I have insect bites the size of gold coins. Let's go back."

"There are small caves on this side of the hill, my lord." Face flushed, his skin turned nut brown from weeks in the sun, Charles lifted his brows, his knife ready in his hand, stepping gingerly over a fallen tree trunk. "What if we could find some place to shelter if we needed it? There are violent storms like the one that sank our ship often enough here. The hut will blow away like a bit of fluff in a high gale. We need to be able to keep ourselves safe from the waves and the possibility of wind funnels. Don't you remember that time in Jamaica when the island was lashed by a storm so fierce huge trees hurtled past us like slender sticks?"

One of the reasons Jonathan employed young Charles was his enthusiasm for travel and his steady nerve. Not to mention his skill with a sidearm or blade. There were



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not a lot of efficient valets that braved the Russian steppes with aplomb or scaled cool mountains on tiny donkeys. Having a wanderlust, Jonathan had explored the world in the past five years with Charles in tow, though he had vowed each night since their mishap, that he would return dutifully to England take up his role as earl if he ever got the chance. He grunted, still mindful of the huge snake somewhere above his head, "I remember. I hate it when you are right, by the way. All right, steady on. How far is this series of caves anyway?"

"Dead ahead, sir. See where we have notched the trees so we could find our way back? Major Reeves is capable and it was his idea."

"I see nothing but snakes and strangling vegetation...oh hell, yes, there I do see one. Well, that means at least we are on the right track." Jonathan pushed away the thought of Major Reeves and the fact he was with the lovely Jenna as they spoke. He also refused to contemplate them together in the hut this evening, but on the other hand, he was a practical man, and containing his jealousy was much easier than not being able to have her at all.

They struggled on, the underbrush so thick it was difficult to walk, both of them with weapons in hand, mindful of the dangers around them. Jonathan was relieved and curious when they reached the rise of ground and he saw that there were indeed openings, the rock riddled with holes, most of them too small for human beings but a few promising. Skirting along the base of the small mountain, he selected the biggest one he could find and went about the process of lighting the driftwood they had brought as a torch, the lack of light keeping Anthony and Charles from actually exploring inside on their previous visit.

"Let us pray this is not a haven for a family of hungry panthers," he said, lifting the blazing wood in his hand. "I'll go first, but I swear, Charles, this is like when we hunted lions in Africa, run like the devil if we are confronted. One small knife will not help us one wit, and if cornered in a cave, a leopard will risk our fire to escape."

"Who knows what other animals are around, too, my lord," Charles said helpfully, with his curly brown hair and dusting of whiskers, looking like a handsome dissolute young pirate. "There could be creatures we don't even dream exist."

"Thanks, that bolsters my courage," Jonathan shot back, sending his companion a killing glare. "Be sure and get a description for the scientists back home. They will want

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to study this new specimen, especially if it devours me in a single gulp. Here ...I'm going in."

Edging inside the gap, Jonathan lifted his light, finding the space was too shallow and narrowed immediately. Backing out, he picked another opening, this one smaller, but just the opposite, the cave inside widening into a good-sized cavern that was thankfully unoccupied, though there were droppings that indicated bats and the ceiling rustled slightly at their entrance.

"A good possibility," Charles murmured, "if you don't mind flying rodents."

The floor was dry and even, and the space was even remarkably cool considering the heat and humidity outside. Jonathan lifted the torch, sweeping it around. "Twenty people could fit in here. I think the four of us could weather a storm with ease. Jenna might not like the company," he glanced upward but the ceiling was actually too high to see the mammals clinging there, "but she will adjust. A few bats are better than being blown back into the ocean."

"She liked the company last eve," Charles said evenly. "Standing sentry so close, neither the major nor myself could escape hearing her scream your name. More than once, if I recall."

Turning, Jonathan gave him a sardonic glance. "Remind me to sleep farther down the beach. I have no interest in hearing her with either of you."

"We all have to stay close together," Charles argued. "Considering the leopard this morning, it was a good thing we were there. And it isn't so bad. In fact, she sounded to be so breathlessly enjoying herself that it made me feel quite a bit better about her...offer. I have slept with refined ladies before, but they have all been married and experienced. She is different."

"Remarkable would be the word I would choose," Jonathan responded, indicating with the torch he wanted to leave the cave. "I don't bed innocent young ladies either. But, luckily for all of us, she is very sensual."

Following him outside, Charles frowned. "How much do think is simply being here? No rules, all of us barely dressed, our future grimly looking like we will be here for a good long while, if not forever. She is younger than any of us...and more susceptible to the environment. It is wild, untamed, and dangerous. Jungle creatures mate at will—I see her that way...yielding to our desires because there is no reason why she can't and it will please us all."

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"I see you have thought about this," Jonathan eyed the jungle in front of them they would have to cross again with grim resignation, remembering the rustle of the large creature with the huge tail. "You philosophize too often, I have told you that."

"I want to enjoy her and not feel guilty," Charles admitted.

"You want to fuck her and not feel guilty," Jonathan amended bluntly, trying to feel neutral over the idea of Charles and Jenna together, but not succeeding entirely. "Unless, you are harboring some foolish notions of romantic love in your young head?"

"I am not sure. She is very beautiful...and courageous and intelligent. Whatever I feel, it isn't the same simple lust I have felt for other women. The major also, he looks at her with more than simple admiration." Charles also gazed at the tangled vegetation but with an abstract expression. "What if we all fall in love with her, it could happen. Is it possible for three men to love one woman and share her?"

That observation hit a little too close to home. Lifting his knife to swipe at a frond, Jonathan said flatly, "You are the romantic, you tell me. And if your memory serves you at all, perhaps you will recall that I do not fall in love, I don't believe in it."

Charles lifted his brows. "They say the most jaded fall the hardest."

Jonathan scowled. "*They* are idiots. Now, shall we go back and wade through the forest of teeth and stinging bugs? I cannot wait to pass under that tree again, the one with the green thing lurking in its branches with eyes like jewels and a girth that undoubtedly means he could swallow a cow whole."

Laughing, Charles said, "I'm right behind you, my lord."

Sourly, Jonathan murmured, "How intrepid of you, Charles."

## Chapter Four

Her hand grasped in Anthony's long fingers, Jenna walked slowly across the sand. It was as if she could feel Jonathan's gaze still, their eyes meeting as the major had risen from his seat at their inevitable evening fire and taken her hand with importunate demand, the unfathomable aqua depths of the earl's eyes revealing nothing.

Did he mind? She wondered, Lord Charbeau being an enigma emotionally. He made love with tender skill, but his desire for her could be little more than that, which was something she needed to face. Actually, she reminded herself, allowing Anthony to lead her to the crude shelter, it was better for everyone if he didn't mind. That was what she wanted, wasn't it? They were all friends—comrades, as she had said before, and she offered her body in the same spirit they would face a hungry leopard to protect her, risking their own life and limb.

So, the earl was wickedly good-looking and a tender lover, what of it? Anthony Reeves was handsome and she had no doubt he would be careful of her. And Charles was an irresistibly attractive young man, his teasing remarks and the smoldering looks sent her way both amusing and flattering.

Dismissing Jonathan from her mind as much as possible, she proceeded inside, seeing the same mat where she had lain with the earl the night before with a pang of regret for what could be...*no, for heavens sake*, she told herself firmly, *all three men only wanted the same thing and that was all she wanted to give*.

"Let me." Anthony's voice was low, muted, his glinting gaze subdued fire. His hands touched her shoulders and slid lower, to untie the loose bow above her breasts, baring them, the garment slipping free of her body altogether seconds later.

Then he unfastened his breeches and shoved them downward, his erection coming free, stiff against his stomach. The light was better than the night before and she stared at the rampant length of it, wondering if he was as big as the earl was, a shiver of anticipation running through her body to pool in her stomach.

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Easing her down in his arms so they lay supine on the sleeping mat, Anthony's mouth nuzzled her neck as he pulled her close. He felt very hard and solid, different from Jonathan, his shoulders thicker, his slight beard teasing the juncture of neck and shoulder. "Jenna, you are so lovely," he whispered against her skin.

Putting her arms around his waist, she felt a glimmer of pleasure already at being held so close and reverently. His hands were gentle as he stroked her back, sliding downward to cup her bare buttocks and pull her tightly to him, the long length of his rigid cock against her stomach. It felt hot and hard, and his impressive muscles rippled as he moved, finding her mouth, his kiss and taste entirely different than what she had experienced before. Anthony moved his lips slowly against hers, his lashes shut, the evidence of his desire pulsing against her soft belly in time with his heart.

Opening her mouth to accept his questing tongue and running her hands up and down, measuring hard muscle and ridges of scar tissue from old war wounds, Jenna let herself drift into a world where nothing existed but what he could give her, a throbbing need beginning between her legs. Jonathan had taught her what incredible pleasure a man could bring to a woman and she innately wanted that sensation. The fact that Anthony would also achieve equal satisfaction and wanted it so fervently gave her a sense of power she didn't know she craved. She had been helpless against the fateful storm, helpless against dictates of the three men who had saved her—but she held them all cupped in her hand with the allure of her body.

Releasing her mouth, Anthony gazed into her eyes, touching her hair, sifting it through his fingers. "You are like an incredibly splendid dream," he murmured, "in an unreal world. Too good to be true. Is this truly happening?"

"I think so," she replied, a little shy but also wanting and receptive. "It certainly seems unreal when I waken each day and realize where we are, but... I admit, less so as time passes."

"For me, too." His mouth grazed hers lightly, tasting but not possessing. "Your breasts are perfect, soft yet firm, God--I admit I want you beyond my honor. Let me touch you and show you how much. Just lie back."

Doing as she was bid, Jenna relaxed, liking the way he fondled and toyed with her nipples, cupping and lifting the pliant weight of her breasts, sucking on the taut crests until they were hard and erect. Lavishing time and effort on her upper body until she was almost dazed with desire and need, he used his hands and mouth freely. Jenna was almost

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surprised when she realized that she was getting very wet between her legs, a fevered feeling capturing her entire body. She sighed when he shifted his weight on top of her, his swollen shaft prodding her female opening as she willingly opened her legs. She whispered dreamily, “Anthony...yes.”

“You want me?”

“Oh...please.”

“I’m here.” He teased her lower lip with his tongue, pushing his rigid penis slowly inside her body. She was still a little tender and but it didn’t outweigh her response to the male organ that invaded her passage and she closed her eyes in surrender, opening her thighs wider as Jonathan had instructed her to do, giving her body completely.

“God,” Anthony groaned, his erection going deep, plunging into her. “Oh, hold on. I need to love you now.”

The word “love” was an abstract applied to what they were doing, but she complied, feeling him slide in hard and out slowly of her wet sheath, her breath coming fast, her eyes half-shut. His lovemaking was slow at first but rapidly escalated to greedy need for them both, her hands clutching his wide shoulders, her body reaching for that sublime pinnacle.

He also seemed to be barely in control, his blond hair damp and thick as she sank her fingers into it, his face tight and his eyes narrowed. He moved inside her time and again, one thrust after another until she tightened unexpectedly and dug her nails in his flesh as she went over the edge of that pleasurable cliff, falling into a whirling space, her body responding to the ultimate male possession with a will of its own. She convulsed and moaned in open enjoyment, suddenly not caring if anyone heard her orgasmic release, unable to stifle the cry that ripped from her throat.

He found his own pleasure a minute later, ejaculating hard inside her with a low fierce sound, his forehead coming to rest on hers as he released his semen with such a force that she felt it warmly coat her passage, his powerful body shuddering. Putting his arms around her a minute or so later, Anthony rolled to the side, taking her with him, breathing harshly.

She liked being held so close, she thought, a lassitude of fulfillment making her weak and submissive. He might not be Jonathan—a wayward thought when Anthony was inside her, softening but still filling her passage. But he was strong and kind and she would sleep soundly in his arms.

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And that was all she wanted, wasn't it? To be safe and protected.  
Well, almost.

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*Son of a bitch.*

Jonathan narrowed his gaze on the offending item, and tried again, using a rock to pound the whittled wooden stake into the sand.

"Here, Richmond, let me help."

Glancing over, he saw Anthony Reeves leaned forward to steady the piece of wood, his blond hair falling thickly over his neck, his naked upper torso tanned a deep bronze from all the time they spent in the sun. The man, Jonathan noted sourly, looked relaxed and pleased with himself, which was no wonder, considering he had Jenna to himself all night.

Her sensual nature—which he had been the first to discover, was going to be a thorn in his side now. And to make matters worse, Charles was remarkably cheerful this morning, even for him, undoubtedly looking forward to his night in her receptive arms.

Lifting the rock and letting it falling so hard the stick went in almost all the way, he murmured, "Thanks, Reeves."

"You're welcome." Grinning with uncharacteristic openness, Anthony lifted his brows.

"Christ, don't be so damned smug," he snarled, not meaning to let emotion show but unable to contain it. "I could hear you well enough last night."

"I had a feeling it would bother you, the way you look at her. Smug doesn't describe it either," Reeves commented, the grin fading. "I don't feel that way about her. The fact that Jenna is discovering herself as a woman doesn't mean I am the lover of her dreams."

"No," Jonathan said too quickly, "it doesn't."

"Neither does it mean you are either," Reeves reminded him, looking irritatingly bland. "My guess is she is embracing her new sexuality like we did in our first freedom of discovery when young men. I don't know about you, but I drank and fornicated without much discrimination, finding with maturity my tastes were not for that sort of unbridled behavior."

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“My tastes are still the same,” Jonathan admitted, his reputation for shying away from permanence legendary. “I prefer ladies who give willingly and then don’t mind when you walk away.”

“I think, in our old world, Jenna would be a lady who most definitely would mind if you walked away from her.”

“In our old world, I would never have laid a finger on her. Marriageable young ladies are strictly off my list of potential lovers.”

“Then perhaps you would be better off not to fall in love with her.”

Reaching for one of the palm fronds to cover the pit where they often trapped small animals, Jonathan paused and glanced up sharply. “What is it with you and Charles babbling about love constantly?”

“Jenna looks at you differently than either of us.” Anthony rocked back on his heels, lifting his brows. “And you look at her like a man who would like to own her, body and soul.”

“Just her body,” Jonathan said shortly. “But I don’t own it obviously, since I am having to share.”

“Are you telling me if by some damned miracle we were ever rescued from this Godforsaken place, you could just forget her?”

“It is so bloody unlikely I’m not going to worry about. Now, shall we talk about making more of those spears? I think the trees with the odd, spiked leaves work the best. They are much harder to sharpen, but the wood is tough and rigid.”

Always easily distracted by the mechanics of their defense, Anthony nodded. “We need several each.”

Relieved to change the subject so easily, Jonathan said, “Exactly what I was thinking.”

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Charles stood very still, poised like an ancient classical statue, David, perhaps, young and brilliantly brave. Slimmer, but just as muscular as the two older men, he radiated youth and vital good humor, his infectious smile always ready. Having proved more skillful than anyone at being able to catch fish, he waited, a sharp spear made of wood in his hand, the ocean lapping around his waist.

Sitting on the beach under the shade of palm tree, Jenna watched him, feeling the slight breeze ruffle her hair. Above the sky was brilliantly blue, a stunning flawless color



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without a cloud, and the sea was so clear and clean, touched with frothy white foam where it caressed the sandy shore. It was a little odd to think she felt content, but it was true.

“You have been standing there for fifteen minutes at least,” she called out, teasing him. “Are there no fish in this ocean?”

“It takes infinite patience, Lady Jenna,” he called back, not moving, concentrating on the water. Suddenly he plunged forward, coming up triumphantly with a wriggling fish impaled on the stick, his young face alight as he turned. His light brown hair had been a little long when they were stranded, but now it curled almost wildly and his short beard was fine and downy. He was tanned and athletic, the only one of them that loved to spend time in the ocean, and he was often hours in the water, fishing and swimming. Unfailingly cheerful and polite, he was a pleasant companion and very attractive young man.

Wading in to shore, he laughingly presented her with his trophy. “Infinite patience,” he repeated with his charmingly easy smile, “like when you are wooing a beautiful woman to the height of pleasure when she is in your arms.”

Jenna blushed at the open reference to the coming evening, eyeing the gleaming creature in his hands. “Well done. You may keep the fish, but thank you.”

“What about the pleasure?” he said, giving her an audacious wink. “Will you accept that?”

“Charles,” she protested, blushing deeper.

His dark eyes were framed by long lashes that would do justice to a girl. Setting their evening meal down on a broad leaf, he neatly wrapped it to keep it cool and went to rinse his hands. Dropping down in the shade next to her with lazy grace, he shook his head. “I am joking and have no wish to embarrass you, my lady. However, you cannot blame me for being anxious and eager. Never have I wanted nightfall more.”

Pulling up her gown where it had slipped down over shoulder, she was well aware of his avid gaze. Her chemise now gaped open all the time, the ribbon disintegrating finally that morning over being constantly wet and used. Jenna said composedly, “I am flattered you want me.”

“There isn’t a man on this planet that wouldn’t want you.” He stared at her breasts, all but completely exposed, and swallowed audibly. The garment was nearly open to her waist and it was all she could do to keep it from falling off her altogether.

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He sounded so sincere, she stifled a smile. “An exaggeration, I’m sure. Tell me, though, I am curious, how long have you been with his lordship?”

“Five years. Since I was seventeen.” He added on a breath. “And I do not exaggerate in the least.”

“You two are very familiar with each other...it hardly seems a normal employer to servant relationship.” Fighting the urge to uselessly pull the material together, Jenna felt the breeze over those exposed curves. She had tried to figure out a way to fix the problem, but with no way to fasten the material together was resigned to the fact she was more naked than ever. It was just as well she made the decision she had, for she was beginning to see why women covered themselves from throat to ankle. Visual stimuli had an impact on even very nice men, and if she had been bare-breasted from the beginning, things might have gotten out of hand earlier. As it was now, they might as well look, if it pleased them.

Charles frowned slightly. “We are friends and I admire him very much, though he would hate to hear it, laughing it off with his usual cynicism. His childhood was cold, I’m told, his parents unfeeling and leaving his lordship to nannies and tutors. He disdains society most of the time because he hates the lifestyle of wealthy selfish aristocrats, even though he belongs to their class. I think he leaves England to avoid his responsibilities as the earl. We have traveled together everywhere,” he said, lounging on one elbow, tearing his gaze away finally to look into her eyes. “The Orient, the southern islands of the Pacific, even places like North America, where there are savages that can ride their horses sideways and can shoot an arrow through your eye from a great distance. This is not the first time we have been in an adverse situation, but perhaps the first time it seems permanent.”

“Do you really think we will be here...forever?” Her voice caught a little. She had tried not to think of what might be, but now after so many days still on the island with no ships in sight... his words echoed her very fears.

Charles murmured, his dark eyes steady, “I think it is possible that the four of us will companions for a long time. Do not worry, we will take care of you, my lady. And truly, if one must trapped somewhere, there are worse places. I admit there are some predators around, but otherwise the setting is beautiful, we have plenty of food, and the weather is superb most of the time. Besides,” he smiled then, a gleam of white teeth, “we will also keep you entertained. All you have to do is be beautiful, which seems to be an

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effortless endeavor for you.” His hand came out, slender fingers running along her forearm to the curve of her elbow. “Look, you are growing golden with the kiss of the sun. And your hair is so gloriously blond and long, streaked with pale strands in contrast to the deep amber color...it would be unfashionable back in England for your skin to be anything but pale, but the truth is, it is very alluring.”

It was true, she knew she gaining a fine tan despite her efforts to keep out of the blazing heat. “You are all turning brown as well,” she told him, slightly lowering her lashes. “Jonathan looks like Spaniard, so broodingly dark and handsome.”

“Will it trouble you to lie with me, knowing how you feel about him?”

Charles’s hand still cupped her arm, holding lightly, but not in any way restraining her. A little disconcerted she had said something so stupid and revealed her growing attraction to the earl, Jenna quickly shook her head. “I like you very much. If I can please you, then that is all I want.”

“Oh, you please me. In fact, I must feel...these.” His hand drifted higher, along the sensitive skin of her upper arm, then slipped into the open bodice of her chemise, pushing it off her shoulder and exposing one breast fully. Inhaling an audible breath, Charles slid his hand under the weight of the pale mound and lifted it slightly in his palm.

His hand was still cool from the ocean, his touch light, cupping her pliant flesh. Jenna sat, letting him begin to stroke her, her lashes lowering demurely. “It is only afternoon,” she reminded him, but not resisting in any way.

“So firm and perfect, your skin is like silk, and your breasts not too large, but full and voluptuous,” he murmured, circling her nipple gently, his nostrils flaring slightly. “I cannot make love to you now, I know that. For one thing, both the earl and Reeves would have my head if I did not guard you properly and I cannot do that when I am taking my pleasure inside you. Talk about distractions, I cannot think of a bigger one.” His smile was wry, but there was heavy arousal in his eyes. “However, my knife and spear are at hand as we sit here and I can see the whole beach, so let me touch you.”

It was enjoyable, she had to admit it. Her breasts were very sensitive she had discovered, and easily responded to his caresses, which despite his youth, felt deft and practiced. Charles brought one breast and then other to taut neediness, her head falling back as she allowed the possession of his hand, the breeze straying across her heated face. Out in the open, in full sunlight, she felt a little wicked, but then again, there was no one to see them, Jonathan and Anthony having gone into the jungle on some errand.

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“Lie back,” Charles told her with a knowing smile, “I can finish this for you, Jenna.”

“Finish it?” she blinked, only aware of how her body had become tight, almost ready to beg him to go ahead and take her.

“Make you climax,” he explained huskily. “And I cannot wait to see it. Lie back and lift your knees, then let them fall apart.”

Heedless of the sand that would get in her hair and all over her back, she complied, without shame. His hand left her breasts and he pulled the hem of her shift up to her bare her from the waist down and she put her feet on the warm sand, opening herself so he could touch her wet cleft. Still propped on one elbow, he caressed dampness and need and she let out a gasp, closing her eyes against the shimmering sunlight, the only part of her world the ache between her thighs.

One finger found her opening, sliding in, rubbing the tightness inside as she clenched against the carnal exploration. It felt wonderful but wasn’t enough and she lifted her hips in supplicant request.

“More? My lady is greedy.” Charles laughed lightly and slipped in another finger, the dual penetration exquisite. He began to imitate the act of sexual consummation with his hand, pushing deep inside her vagina with his long fingers, and pulling out again, applying pressure with his thumb to the bud that seemed to seep fluids with each stroke, until Jenna arched in sharp acute pleasurable release, her hands picking up fistfuls of sand, her low cry echoing out over the rippling water. Her passage in spasms around his invading fingers, holding them inside her until she trembled with the sheer pleasure of it, the world faded...and then came slowly back into focus.

His hand still between her legs, his fingers gentle as he lightly stroked her inner walls, Charles smiled mischievously at her, looking both supremely male and boyish at the same time. “Tonight,” he said, a husky note in his voice. “is going to be delightful.”

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A few clouds scuttled overhead, but otherwise there was nothing but stars and the huge vast moving sea. More alert than ever, Jonathan waited. They had had trouble the past two nights with a beast of some sort, probably the jungle cat from the other morning. It had discovered the scraps of fish bones and other discarded bits from their meals, even though they had carefully buried them to keep scavengers away. Digging up the debris,

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the animal had obviously decided the free food to its liking, for it prowled the vegetation near the hut despite the fire, and he and Anthony had heard it growling earlier.

A giant snarling cat bursting from the bushes would be welcome, he thought savagely. It would give him something to do other than sit and *listen*.

Jonathan sat, his hands loosely grasping his knife, hearing against his will the low sounds coming from the shelter nearby. Jenna said something in a breathless whisper and Charles laughed, the low sound of their voices muted. He could almost see in his mind their bodies entwined and it made him grind his teeth, even though he loved Charles like a brother. Picturing his youthful masculinity over Jenna's slender and extremely female body was torture, as was the fact that once they stopped talking, he knew they were engaged in another activity, a low moan drifting out now and then, the sound of ragged breathing finally punctuated by her soft cry of release and a lower groan as Charles came as well.

Dammit, he thought blackly. Her infernal idea had sounded marvelous when it involved *him* being able to satisfy a very burning lust in her young body. And he had thought he could handle the fact she would be fucking Anthony and Charles too, because he was never possessive of his lovers.

But he was pretty miserable sitting there, a prisoner because it was his turn to stand guard, Anthony sound asleep on a pallet nearby.

Refusing to analyze his feelings, he focused on the fact that there was one good thing about this evening...tomorrow he was Jenna's bodyguard.

## Chapter Five

The day began with rain, a gentle patter that sifted occasionally through the roof of the hut. Jenna moved now and then when it woke her, finding a drier spot, naked and sleepy, but alone as she had been the past two mornings. The men always got up early and began to work on their daily survival, looking for food, hunting, fishing, and keeping a vigilant eye constantly on the horizon for a ship they could signal. When thunder boomed, she grimaced and scooted into the corner, the roof certainly not waterproof. Dreaming of her dry bed in her luxuriant bedroom in her father's London townhouse, she drifted back to sleep, not even stirring much when she felt the first insidious glide across her back.

Nor did she really realize she wasn't alone in the hut after all.

"Jenna, don't move," Not able to keep his voice even, Jonathan froze halfway through the doorway, staring at the serpent coiled next to her. She was nude still, and sleepily gorgeous, her lashes fluttering as she lay on her side, her long slender legs resting together, her splendid breasts gently moving with each slumberous breath.

The snake was thick in girth, but he couldn't tell exactly how big, not that it mattered with the creature actually touching her, and he was suddenly petrified she would wake and panic, causing it to attack.

"Jonathan," she muttered, stirring a little. "What's wrong?"

He didn't dare tell her. A fear he had never known—not even when he realized the ship was sinking—gripped him. Smiling in sickly reassurance, he said, "Nothing...it's late morning, I just wanted to make sure you were feeling well."

Advancing slowly, he crouched in the low space, wondering how the hell he would do this...the creature was actually coiled so close she would realize it at any time, and if she tried to turn over to see what was touching her back, she would be bitten.

Hell and blast.

The serpent lifted its head, the tongue flicking out, registering his presence.

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Not sure what else to do, not able to leap over her because the space was too small, and the snake just too close, Jonathan took a deep breath and suddenly grasped her slim ankles. Yanking violently as he stumbled out of the doorway, he dragged her backwards onto the wet sand of the beach out of the hut, not pausing even though she fought and twisted against his assault, her long shining hair trailing behind her, her expression one of both fury and surprise.

Sputtering, completely naked and magnificent, she sat up and shook out her long golden tresses once he stopped a safe distance from the hut, looking confused and angry, her eyes sending sparks. "Are you insane?" she demanded, her breasts heaving, the golden triangle at her thighs visible from his viewpoint, the darkness between her legs intriguing at all times, even now.

"Most days since I've been here," he confirmed dryly, dropping her ankles, though admittedly enjoying the view of her silky tempting cleft. "Jenna, I apologize if I startled you."

"You apologize for waking me from a sound sleep by dragging me out into the mud like one of the Sabine women?" she demanded. "If you wish sexual congress so early, my lord, perhaps you could just ask me. I believe it is your turn."

Her scathing words brought the blood to his face, even though he thought he was immune to anything as naïve as chagrin. "I do wish sexual congress," he said evenly, "and in that interest, I prefer you to be alive so that I can take my pleasure. Forgive me, but the snake you were so cozily cohabiting with looked detrimental to my selfish desires. He didn't bite you, did he?"

The blood drained abruptly from her face. "What?"

"You know, the one coiled right next to you inside."

"Oh God." She began to shake, her eyes widening. "I hate snakes...are you serious?"

"It must have crawled in the door when Charles left you," he explained, his voice softening. "The walls of the hut are down in the sand, but the doorway is open...Jenna, you are fine now..."

"Oh," she scrambled to her feet and flung herself at him with a sob, mindless of her nudity.

"I am not one to fend off beautiful women in a state of complete undress, but you are covered in sand," he murmured into her hair, lifting her up despite his words, the

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weight of her luscious in his arms, her bottom satin and round, her breasts warm against his chest.

“Wipe me off then,” she whispered, “but don’t let me go. This is your day...you can do whatever you like.”

That suggestion went straight to his groin like a streak of lightning in a night sky.

“I hate snakes, too,” he offered, smiling in relief that she wasn’t hurt, his heart slowing a little.

“You do?” The general’s daughter looked very young with her trembling lips and ashen face. A golden mane of hair trailed over his arm and brushed his thigh.

He gave a grimace. “Ask Charles. I am a complete quaking coward when it comes to the slithering things.”

She swallowed, and then emphatically shook her head. “No, you aren’t, my lord. I don’t believe it. You are unfazed by anything.”

*Not by seeing her lying sleeping next to a deadly reptile.* Relishing the feel of her naked body against his, Jonathan said neutrally, “Let’s say I would gladly walk through glowing hot coals to avoid one. However, I think we need to get this one out of your abode, so if you will stay here, I’ll take care of that unpleasant task.”

“No,” her arms tightened frantically around his neck, “stay here and hold me.”

Women often complained over how the world worked, with men in charge and their roles subject to male authority and privilege, but looking into the limpid eyes of the girl in his arms, Jonathan found he could not deny her anything she asked of him. “I’ll do whatever pleases you,” he said softly, meaning it. Then he added meaningfully, “Now...and later. Did you miss me these past two nights?”

“Yes.”

“It didn’t sound like it.”

Her cheeks grew pink but her gaze did not falter. “I did what I said I would do. Did you expect less of me?”

The truth was, he thought her very courageous as well as sensuous. But it still annoyed him against his will that she had enjoyed the lovemaking of other men. He said shortly, “My expectations aside, I am glad this is my day.”

“I am, too.” Her voice was hushed, her long lashes fans on her cheeks.

“Hell,” he muttered ungallantly, hearing shouts in the distance. “What now?”



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Setting down his delightful burden, Jonathan took her hand and tugged her forward. "Come on, it sounds like Charles and Anthony are in some sort of trouble."

Running, pulling her along, he headed toward the raised voices. It took him only a few seconds to realize that Anthony and Charles were at the trapping pit. They had dug it in a small clearing just inside the line of foliage and thick trunks the first week of their arrival, working for days with big shells to scoop out the dirt and damp sand to make it deep enough to keep small animals from being able to escape. It was five feet deep and roughly square, with perfectly straight sides. A tall man could easily vault out of it, but the little fierce pigs that roamed the island were trapped, and they had also once caught a rabbit-like creature with huge eyes, which had tasted a little like guinea fowl. They checked it several times a day, covering it over with fronds so unsuspecting animals would wander over and fall through.

Now, Jonathan saw as he ran up, dragging Jenna by the hand, the fronds were destroyed and scattered and from the depths of the hole came low ominous sounds. Anthony and Charles both held their spears with business-like attention, only glancing over as he arrived, obviously at the ready in case the animal in the ground decided to emerge.

Anthony said without prelude, "It looks like our skulking friend has injured something in his fall. Otherwise he would simply jump out. There was something in there and he must have heard it and decided to help himself, hence the blood."

Jonathan drew his brows together, guessing, "The leopard?"

"A beauty. And so damned mad, he's spitting. The trouble is, our spears aren't long enough to kill him if we are standing on the edge, and I'm not all that anxious to jump in there."

Letting go of Jenna's hand, Jonathan moved forward to peer downward into the pit. Sure enough, the cat was crouched there, hissing and growling low in his throat. A magnificent beast with malevolent green eyes and powerful muscles, it bared impressive fangs and howled as he stared at it.

"What is this, some kind of plot with the jungle beasts to make my hair turn gray this morning?" he muttered. "Well, we can't leave him in there. It isn't humane to let anything die of thirst or hunger, but damned if I'm going to feed and water it until it heals and jumps out. He's been a nuisance already. We have to kill it."

"How?" Charles asked simply.

*Emma Wildes*

“If you can keep it at bay with your spears, I can jump in and use my knife. I’ve hunted big cats before, I know how.”

Jenna gasped, “No, are you insane?”

“He has done it before,” Charles confirmed, sounding thoughtful. “And look at him, my lord, it looks like he might have broken his leg, for he turns only so far and drags his right paw. Since he needs the other to keep himself upright, all you need worry about is his teeth.”

“Is that all,” Anthony said dryly. “Better you than me, Jon.”

“It needs done. He was going to be trouble, we all knew it.”

“I suppose so.”

“Absolutely not.” Jenna grasped his arm, staring down at the cornered animal. “He could tear you to shreds.”

Turning and looking at her, he realized he’d dragged her stark naked from the beach, her lithe, slender body coated with a fine layer of sand, her luscious breasts heaving with agitation. She seemed uncaring of her nudity, but then again, he reminded himself, both Anthony and Charles had seen her that way already. “I’ll be fine,” he said soothingly. “In fact, I prefer jumping into a pit of claws and razor teeth to dealing with the serpent in your bed. Charles can dispose of your unwanted bedmate.”

“Bedmate?” Charles asked in obvious surprise, his dark eyes widening. “She slept with me last night.”

“And woke up with a snake. That must have some poetic significance.” Jonathan grinned with cynical humor, turning back toward the pit, pulling his knife from its sheath and testing the sharp blade with his thumb. “Now, gentlemen, are you ready? Just keep him from moving and I’ll do the rest.”

“Be careful,” Charles murmured, “this could be more dangerous than Constantinople, my lord. And that was a sticky situation indeed.”

“What could be more dangerous than a pit with a deadly panther in it?” Jenna demanded, her voice tight with audible hysteria.

“A woman scorned,” Jonathan answered blithely.

“I beg your pardon?” she blinked, distracted for the moment from the dangers of what he proposed to do.

### SAVAGE SHORES

“I’ll give you details later,” Charles said with a wink. “Let’s just say his esteemed lordship almost lost a very important part of his anatomy that I know he values highly because of a jealous—”

“That’s enough.” Jonathan interrupted, scowling. “And keep the details to yourself. In the meantime, can you help me or are you going to stand there gossiping?”

Looking entirely unrepentant but obediently hefting his spear with a steady hand, Charles grinned. “Forgive me, my lord. I am ready when you are.”

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The very worse thing about being stranded in a tropical paradise was not the marauding presence of unknown creatures, but the fact that her other three companions were all infuriating, high-handed, arrogant...*men*.

Reclining on her pallet, Jenna stretched her body languidly and waited, the events of the day still making her almost lax with exhaustion. First, the snake, then Jonathan leaping in to kill the panther, landing next to it and wrestling the massive head up to plunge his knife into its neck, dark blood spurting everywhere. Both Charles and Anthony had been approving, herself sickened and frightened. The men had spent hours skinning the beast and stretching out the hide, the work both bloody and gruesome.

She hadn’t fallen in love with a titled, darkly handsome lord, but a forceful barbarian, she decided, shivering at the memory of his reckless courage.

A shadow crossed the doorway, hung there for a long moment, and then he parted the fronds and came inside. Dripping from the ocean, Jonathan smelled tangy, his skin wet and slick. He was naked, bronzed, powerful as a god. Not saying a word, he stared down at her, a slow smile curving his mouth when he saw she was nude and waiting.

She met his glittering gaze almost defiantly, saying, “My chemise is in tatters. I wanted to spare my last bit of clothing your impatient hands.”

“What an excellent idea.” His voice as smooth and before her eyes she saw his reaction to the sight of her lying there, the staff between his legs stiffening and growing, rising from the nest of curly dark hair. Lengthening until it was upright against his flat, hard stomach, the tip swelling, his testicles tightened as well, the large sacs pulled upward. “Excuse my tardiness, my lady, I needed to wash.”

“Away the blood?” she asked in a small voice, staring at his blatant erection. “Jonathan, do you realize what we are becoming? Most of the time I try not to think about our...situation. But today I saw a titled gentleman kill a jungle beast with little

*Emma Wildes*

more than a small knife while I stood there watching, naked and not the least concerned with it. The two other men on this island with us are also normally intelligent and polite...but we are evolving into something else, aren't we? Savages, at the least, living for the moment. Look at me here. I wait for you, willing to spread my legs for the pleasure you will bring me and I will give you, my reputation and virtue so far gone I cannot even recall why I cared about either one."

"What I see when I look at you is a passionate creature that embraces the side of life our culture dismisses." His voice was low and persuasive as he sank down next to her. "You are fretting over nothing, Jenna. We are strong, all of us, especially you. Strong and beautiful and so sexy you cannot imagine your own allure. You need to survive like the rest of us, and to do so, you keep us content with each other. It is simple, and yet complicated as hell."

"I don't feel strong, I feel—"

"Free?" he supplied, irony heavy in his voice, his hands finding her, circling her waist.

She did, in a sense. They all were no longer bound by any rules but their own. "I suppose," she acquiesced quietly, looking into his eyes. "I like being able to... give myself. I never imagined there was such joy between men and women. The whispers I have heard mostly hint that married ladies only endure their husband's attentions, anxious to give him an heir so they can sleep alone."

"But?" His hands held her still, spanning her torso, his eyes gleaming in the dim light.

"How can a woman eschew such sensation?" she asked, truthfully not understanding, liking the feel of his warm palms on her stomach and side.

"Look at it this way, if we were back in England and you had married some young buck, eager to have you but still repressed by the stilted confines of our societal strictures, and he had come to you mindful of your virginal innocence, would you have enjoyed your first coupling at all?"

Chewing on her lower lip, so very conscious of his aroused large body next to her, Jenna asked, "What do you mean?"

His smile was a glimmer. "He would be a nervous lover, anxious to not offend you. You would be stiff and fearful because some sour matronly aunt had given you the lie-there-and-endure-it speech—and because neither of you were allowed to discuss it,

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much less explore your passion for each other—it would be painful and embarrassing for you and humiliating for him. Hence why so many men take mistresses and most married ladies seek seduction away from their husbands. Aren't you glad you experienced it here, where there are no such restrictions against enjoyment over the miracles we can give each other?"

"I suppose." She felt a little dubious over such facile reassurance. "Is that why you are not married, my lord? Because of matronly aunts and stiff fearful brides?"

The question seemed to disconcert Jonathan, and he hesitated before replying softly, "I have not yet married because I hadn't met a young woman with incredible beauty, uncontained passion, and the ability to be inventive in bed. Roll over, Jenna."

Blinking at the implication, she said, "What?"

"Over," he coaxed her with firm pressure. "I am done with conversation. I need your soft heat. On your hands and knees."

Letting him move her, she complied, moving into a position in which she faced the wall of the hut with him behind her. Feeling his hands slide over the curve of her buttocks, she took in a breath. "What are you doing?"

"This position is one of my favorites and I think in our...primitive surroundings, will suit the moment." He added on a suffocated breath, "I need to mate with you."

She felt the pressure at her sex from behind, his hands going to her hips. Bracing herself, she opened her thighs slightly to accommodate his swollen erection, her passage stretched at his insistent entrance when he pressed deep, mounting her from behind. Her eyes closed at the hard hot invasion, the tip of Jonathan's shaft nudging her womb, his hands holding her immobile. He began a systematic seduction of her body with his persistent thrusts and withdrawals, holding her still as he occupied her most intimate space and then retreated. She whimpered beyond her will as she was forced forward when he invaded, her cleft plundered by his need and passion, their position both shocking and arousing.

He was right, it was primitive.

It was also basically a lesson in pure pleasure.

When she climaxed, it was on her elbows, his hips hard against her bottom. She cried out and felt the tremors of her inner muscles milk his cock, his own orgasm intense as he rocked inside her passage and exploded in a torrent of hot semen, his breathing harsh and loud.

*Emma Wildes*

They were heathens, she decided dazedly when he eased out from between her legs and pulled her to him. Both of them were lightly touched by sweat, their bodies relaxed, not even a kiss exchanged between them.

They had, as he said, just mated.

Outside the hut, some creature howled from the depths of the jungle. The sound seemed appropriate.

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It would be morning soon.

On his side, the small shelter wreathed in darkness, Jonathan lightly touched the woman sleeping next to him, feeling a little guilty, but enough to stop. In the dim light she looked ethereal and unfairly lovely, her voluptuous body gilded by filtered moonlight, her tumbled hair like spun gold. His sperm was on her slim thighs, glistening in thin rivulets.

She was right, of course. They were all under the spell of forces ancient as time itself. The need to eat, to sleep and protect their carefully carved out space on the island ... the need to find a sexual partner, those basics occupied their every waking moment.

In a few hours, she would belong to someone else.

There was no reason not to wake her, he decided selfishly. She could sleep late in the morning. He was straining and erect, his cock rigid with the sort of need he had never felt for another woman ... by the gods, he'd almost told her that earlier. Leaning over her, he eased her on her back and covered her body, gently pushing her legs apart and settling between them. She began to wake as he nibbled on her neck, his throbbing penis nudging her female opening. "Let me know when you're ready," he murmured against the curve of her throat. "But don't," he lifted his head and smiled wickedly into her sleepy eyes, "take too long."

"Jonathan." His name was a sigh and her hands lifted to lightly rest on his back. "Don't you ever rest?"

"Why would I rest?" he asked, kissing her right breast, savoring the silky firmness, "when you are so deliciously available."

"What if I prefer to sleep?" she asked, her eyes still half-closed.

"Do you?" He sucked her nipple into his mouth, teasing it with his tongue.

"No." Her breath shuddered in her chest as he nibbled and licked at the bud. The admission, and the fact that she was already slick with his discharge from their earlier

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intercourse, made him enter her with slow pressure, not able to suppress a low sound of satisfaction as he was enveloped in perfect tight wet heat. Jenna lifted her hips to accept and take him deeper, opening her thighs wide and raising her legs to put them around his waist. This time he didn't feel just the violent need for carnal release, but also the need to touch and kiss her, and he moved slowly, looking into her eyes. He could hear the soft wet sounds of his penis sliding in and out of her vagina, registering the changes in her breathing as she began to climb that orgasmic peak, holding back as he made love to her with infinite finesse, a distinct difference from their wild joining earlier.

"Please," she finally begged, "Oh, Jonathan...harder."

He kissed her flushed cheek, not complying, loving her breathless moans. "It's good this way, my love. Don't be so impatient, you'll get there."

Her small hands clutched frantically at his back. "I don't want to wait...Oh God, you're so big...it feels so good. Help me."

The truth was, he didn't want to wait either. "Anything for the lady's pleasure," he murmured, and suddenly pushed incredibly deep, making her cry out. Pulling back, he did it again, fast and hard, touching her trembling womb. Her resulting orgasm was intense and instant, her legs locking as she lifted against him, forcing him as deep as he could go, her eyes tightly shut as she uttered a low, keening scream and convulsed. He followed her, unable to help the relentless tide of pleasure as it swept him into a maelstrom of erotic paradise, the sensation of scalding release unique because in spite of all his experience, he had never made love to a woman like Jenna.

He stayed in her body a long time afterward, not withdrawing until she had drifted back to sleep, not wanting to give up his possession.

Dammit, he thought as he lay there next to her, one arm still holding her close despite the warm darkness and the fact he was sweating. He sure as hell hoped Charles and Anthony weren't right and he was falling in love with her.

At the same time, he was afraid it was possible.

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Days flowed, one into the other, and time became nothing but sunrise and sunset. The rains came, day after day of incessant moisture from dark clouds that hung above, and at first Jenna stayed in her hut, but the men still had to forage and hunt, and soon enough the boredom of it brought her out too. She got used to being wet, and in fact, the warm droplets ceased to bother her.

### *Emma Wildes*

After killing the panther, Jonathan had given her the cured pelt, and she had fashioned a small short skirt that hung on her hips and covered her to her upper thighs, staying in place with a simple tie made out of a bit of supple vine through two slits in the material. It was barely enough to cover her bottom and front, but it was so hot and humid each day that more clothing was unwanted and she had deliberately made it that way. Her shift had fallen apart but she kept a strip of cloth that she used to bind her breasts, tying it behind her back. It afforded little actual coverage because the material was so sheer, and half the time she didn't even bother. Being bare-breasted in front of three men who saw her naked regularly didn't seem significant and she liked the freedom of walking around that way.

They enjoyed it too, though they were scrupulous about their arrangement and no one ever touched her if they were not assigned to guard her. They wore very little but their now frayed breeches, donning boots only to go into the jungle, and each one of them had become so muscular from doing physical work all day, they were impressively defined, dark as any natives, their hair growing long though they kept their beards trimmed. The work between them fell into categories of responsibility dictated by natural ability, and there was very little discord.

In fact, they all got along remarkably well, their situation forging them into a family, the very difference between their personalities a boon. She found the same nuances in all three of them as lovers. Charles was teasing and playful in bed, and often he would stay inside her after their first climax, talking, kissing and touching until he hardened again and repeated the performance. Anthony was the opposite...a careful lover who was obsessed with her breasts, lavishing his attention on that portion of her anatomy until they were both so aroused they climaxed quickly once he actually penetrated her.

And Jonathan.

Jenna lived for the nights when she was his. She enjoyed sex with the others, there was no denying it and she didn't try, but it was different with him. Combustible, often wild, always intensely pleasurable. He was inventive and demanding, but also tender and skillful. Even during the day, she often stayed near him, and it was natural for her to sit next to him when they ate or gathered around the useless but traditional signal fire. He seemed to have exclusive rights by some sort of unspoken agreement to have authority over anything that involved her.



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She gloried in the possessive look in his aqua eyes when he looked at her, and wanted him to admit his feelings for her were more than just simple passion.

Of course, she reminded herself often with dreary practicality, what would be the point? It wasn't as if he could marry her and they could forge a normal life together. All she could have was his physical affection.

It didn't feel like enough.

## Chapter Six

Seabirds circled and called, the forms indistinct against the void of blue above, the sun blazing down with fierce intent. The breeze was warm as well, a breath of hot moving air that did little to relieve the oppressive heat. The monsoons had left, but there was something approaching, Jonathan could feel it. Standing on the beach, he scanned the horizon but it appeared harmless and serene, the ocean glimmering in its usual endless vista.

Next to him, Anthony said, "I think we're in for some bad weather, Jon. In fact, maybe we should go to the cave tonight."

"Shit, I hate the trek to that damned place," Jonathan replied darkly, "but I'm afraid you're right. The air is practically simmering."

"One of us will have to carry Jenna," Anthony murmured. "Her skin is too tender for the thorns and insects."

Both of them transferred their gaze to the water, where she stood waist deep in the gentle surf, her shining blond hair tumbling down her graceful back in long tangled curls, her firm breasts high and pink-tipped. She was nude, but then she often was, none of them were self-conscious of going without clothing anymore. A little farther out, Charles swam in long powerful strokes, more at home in the water than anyone Jonathan had ever seen. Periodically they would splash each other and laugh, like two carefree children, her musical mirth a pleasure to hear. Like the three of them, she was smoothly muscled from swimming and walking so much, her limbs long and luscious, her entire body a golden brown from going without clothing in the sun so often. Even her breasts and bottom were gloriously tanned, and her beautiful halo of silken hair streaked with pale glimmers, so long now it fell below her hips. She had been beautiful and desirable when they had first been shipwrecked, but now she was...incomparable.

"How long have we been here, if you had to guess, and I know that is all you can do."

### SAVAGE SHORES

Turning, Jonathan glanced at the man he now considered a close friend. "Months. At least four. Maybe five."

"That sounds about right if the monsoons came when they were supposed to." Anthony nodded, his brown gaze still fixed thoughtfully on Jenna's lithe figure. "And in that time, Jon, how often has Jenna had her female courses?"

"Once," Jonathan answered with resignation.

"I think," Anthony said calmly, "you need to talk to her."

"This was bound to happen, of course." Jonathan rubbed his jaw with uncharacteristic uncertainty. "Has she said anything at all to you?"

"Not a word. I swear I think she doesn't realize she's pregnant."

The subject in question shrieked suddenly as Charles came up out of the sea and grabbed her, lifting her in his arms, playfully threatening to toss her into the water. Her slender body gleamed in the sun.

"I cannot believe it wouldn't occur to her, but we of the upper classes do pride ourselves on keeping our young well-bred women ignorant about their bodies," Jonathan said sardonically. "She's intelligent, but if one is not armed with information, how can a person come to any correct conclusion? She's probably just grateful to skip her flux. I know I would be if, God forbid, such a plague descended upon me. The way time passes here, she no doubt lost track of when it was supposed to come in the first place and as each day went by, forgot she was expecting it. I don't know exactly how women deal with such things, but I have had many mistresses and they seemed to be able to gauge carefully their...availability."

Anthony lifted his brows. "Her breasts are larger already."

"I've noticed, thank you," Jonathan said shortly.

"Not that they weren't perfect before...but they are spectacular now." Grinning, Anthony took a theatrical step backward as Jonathan shot him a killing look.

"She belongs to Charles today, so forget about her breasts." Often enough, both Charles and Anthony liked to needle him over Jenna, and he tried to not get irritated, but still did so with annoying frequency. Frowning, he said, "I have noticed she isn't as slim either, she is beginning to show a little evidence of the growing child. If one didn't know her body intimately, she is slender enough that maybe they wouldn't see it, but I do."

"Will she be pleased or upset?"

*Emma Wildes*

It was the question that had bothered Jonathan all long. "That's why I haven't said anything before now," he admitted. "Pure cowardice. I honestly don't want to see her unhappy over something that is so monumental and life-changing. Face it, we are all going to be different when this child arrives. It frightens the hell out of me to think of protecting a vulnerable babe in this place, much less the thought of Jenna having to deliver it without the benefit of a mid-wife or any medical care. I have no idea what to do."

"I have some experience," Anthony said, still watching the two young people frolicking in the water, Jenna bending over to send a spray of brilliant water at Charles, both of them looking like nubile young savages. "Where there are soldiers, there are camp women. The combination often results in babies. I've seen some born, they tend to not wait even if a battle is raging. I know the basics, anyway."

"That's something," Jonathan said gratefully.

"You need to speak with her right away, Jon. It can't be put off."

"Yes, I know. I'll do it now and get it over with."

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Wading out of the water, Jenna lifted her brows in question, seawater running off her body and onto the warm sand. "The water is nice, are you going in for a swim?"

"No." Jonathan held out his hand. "Come, walk with me."

Since it was unusual for him to approach her when he wasn't on duty to protect her, and because he looked a little strange, she said slowly, "Is something wrong?"

"Not in my opinion. Just come, Jenna."

Not even letting her retrieve her skirt, he grasped her hand and began to walk along the beach. Still in the water, Charles called something and Jonathan turned to wave at him in dismissal, his handsome face serious under the grazing of dark whiskers on his jaw and chin.

Nude, her hair dripping, Jenna walked obediently beside him as he led her away, the beach glistening before them in a pale arc into the distance, his expression unreadable. He said abruptly, "Do you understand exactly how procreation works?"

Blinking, a little confused, Jenna said, "What?"

"How babies are made," he clarified, his blue-green gaze direct. "Do you understand that when a man comes inside a woman and deposits his seed near her womb, a child can be conceived? If it is only one time, a child can result. If it is multiple times, a

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child becomes more and more likely. When I make love to you, and I climax, the residue that seeps from between your legs later is my sperm, made by my body to impregnate you.”

Put so graphically, she couldn’t help but understand. “I know that,” she said faintly, though the truth was, she hadn’t particularly grasped how the entire process worked. With only her father as a parent, the subject had most certainly never arisen.

Jonathan stopped, the light breeze ruffling his long dark hair, his gaze at once tender and compelling. “Do you also understand that when a woman has her courses, it is because her body readied for conception, but it didn’t happen. But if her flux does not come, and she has had sexual intercourse *frequently*, it is likely she is going to have a child.”

His emphasis on the word frequently sent the blood into her neck and cheeks. Suddenly she felt as if the world slipped out from under her and she stepped back abruptly, shaking free of his hand, her mind whirling. It was a fact that she hadn’t bled in the regular way for a long time.

*Could it be true?*

“Jenna.” The way he said her name was gentle. “Are your breasts a little tender? They look fuller, even more enticing than before. And you are sleeping in the afternoons, resting so you can grow this life within you. I don’t think there is any question of your condition.”

“I’m going to have a baby?” She wasn’t sure how to feel, her legs suddenly weak.

“I think so. In fact, I am quite sure.”

A thousand thoughts slid through her mind in a second. “Here?” she said suddenly, fearfully. “With snakes and leopards and God knows what makes that horrible sound in the night...”

“We’ll protect you and the babe,” Jonathan said, his gaze steadily. His smile was almost tentative, a difference from his usual arrogant expression. “Are you upset?”

“I don’t know,” she answered honestly. Her hand went to her stomach, feeling the taut skin there, flat against the very gentle swell. It seemed suddenly that what he said made complete sense, all of it, and that maybe somewhere deep she had known something was happening to her body. “You must think I am an ignorant fool to not have guessed this myself,” she mumbled. “Do Anthony and Charles know?”

*Emma Wildes*

“Yes--at least Anthony does, and Charles will not be surprised.” Jonathan smiled wider, catching her and bringing her close, encircling her with his strong arms. “You are not a fool, Jenna, but a product of your upbringing. We are all not only older, but vastly more experienced. And as for myself, I am pleased with your condition.”

“You are?” Tilting her head back, she studied his expression, resting against him. He looked sincere, and relieved maybe that she had not flown into a bout of hysterics. Then a thought occurred to her and she flushed. “You can’t even know it is yours,” she said reluctantly.

His long fingers caught her chin, tilting her head upward. “Do you want this babe to be mine?” he asked in a husky voice, his azure gaze mesmerizing.

She did, heart and soul. “Yes,” she admitted.

“Then as far as I am concerned, it is. If for no other reason than it grows inside you.”

For the first time since she had offered herself to them all what seemed a lifetime ago, he kissed her when it was not going to be his night, his mouth warm and gentle, his tongue slipping inside to taste and caress. She capitulated with joy, her bare body against his strong tall form, her arms clasping his neck. It was a long, tender embrace and when he broke it, he smiled again, not looking in the least like the jaded aristocrat she knew, nor like the impassioned lover of her dreams. “I am going to be a father,” he said with open wonder.

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The animals, too, seemed to know something monumental was going to happen. The underbrush of the jungle was unnaturally silent, the usual constant rustling and movement gone. Even the birds ceased their insistent racket, a hushed silence hanging like a pall over the leaves and twisted vines.

Anthony moved purposefully in front, knife in one hand, spear in the other. Vigilant, he led them through the dense growth, finding his way by the markers they had left on previous excursions. Behind him Jonathan followed, carrying Jenna in his arms, her golden head resting on his shoulder. Charles made up the rear, transporting provisions such as food and some skins with water from the pool. He had also strapped to his back several sleeping mats, since they had no idea how long the storm might rock their little island.

Because it was coming.

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For one thing, the wind was rising, and by the time they left the beach, the surf had been wild and foamy, licking the shore like a hungry animal, washing away sand and crawling ever higher. The hut would not survive this onslaught, and Jonathan felt a pang of regret for all the times he had made love to Jenna there, and the hours when they had lain and slept together.

By the time they reached the other side of the island, the sky had turned a lurid color and the tallest trees groaned and thrashed in the increasing gale. Anthony and Charles checked the cave first, having a hard time lighting the torch, their faces grim and set. The first spit of rain came as Jonathan stood outside, Jenna still nestled against his chest, her face a little pale.

"Will we be here long?" she asked, obviously reluctant to go inside, even when Charles whistled to let him know it was safe.

"I can't tell you that, love," he said with patent reassurance, the protective feeling over his precious burden so intense he didn't know it was possible. His arms tightened a little around her slender body, feeling her fragile bones, her soft vulnerability. "We'll be safe, that's the important thing. Are you ready? We need to go in, I think. Hear that roar? The storm is coming, much, I would guess, like the one that sank our ship."

Her face lost even more color. "Yes, let's go in."

Ducking inside, he saw that Charles had already unrolled a mat, and he set her on it gently. The torch flickered, shoved into a crack in the wall and he knew it wouldn't last long, though some time before he and Anthony had made a journey and gathered wood that they had piled in the corner against such an emergency. However, the space was not ventilated as far as he knew, and building an actual fire inside was a bad idea. If they needed light, they had torches, but otherwise, it was going to just be the darkness and the raging fury outside.

Anthony said in awe, "Listen to it. This morning the sun was shining."

"It's coming like an avalanche," Charles remarked, wiping sweat from his forehead with his hand, his eyes narrowed on the doorway. "Do you remember, my lord, that time in the Alps? We could hear something similar and realized that the mountainside was loosening its load of snow. An entire village was wept away before our eyes."

"I remember," Jonathan said, sitting down next to Jenna. "It was incredible and horrifying at the same time."

*Emma Wildes*

“This sound reminds me of the siege at Badajoz,” Anthony offered, his face grave with memory. “We battered the fortress for days and it began to rain, making it all the more miserable. Wellington sent in more and more men, until we finally breached the walls and took the town. I can still hear the constant roar of the cannon, it went on forever.”

Always cheerful, Charles gave Jenna a bright smile. “So you see, this is nothing. No wounded, no casualties or missing villages, only a passing typhoon. These rock walls have been here for thousands of years. We’ll be completely safe.”

“Only because you all planned ahead.” Her smile was wan. “I cannot think but that I am very lucky to have three such far-sighted men taking care of me. Unfortunately, this sound reminds me of the night our ship went down. My father didn’t want me to come see him in India in the first place, but I insisted. I hope he hasn’t racked himself with guilt, thinking he should have stood firm. I have felt guilty myself more than once, when I felt happiness and joy here, knowing he was grieving.”

Outside a tree cracked suddenly, the crash audible even inside the thick walls. She shivered and Jonathan reached out to touch her face lightly, running his fingers along her perfect jaw. “Your father was blessed by having you, just as we will be blessed by this coming child. Come now, it needs rest, and so do you. Lie down and sleep. We’ll be here.”

To his surprise, she did as he instructed when he eased her back on to the pallet, amazingly asleep in no time as he held her hand, her fingers slowly growing lax. When he looked up, he realized Anthony, and especially Charles, were grinning at him in the sputtering light despite the furious assault of wind and rain outside. “What?” he asked defensively.

“You should see yourself,” Charles chortled. “You are such the tender and solicitous lover, nothing like your usual distant, unapproachable self. All those fine ladies back in London that you have seduced and left bereft would swoon to see you so soft and caring. If you are not the most besotted fool on the face of this earth, I will eat the next tree that crashes to the ground.”

“That I would like to see,” Jonathan muttered, nevertheless not letting go of Jenna’s slim hand.

Crouching closest to the doorway, Anthony also laughed. “I agree with Charles. You should simply admit to yourself that you are madly in love with her.”



### SAVAGE SHORES

“She’s with child on an island being storm-tossed by a violent tropical tempest. I would hardly be human if I didn’t take great care with her.” The protest sounded weak, even to his own ears.

“We’re human. Do you want one of us to hold her hand while she sleeps?” Charles asked innocently, his mouth twitching. Cross-legged on the stone floor, he looked smug and amused. Shaking his head, he murmured, “Don’t bother to answer, my lord. You and Jenna have been growing more and more attached to each other as time passes, Anthony and I have both seen this coming. I believe, in fact, I warned you.”

Jonathan bared his teeth in a feral smile. “Be careful lest you push me too far, I could still castrate you both in your sleep. Believe me, it has occurred to me.”

“I was a little afraid of that,” Charles said, only half-laughing.

A sudden great gust of wind blew in a fine spray of rain, the sound of the pounding storm increasing outside. Anthony murmured, “We left the beach just in time. I wonder what will be left when this is over. I hope we brought enough food.”

“I hope the island will still be there when we try to emerge,” Jonathan said with feeling, the howl outside frightening, even to someone who had been through dangerous situations many times before. “Flooding could be a problem for us, even here.” Lightly stroking the fingers of the woman sleeping so quietly beside him, he said, “I would give my life to keep her safe, that I do admit.”

“Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that.” Anthony said above the roar of the fearsome wind. “With a child growing inside her, she needs each one of us, and you most of all.”

## Chapter Seven

The beach, Jenna decided, was so littered with debris that it was unrecognizable as the serene place they usually occupied. Despite the brilliant sunshine and soft warm breeze, fallen trees lay everywhere, and there were fronds and branches splayed on the sand, along with the bodies of dead birds and the occasional sea creature washed ashore and stranded. Three days the storm had ravaged the island, and it had left its toll. She felt unaccountably sorrowful for the loss of her hut, as it had been the one thing hers alone, and a place of refuge.

“Look here.”

Glancing up, she saw Anthony was the one who shouted, pointing at some object tangled in a mass of sodden vegetation. Picking her way carefully, she walked over, Jonathan right behind her.

“What is it?” she asked, seeing a huge pile of what looked like white cloth.

“Ship’s sail,” Jonathan explained. “Blood and thunder, it looks like a mainsail.”

“Don’t get your hopes up,” Anthony warned, frowning, going down on his haunches and pulling at the material. “In a storm like that one, this could have come from miles and miles away.”

“Or close by. Maybe we should start scouting, looking to see if there is anything on the horizon like we used to do everyday.”

“It probably sank,” Jenna said, thinking of the violence of the wind howling outside the cave.

“Possibly,” Jonathan admitted. “But it is good to know there was a ship nearby. At the very least there might be more debris we will find useful. There might also be survivors. Come on, Jenna, we will walk north up the beach. Anthony, you and Charles go the opposite direction. Shout if you see or find anything.”

Nodding, Anthony went off to find Charles. Jenna fell in step next to Jonathan, both of them walking carefully on the littered beach, searching among what was mostly

### SAVAGE SHORES

leaves and tree limbs for anything else, their gaze going time and again to where the azure sea met the pure blue sky. It was almost ironic that it was such a beautiful day and she lifted her face to the faint wind, ecstatically happy to be out of the cave. The sun felt warm on her shoulders and breasts, the sand soft and hot under her feet. Next to her, Jonathan walked with athletic grace, his spear in one hand, his knife gleaming at his lean waist. His vigilant gaze scanned the jungle now and then, always checking for danger, always alert.

“Don’t go too far ahead,” he told her, “I am just going to take a quick look at that pile of tree limbs over there. It appears there could be something dark in the middle.”

Nodding, Jenna kept on walking as he clambered over a fallen log and began to examine the twisted branches. There was a small rise ahead, and the beach curved past it, unseen. To her complete and utter surprise, she saw a small party of men come around the corner, trudging through the sand. There were perhaps five or six of them, the one in front wearing some sort of uniform even in the heat. Halting in her tracks, she was too startled to even cry out.

Apparently, she had the same effect on them, for when the leader caught sight of her standing only a short distance away, he gave a sharp order and they all stopped.

The order had been in English that fact registered dimly. His uniform too, was familiar. As the daughter of a military man, she recognized the insignia of a captain. For a long second, they all just stared at each other. Then one of the men muttered, “Oh my God, Captain Murray, I think we died in that blasted storm after all. Look here, we’ve found heaven.”

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Voices.

Even as Jonathan struggled to pull what looked like a cannonball out of the sand, he registered the sound and the significance sank in. Abandoning his find and leaping over the debris, he saw Jenna just ahead, her slender golden figure like a beautiful shimmering mirage, her long silken curls lightly moving in the wind. A band of men were just beyond her, stopped in the sand. She stood very still, a caricature of surprise, clad only in the animal skin around her slim hips that did little to conceal anything. Everything else was bare, from her long tanned legs to her lovely firm breasts, and as far as he could see from the gawking expression on the faces of the men staring at her, each one of them was enjoying the view and probably could not believe their eyes.

*Emma Wildes*

Sprinting forward, spear in hand, Jonathan saw the leader spot him coming, his hand going to his sword. Slowing his pace so he would not appear so threatening, he walked to Jenna's side, his stance obviously protective as he stood slightly in front of her. He probably looked at the best like a ragged pirate with his long hair and rough-cut beard, armed with a business-like spear, guarding a lush tropical goddess.

The man standing at the point of the group wore an English military uniform, Jonathan realized. Opening his mouth to speak, he was cut off as the officer, a middle-aged man with blond hair going to gray, and sharp intelligent eyes, said sharply, "Davidson, try the closest local dialect you know. Tell them we are here looking for a missing part of our ship and mean them no harm."

Obligingly one of the men began to speak in some of gibberish, his gaze still on Jenna as if he couldn't quite tear it away. Jonathan wasn't quite sure whether to be insulted or to shout with laughter over being taken as a local heathen. Next to him, Jenna spoke first since she was the one apparently being addressed, saying demurely, "Jonathan, shouldn't you tell them English would work better. I can't understand a word he's saying."

"For you," he responded gallantly, "anything, my dear. Captain, the lady requests our ensuing conversation be in our native tongue, if you don't mind."

The expression on the face of each man in the party was so thunderstruck it was comical. The captain finally managed to say, "You're English?"

Jonathan gave a very formal bow. "Jonathan Richmond, the seventh Earl of Charbeau. Your servant, sir."

"Good God, what are you doing here?" The captain looked rattled, still gaping.

"We were on the *Cricket* when it was trapped in a violent storm. The vessel sank and we landed here. There are two more of us, Major Anthony Reeves, and Charles Blake." He added with feeling, "And we are very glad to see you, as you can imagine."

"I know Reeves," the man said, recovering a little. "Damned fine officer...excuse me, ma'am."

Since she was standing there half-naked, Jenna merely lifted her fine brows, managing somehow to look every inch the lady despite the fact that the light breeze blew her glorious hair across her bare breasts, exposing those generous curves for the avid stares. She laughed lightly, "Don't apologize, Captain. I would venture a guess you also know my father, General Hayward."

### SAVAGE SHORES

"You--you are his daughter--oh my God in heaven, she was lost at sea, I remembering reading it..." the man swallowed, stammering, a fine sheen of sweat gracing his brow, no doubt resulting from the fact he'd been ogling the admittedly spectacular bosom of the daughter of the most important man in British military history since Wellington. Clearing his throat, he managed to say credibly, "I am Captain Murray, at your service in every way."

"If you are looking for your sail, we found it this morning," Jonathan informed him. "I'll be happy to show you where it is."

The captain bowed. "And once we make some minor repairs, I'll be honored to give you safe passage to the nearest port where you can catch a ship for England."

"It's a bargain," Jonathan said dryly. "Come on, Jenna." Taking her hand in an act of sheer male possession, he started to lead her down the beach. Behind them he heard the captain bellow, "Follow me, men." Then he added in a firm low tone, "And if I catch any one of you staring at the young lady, I'll have you flogged, understand?"

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Leaning back, Jenna closed her eyes in bliss. "Tea," she whispered. "I am drinking tea again. I didn't realize how much I missed it." She sipped the beverage, holding the warm cup in her hands, leaning back against a soft pillow.

Jonathan laughed, buttoning his white shirt, tucking the ends into dark trousers that were a shade tight and a tad too short. "I don't know if I missed all the confining clothing, however. It feels distinctly odd to don a shirt after nearly half a year."

"I feel a little offended I am not invited to dine with the captain as well," she said teasingly, reclining on the bunk of the spacious cabin, watching him dress in the borrowed clothes. "Though, I guess I won't complain. I am so tired from all the excitement I could sleep for a year."

"You cannot appear at the table in your island attire or you would cause a riot. Neither can you only wear a man's shirt, even if it covers you to mid-knee," he remarked, turning and lifting one dark brow. "It will take a while to sink in, but we are all going to have to readjust to civilized clothing and expected behavior. For my part, I am glad to be able to shave." He fingered his smooth jaw. "I hate a beard."

"If we are supposed to be so civilized and polite, how on earth is it expected that you will join me in this cabin then?" She was curious how a man who clearly revered her father like Captain Murray would allow the earl to share her bed on his ship.

*Emma Wildes*

Jonathan said autocratically, "Because I informed the captain I would be. I am Charbeau, and there are some advantages to having an aristocratic title. I doubt Murray even has the slightest idea how to deal with the awkwardness of finding you half-naked on an island with three men. I simply made it clear you were mine and I would sleep here with you."

Gazing at his tall, well-muscled form, so lean and dark in contrast to the white shirt, the expression on his handsome face laced with arrogance, she murmured, "Am I yours?"

His aqua eyes were direct, his mouth faintly smiling at he stared at her. "Oh yes."

He was right about the confinement of conventional clothing, she almost wished she wasn't wearing the fine lawn shirt, but it was the only thing that could be found she could use for cover. The urge to take it off and lie without a stitch on the soft mattress of the bunk was almost overwhelming she was so used to being nude. Stretching slightly and setting aside her cup, she said languorously, "It strikes me that I have been a bit...deprived lately, Jonathan."

His gaze narrowed, scanning her bare legs where the shirt rode up to mid-thigh. "Deprived?"

"Of sex," she informed him, her lashes half-lowered as she gauged his reaction. "In the cave, it wasn't possible with all four of us there and the storm, I understand that, but... I am afraid I have grown very used to the activity and maybe it is the coming child, but I feel very...womanly."

"Jenna," he said, taking an audible breath, his eyes flaring, "the ship's mate will be here any second to escort me to the galley and I just got dressed. Stop tempting me. I promise to fully oblige you later."

"You'll wake me when you come back?" she asked, lifting the hem of the oversized shirt to reveal the golden triangle of pubic hair between her legs. "I need you here."

"You can stake your life on it," he muttered, his gaze glittering bright as he stared at the apex of her thighs.

"I am looking forward to it."

"Hell and blast, will you always entice me this way?"

She answered in complete unaffected honesty, "I hope so."

### SAVAGE SHORES

The light knock on the door made him say gruffly, "Cover yourself. There is a guard posted at the door, ask him for anything you want. Your dinner should be here shortly. I will be back in a few hours."

She frowned, pulling the shirt back down. "A guard? Why?"

"Perhaps you've never looked at yourself, Jenna. This is a ship full of men." With that he stepped out, the door closing smartly behind him.

When he was gone, she lay there feeling both bereft without his presence and vulnerably afraid. Over the past months she had managed to wheedle a great deal of information from Charles about his employer. By all accounts, Jonathan Richmond was a detached, if skillful lover, and had an aversion to the permanence of marriage. She loved him, and back on the island she felt he was growing into feeling the same for her ...whether he recognized the emotion or not. The trouble was, now that they were rescued, he could easily enough deliver her to her father and walk away. The child she carried might, or might not be his, and he wasn't honor bound to marry her anymore than Charles or Anthony.

Anthony would wed her, she thought despondently. And he would make a dutiful husband, considerate and caring.

Charles too, would do the honorable thing, though her father would never allow her to marry a servant, no matter how brave and engaging.

Jonathan, however, was an unknown quantity. He said he would claim the child, but that was before they had suddenly found themselves on their way back to England. Not once had he even mentioned feeling anything but lustful possession.

Reaching for the teacup, Jenna found her throat was too tight with tears to swallow.

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The shipboard dining area was small, paneled, and smelled of tobacco and long past meals. The brandy, however, was excellent and slid smoothly down his throat. Jonathan sighed much as Jenna had when drinking her beloved tea and leaned back in his chair. Swirling the glass lightly, he asked, "Are Charles and Anthony not joining us?"

"They dined below with the crew." Murray, resplendent in a clean, crisp uniform, his graying hair carefully brushed, said hesitantly, "My lord, I thought it perhaps best if we had some time alone to sort out this...interesting situation. I admit," he added heavily, "I am at a loss on how to handle it."

*Emma Wildes*

“You rescued us. That should be enough, I would say, for a promotion.”

“I stumbled upon you by accident. There was no valor or cunning involved.”

“Just the same, we are quite grateful. And I have friends in high places, even at Horse Guards. It will not go unremarked.”

Captain Murray had very light gray eyes that almost matched his hair. His gaze direct, he nodded. “Thank you, but my problem goes deeper than a good word in London. I somehow doubt General Hayward would be grateful if he knew I allowed you to--to bunk in with his young daughter. You, sir, are putting me in a very bad position. I wish to accommodate you in every way, Lord Charbeau. However, your insistence on staying in the stateroom with Miss Hayward is beyond the pale.”

“She needs protection. Since I have been giving it to her these past months, I want to continue to see her safe.”

“I have posted a guard at your insistence,” Murray continued doggedly. “Is that not enough?”

Taking another mouthful of brandy, Jonathan swallowed and leaned back in his chair, narrowing his gaze on the man sitting opposite. “You did look at her, didn’t you, Murray, back on the beach?”

A slow flush touched the older man’s face. “I had no idea who she was.”

“But, just the same, you saw her incredible beauty, those very luscious breasts, and all that smooth skin, didn’t you?”

“My lord, I just said I had no idea—”

Fingering his glass, Jonathan elevated his brows in a haughty gesture that had intimidated many men. He said blandly, “I was trapped on an island with her for months. Is it any wonder I would succumb to those obvious charms? She already carries my child. I will not get her anymore pregnant with a few more nights on your ship. Your sense of responsibility is misplaced. What happens between myself and Miss Hayward is between us.”

The captain looked aghast for the moment, then sighed deeply in resignation, rubbing his forehead, muttering, “I cannot imagine your dilemma anymore than how General Hayward will react.”

“Fortunate for you, that is my problem,” Jonathan said sardonically. “In the meantime, tell me how you came to be there on the beach today.”



### SAVAGE SHORES

Gratefully accepting the change in subject, Murray said, “We knew the storm was coming...you could feel it approaching even when the sky was clear. I ordered the ship to skirt all the islands in the area, looking for a promising place where we could weather the typhoon. It was a hearty blow, if I may say so.”

Sipping his brandy, Jonathan inclined his head. “I know exactly what you mean. We took refuge in a cave on the other side, sitting in the darkness for almost three days.”

“We sailed as close as we could into a small cove. Putting the ship at anchor, we found that the way the winds came the vessel was fairly protected, at least as much as one could be in such a gale. It was sheer luck, nothing more, but all we lost was the one sail. When I set out to look for it, I had no idea on earth you were there.”

A boy entered, carrying a tray with steaming chafers and Jonathan registered the smell of beef for the first time in what seemed a lifetime. “I despaired of being found,” he said quietly as the cabin boy moved to serve them.

“Major Reeves said you all had resigned yourselves to a lifetime of exile on your small bit of paradise.”

“Yes.”

Picking up his knife and fork, the captain had a heavy speculative look in his eyes. “He also told me he saw you kill a full grown leopard with nothing but your bare hands and a small dagger, and I was not to judge you as an arrogant foppish lord.”

Jonathan laughed, meeting the other man’s level gaze. “Anthony proved to be an intrepid companion. What else did he say?”

“That Miss Hayward willingly shared your bed and to let you deal with her father.”

“A wise man.” Jonathan sighed. “I imagine our arrival in London will create a stir. Since I am presumed dead, I suppose my younger brother thinks he is the earl, and we will have to unravel all that mess.”

“You imagine correct.” Murray said, a small smile touching his mouth. “If you’ll forgive me, Lord Charbeau, but I don’t move in society circles, far from it, yet I know your reputation is that somewhat of a rake. Hayward went back to England after his daughter’s disappearance, and he is still there as far as I know. In my opinion, he will be grateful to get his daughter back, but not happy over her scandalous condition in the least. I have two daughters myself, and I can tell you that I would—perhaps unrealistically, I admit—expect a gentleman to act a gentleman.”

*Emma Wildes*

“We all tried,” Jonathan nodded gravely, “but quite frankly, with the likelihood of ever being found remote, it did not take long for us revert to our baser instincts. Captain, you saw Jenna today on the beach. She was raised a lady, well-educated, chaperoned at all times, yet she stood in front of you and your men practically naked and didn’t blink an eye. When one is struggling to stay alive each day, the restrictions of our rules and regulations seem ridiculous. I would have given an arm to have my cravat, but not so I could tie it properly and look the dandy, but in case we needed cloth for bandages. It puts things in perspective.”

“I’ve been in battle too many times to disagree with you, my lord. However, the General may not be as understanding. He is a formidable man.”

“Then I am forewarned.”

As their food was served, the topic switched to the events of the world in the past few months, Jonathan asking questions which the captain answered as they ate and drank a fine bottle of claret. Mindful of Jenna waiting for him back in the cabin the captain had generously given up, he didn’t linger but bid their savior a polite good night. The young soldier on duty at the gave him a rather cheeky smile as he stepped aside, and Jonathan lifted his brows, wondering how many conversations on board the ship right now centered around General Hayward’s beautiful daughter.

Most at a guess, he thought in amusement. And he was probably considered one lucky bastard.

Closing the door behind him, Jonathan saw the lantern was not lit, though there was moonlight coming in the small window. To his surprise Jenna was still awake, standing and staring out over the glimmering waves, a slender shadowed form. Turning, she gave him a small smile and asked, “How was your dinner?”

“Excellent. And yours?”

“Roast beef. I actually had a potato and felt it a miracle.” She laughed, but it sounded strained.

They were so in tune, Jonathan felt he could read the nuances in her lovely eyes. He said gently, “Jenna, this ship will not sink. That happens rarely actually. Relax.”

“Every time I lay down to go to sleep, I remember waking to that awful sound. This cabin is so similar, I suppose that is the problem.” Her slender shoulders shuddered slightly as she took a deep breath, “It’s foolish, I know.”

## SAVAGE SHORES

“Perhaps you need a distraction.” Jonathan gave her a wolfish smile, his fingers going to the buttons on his shirt. “Tell me, are you still feeling...womanly and deprived?”

The uncertainty left her gaze, replaced instantly by a flare of excitement. “Yes.”

“I suggest you take off that garment then.”

It was so large on her she had only to unfasten a button or two and it slid to the floor, leaving her in the gleaming moonlight. She shook back the long veil of her hair and watched him undress. “You get hard so fast, my lord,” she murmured with teasing sultriness. “In fact, you look as if you might feel deprived yourself.”

The truth was, he was ravenous. “Bring those beautiful breasts over here,” he ordered softly. “They look as if they need my hands and mouth.”

Her small feet silent on the rug, Jenna walked toward him, the sway of her hips matched in the movement of the full golden globes that were so high and firm. They were larger, and very erect, her areola glistening like ripe fruit, the nipples already peaked and hard. Jonathan cupped them both in his hands and kissed each one lightly, before lowering her to the rug. “The bunk will suit us fine for sleeping,” he explained, running his hands over the mounded flesh of her breasts, teasing a pink nipple with his tongue. “But for energetic lovemaking, we need more room.”

She threaded her hands into his hair as he nuzzled and suckled, moaning within moments, her knees falling apart in unmistakable carnal invitation. It was true, he was hard and rigidly erect, but instead of moving to mount her, he slid his mouth down the curve of her belly, kissing the growing swell there, noting that she seemed more fertile and soft than ever. The evidence of her pregnancy would not be something she could conceal much longer.

Pushing her legs farther apart, he settled between them with his mouth inches from her sex, smelling the earthy scent of her arousal. Stroking the pink lips of her labia, he whispered, “You are already wet, my love. So wet, and incredibly soft, and female.” Inhaling the heady fragrance, he deftly, he parted those damp folds, his mouth grazing the satiny tissue underneath. “So sweet, I can taste your nectar, Jenna. It is the most erotic thing on earth.”

Her slim thighs trembled as he pressed his mouth to her cleft and began to consume her. Licking up and down, he explored the space from the tiny nub that swelled and wept, to the small entrance to the passage that gave him so much pleasure. Using his tongue, he invaded her body until she arched, breathless and gasping, her hands tangling

### *Emma Wildes*

in his hair. He varied his technique until she was wild for release, twisting and moaning, her legs open as wide as possible. When he knew she was on the edge of desperation, he found her swollen nub and abraded it with his tongue, sucking gently to prolong her orgasm as she shuddered in surrender, her breasts heaving in the dim light, her body finally going limp on the tangled silk of her long hair, her eyes closed.

Jonathan took his pleasure then, more careful with her than in past sexual encounters, using her passage more slowly, not thrusting as deep and hard. Sex was different now, he thought, his cock sliding inside her in an almost temperate rhythm. Looking into her lovely flushed face, he realized that if he never made love to another woman besides Jenna the rest of his life, he would be the happiest man on earth. When she climaxed a second time, her teeth lightly biting his shoulder as she came, he let himself go, holding her close as he pulsed and flexed in the ultimate physical joy, prolonging the sensation by focusing on the warm weight of her breasts against his chest and soft fragrance drifting from her damp skin.

*I love her*, he thought, and it was amazing, but it didn't scare the hell out of him. Instead he rejoiced in the idea of a wife and a child.

They lay there, intertwined, until their breathing slowed and he wondered exactly how to utter the words. His experience with women might be vast, but it did not include flowery declarations of tender emotion.

Finally, cradling her in his arms, he said, "Jenna, I--I love you."

To his surprise, she said nothing and he realized she was sound asleep, her long lashes on cheeks rosy from his lovemaking, her body lax and pliant. With a rueful smile, he eased out from between her legs and lifted her in his arms, laying her carefully on the bunk and sliding in beside her. She slept trustingly against him, like a beautiful child, and he touched her reverently as they lay there so close. Stroking her hair, her arm, the perfect curve of her hip, he wondered how she would feel about a marriage proposal. To a certain extent, it felt wrong to ask simply because of her condition. He had never wooed her, not as a woman should be courted, instead he had pursued her on a very base level, with sexual intercourse his goal, not a promise of permanence.

She had never, not once, told him she loved him either, he realized. He was also going to have to deal with her father, who was not going to be very kindly disposed toward him or any honest offers when he realized his lovely young daughter had been seduced.

## **SAVAGE SHORES**

“Hell,” he muttered out loud.

## Chapter Eight

The quay was crowded but Jenna saw her father at once. Tall and unmistakably authoritarian, he wore civilian clothing, his iron gray hair gleaming in the thin drizzle of rain that fell from sooty skies. A certain something akin to panic twisted in her stomach and must have shown in her face, for next to her Charles murmured reassuringly, “Don’t worry so. He loves you, and that will take care of everything.”

“Even the huge scandal I am about to bring down upon his head?” she asked, allowing him to escort her slowly down the gangplank.

“None of it being your fault, my lady.” Charles winked with roguish charm. Under his breath, he said, “Since you did not ask to be shipwrecked with three men on a distant island, you cannot be held accountable.”

“I believe,” she said wryly, “I am very much accountable for the child growing inside of me. Whenever it was conceived, I was mostly definitely not ravished against my will.”

“Your generous passion will be indelibly etched in my memory,” Charles said impudently. “But alas, only that from now on. His lordship has made it clear that he means to claim this child.”

The child that seemed to grow each day. Once they had reached the bustling port where Captain Murray found them the English consul who helped them arrange for clothing and a passage on the next passenger ship bound for the English coast, they had been delayed a week, waiting for repairs to be made. The journey itself had been thankfully uneventful, and she had her own cabin during that time. Jonathan had hired a young maid to accompany her, mindful of the other passengers and possible further scandal. She’d mostly kept to herself, knowing her pregnancy would cause whispers. Jonathan had let her be, checking in politely to inquire after her health, but not touching her.

### SAVAGE SHORES

He'd sent word ahead of their rescue on a cargo ship that was able to depart earlier than their vessel, and apparently, that news had been delivered for her father was there, waiting.

And in the time elapsed, she had gotten bigger, her condition now noticeable, even through her clothing. Jenna would have preferred to be able to break the news to her father after their reunion, but he was bound to see it right away. At the moment, she wore an enveloping cloak and hood against the rain, but once she took it off, the game would be up.

"Where is Jonathan?" she asked in a low urgent tone.

"He will be joining us... here he is," Charles said, sounding a little relieved, letting go of her arm and moving away. Glancing up, she saw that Jonathan was bareheaded, his dark hair already beading with the misting rain, his grip polite and almost distant. Charles said, "I'll arrange for our baggage, my lord. Do you wish me to go straight to the townhouse?"

"Yes. I'll be along once I see Jenna safely to her father."

Those cool words made her swallow, looking away to hide her uncertainty. He wouldn't shirk his responsibility; that she knew. But what form that responsibility would take was the question. He was nearly thirty, and with his title, good looks and wealth, he'd no doubt had the pick of every lovely London beauty for over a decade. But he liked to roam the globe and a wife and child would hinder his carefree lifestyle. It was possible he meant to offer to support her and the baby; that would be generous enough. Perhaps he viewed her like his past lovers, as a mistress he could visit and enjoy.

Edging their way through the crowd, Jenna felt her stomach flutter again. Unexpectedly tears sprang to her eyes and she saw her father shoulder his way forward, finding herself suddenly caught in a hard embrace, his familiar scent washing over her and making her feel like a child again. "Papa."

"My dearest Jenna," her father said hoarsely, gazing down at her, finally loosening his arms. "I thought I'd lost you. This is like being given the precious gift of your birth again." His normally stern face working, he stepped back, glancing at the tall man by her side, offering his hand. "Lord Charbeau, I received your message as you can see. Never have I felt such complete and utter joy. I understand you were also stranded after the ship sank. I want to hear the details of your adventure in depth and your care of

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my daughter has my undying gratitude. Please, let me invite you to dine tomorrow. I will send along an invitation in the morning.”

Jonathan’s expression was smooth, his eyes cool as an azure sea, though Jenna thought she saw a flicker of his signature ironic amusement there. “I appreciate your invitation.” He hesitated, a fraction. “But...perhaps you will not understand this, but I have been responsible for your daughter for nearly half a year, and she has been barely out of my sight. I would like to accompany her and be there when she tells our story. It might be easier for her and those details you spoke of more clear with both of us explaining our...adventure.”

Her father was not a fool. Jenna saw his gaze sharpen, and the two men looked at each other eye to eye, as if weighing the measure of each other. Her heart began to beat quickly, and her palms felt suddenly damp.

Her father said slowly, “As you wish. I have a carriage waiting.”

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Damn if he wasn’t tired, travel-worn, and not anxious to do this, but as Jonathan accepted a glass of brandy, he glanced at the wan face of the young woman seated in the chair in her father’s study and knew he could not let her endure this interview alone. Jenna wore a soft rose dress, the material gathered under her full breasts, and her shining hair was gathered into a demure chignon, but nothing could disguise the still golden hue of her flawless skin, or the apprehension in her dark blue eyes. She had discarded her cloak quickly and sat down, hoping, at a guess, to put off exposure of her condition. She began, “Papa, I know that you must—”

“Perhaps, the earl should talk first,” her father interrupted, tall and regal behind his desk, almost as if he were conducting a war council. His gaze was like granite. “Since he seems to think he needs to be here. Tell me, Charbeau, what it is that my daughter cannot tell me alone?”

Well, Jonathan thought with resignation, he *had* been warned. “I suppose you realize now, considering where we were found, that we had been blown miles and miles off course even before the second storm hit.”

That fact, started so blandly, made the general nod once, his face tight. “I concede I was surprised. I had sent out ships searching, of course.”

“But, in the time it took them to get there and given the fact that they were looking in the wrong place, you found nothing. In fact, had fate not taken a hand, we



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would beyond a doubt still be there, locked on our little island, battling snakes, jungle cats, and tropical storms for years and perhaps always.”

“I trust all this has a point, my lord,” Jenna’s father said acerbically.

“It does. Let me say that it was the consensus between Reeves, myself, and Charles, that we were probably there for life. Jenna, also, knew what the odds were because we kept nothing from her. At first, of course, we were all understandably unhappy with the notion.” Jonathan paused and then said in a deliberate voice, “But in the natural course of things, we *adjusted*.”

The general was not slow, that was a certainty. He stood immobile, his blue eyes frosty, his lips barely moving as he asked, “Just how well did you...adjust, my lord?”

“Your daughter,” Jonathan said mildly, “is very beautiful.”

Very quickly, Jenna, who had said nothing, stood and crossed the room, looking with imploring eyes at her father, stopping just short of his desk, her dress falling in soft folds around her. Her cheeks were pink but her head held high. “I am not ashamed of anything I’ve done, but I am well aware you might be. However, please consider that this life,” she indicated the very civilized confines of the study with its bookcases and leather-bound chairs, “is more remote to me, even now, than walking half-naked on a sandy beach. One of them guarded me; a spear and knife at ready, at all times. There were predators everywhere, sharks in the sea, leopards, huge snakes...I would be dead ten times over if not for Jonathan and the others. Yes, I guess I am not the innocent young maid I once was, but I am not sorry.”

“Jenna,” Jonathan said, feeling a curious tenderness at her willingness to flay her own behavior in front of her beloved father. “Please sit down. Your father and I will work this out.”

She ignored him, announcing, “I am going to have a child.”

General Hayward’s face reddened slightly, but he inclined his head grimly as he looked pointedly at her. “I have already surmised that. My question now is what exactly is Lord Charbeau going to do about it.”

Jenna opened her mouth again and Jonathan feared she was going to blurt out the truth about Anthony and Charles, so he rose quickly and said, “I take full responsibility, of course. I would like us to be wed as soon as possible, perhaps even tomorrow if I can get a special license. Please understand, I have not even yet seen my family and I think I am still officially dead.”

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"You still could be," the general muttered.

Jenna turned and looked at him. "You wish to marry me?"

"He damned well better wish it."

"Father," Jenna said in hot reproach, swinging back. "I love Jonathan with all my heart and he saved my life. I want this baby...oh." Very suddenly, she stopped talking and her hands flew to her stomach, pressing the small swell there. "Jonathan, it moved...I mean --I thought all morning it was simply butterflies, but--our child moved."

*She loved him.*

Forgetting her father completely, Jonathan's world suddenly narrowed to one lovely blond young woman with her hands smoothing the precious curve of a new life. He crossed the room in two strides, catching her in his arms. "It did?" he asked, ignorant of what happened to pregnant ladies, looking down into her suddenly glowing face. "Tell me, my love, how did it feel?"

Jenna smiled up at him and incredulous tears trembled on her lashes. "Like a tickle, really. A brushing inside me...Oh, Jonathan, do you really want to marry me or are you saying so for my father?"

"I insist on marrying you," he explained firmly, lowering his head to brush his mouth against her soft parted lips. "And keeping you all to myself."

She blushed then, knowing what he meant. "Can I keep *you* all to *myself*?" she asked tartly. "Your reputation precedes you, my lord."

His smile was tender and infinitely wicked. He said truthfully, "Even if I were trapped for eternity on a desert isle, I would not need anyone else."

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### About the Author

Emma Wildes loves the infinite variations of romance in all its forms. She believes that passion makes the world go around...and delights in being able to write about it. Come see her at [www.emmawildes.com](http://www.emmawildes.com). If you also like traditional romance or mystery, please visit her at [www.katherinesmith.net](http://www.katherinesmith.net).

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