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# Surrender *the* **BOOTY**

**Carmie L'Rae**

# **SURRENDER THE BOOTY**

*Sand and Spurs 1*

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**MENAGE AMOUR**



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# **SURRENDER THE BOOTY**

*Sand and Spurs 1*

**CARMIE L'RAE**

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## **Chapter One**

Warm wet hands slid up the back of Bella's thighs before retreating in a slow tease that left her trembling and aching for more. She lay on her stomach in a room so dark she couldn't see even the outline of walls. Something coarse pressed into her abdomen. The firm bed or platform she lay on had adjusted to the contour of her body. Like sand at the beach.

The hiss of a lover she couldn't see teased her ear as the sensual hands climbed up the back of her thighs again and licked like a warm tongue at her skin. How long had he been teasing her? She'd lost all sense of time, all worry of anything but this slow, sweet torture being wrought on her body. Her nipples, rigid and raw, rubbed against the coarse bed as her body rocked in a maddening slow rhythm.

"Please," she whispered. Her throat was tight with misuse and her voice sounded far away, barely audible over the hushed whisper that rose with the rhythm that rocked her.

Something wet and sensual trickled down her legs, and her skin had never felt so warm. Somehow she had found Nirvana, but she couldn't recall how she had arrived. She couldn't recall anything. She could only feel. She spread her legs, inviting more, silently begging her lover.

A warm breeze blew over her heated skin. Maybe she had died and landed in hell. She sure didn't deserve to go in the other direction. Oh, God. If she was in hell, this torture could go on forever without any relief. She pumped her hips hard, desperate to find some satisfaction.

Her efforts met with nothing but frustration. She had to be dead. The heavy fog of semi-consciousness lifted and she willed her eyes to open. Slowly a pinpoint of light pierced the darkness. She recoiled from the starkness of it, but forced her lids open to the glare. The brightest white she had ever seen temporarily blinded her.

Slowly, the world around her came into focus.

Salt clung to her tongue. Warm waves pulsed against her feet, and wet, hard-packed sand pressed into her cheek. She licked the taste of the sea from her lips. A sweet scent laced the air, and a heavy weight lay against her aching thigh. She pushed her chest off the ground and slowly surveyed her surroundings. The exhausted muscles in her arms burned and shook with the effort of supporting her upper body.

A white sand beach stretched several yards up the shore and powdery dunes rose above it. Sea oats danced in the gentle wind and sun glinted off the quartz in the sand.

The weight against her thigh shifted and she turned to find Jose Marco face down in the sand at her side, his thigh protectively over hers. His hand lay limp in the sand as if it had slid off her back while he slept. How many women would pay to be in her position right now? Millions. Maybe billions. Jose Marco was sexier in person than on the tabloid covers he regularly graced. His handsome features stirred something deep in her belly. A familiar ache, a longing she couldn't contain. And something else. An awareness, a spark of recognition, like she'd been in his arms before and she belonged in them again.

And she owed him her life.

The events that led them to this shore had been more action-packed than any blockbuster his father had ever acted in.

She shook off the lust that heated her more than the Caribbean sun. She was starstruck, like every other woman he met. That was all.

Jose stirred and reached out blindly. He cupped her bottom like he might a lover's. Her heart skipped a beat, and her breath caught in her throat. Starstruck was an understatement. She couldn't have been more affected if an entire galaxy slammed into her. His touch was electric, and she'd give anything to feel his body pressed to hers, loving her the way she knew he could.

His strong fingers lazily kneaded her flesh, and for just a second, Bella let herself pretend there was something real in his touch. The gauzy cotton skirt she wore had ended up crumpled and pushed up to expose one buttock. The same buttock Jose was working his delicious magic on. How did she end up in this dream? Oh, God. This wasn't a dream.

She twisted to search the beach for Trevor McNamara, the other passenger on board the boat that was supposed to carry them to Isla de Amantes. He had survived, hadn't he? She dug her hands into the sand and momentary panic shut off her breath until she saw the imprint on the beach where Trevor had lain next to her. Relief released her lungs, and she sucked in the warm, sweet island air. She remembered now. The picture in her mind came in flashes of the three of them struggling ashore together after the boat capsized in the rough water.

They had collapsed the minute they reached dry land. Limbs entwined, thankful to be alive, exhaustion had overcome them. She scanned the shoreline again for Trevor and caught sight of his head as he climbed the backside of a dune. Without the cowboy hat he'd lost at sea, she saw his wheat-colored hair, cropped close to his head but long enough to be blown in the breeze. She waved and he waved back, moving steadily closer.

Jose's hand crept upward and closed around her waist. "You're okay?" he murmured.

She swallowed hard, her heart hammering from his touch. "Are you?" Her voice came out low and scratchy. She swallowed against the rawness, but her mouth was too dry to make a difference. Jose's hand moved slowly across her back, dragging rough grains of sand against her skin and pumping heat into her blood.

He shaded his dark eyes with that same hand and searched the dunes until he saw Trevor. "I can't believe we survived," he said.

"I don't think the captain was as lucky."

Jose gave her shoulder what was meant to be a comforting squeeze, but his touch packed more voltage than the lightning in the storm that had swooped down on them yesterday afternoon.

The purple-black cloud had appeared suddenly. Angry thunder rumbled, and electricity charged the air. The sea responded, rising in waves that slammed into their water taxi. The small boat rode the storm valiantly for a while, then rolled, sending Jose, Trevor and her into the gulf. In the corner of her eye she had seen the captain clinging to the vessel. She would never forget the splintering sound the hull made when a final monster wave crashed against it, or the scream as the captain went down with his ship.

"Maybe he made it ashore around the bend there." Jose tipped his head toward a curve in the shoreline. "Why don't we go take a look?"

He climbed to his feet and offered her his hand. His white cotton shirt hung open, exposing his smooth olive chest. Unlike most of the men in Hollywood, his pecs didn't need any airbrushing for the magazine covers. White sand dusted his dark skin and clung to the hair on his forearms. Bella raised her hand slowly toward his outstretched palm and tried to brace herself for the zing his touch would bring.

They were in a world of trouble, stranded on an abandoned island without the first provision, and her sluggish libido had jumped to life. Actually it had jumped to life early yesterday afternoon when Trevor McNamara swaggered into her office in a pair of jeans that made her mouth water and asked her to bring him out to this island so he could



look over the property. Then her already screaming hormones did somersaults when her fellow real estate agent and friend, Maxine, overheard Trevor's request and suggested that Bella also escort the deliciously tempting and easily recognizable Jose Marco.

Jose had come into the office only minutes before requesting to see the same parcel of land. As Maxine made the request on his behalf, Jose looked over from his seat in front of Maxine's desk with curiosity stamped clearly in his dark sex-soldier eyes.

A tingle of anticipation had sparked at the base of Bella's spine and trickled upward until it settled in her nipples in a stinging ache. She would have drooled over either of these men any day of the week. To have them both wanting something from her at the same time left her feeling like she was in the middle of a beefcake sandwich. And she had no idea which one to bite into first.

Now with Jose's hand folded firmly around hers, Bella's legs wobbled as she stood. The exhausting swim the night before had taken its toll. Jose steadied her.

"Take your time," he said in a smooth voice that held just the slightest hint of a Spanish accent.

She nodded and followed him toward Trevor, who carried a bunch of pale yellow bananas and two oranges. "I found breakfast," he said with an easy smile.

"You said this island hasn't been inhabited in years, right?" Jose asked Bella as he broke a banana from the bunch and offered it to her.

"There's no official record of it ever being occupied," she said. "But locals on the mainland say an older couple lived out here for most of their lives. They never came over to the mainland, at least not that anyone can recall."

"I can believe it," Trevor said. "The island's covered with fruit trees, even some macadamia. I'm sure the fishing's good, and there's a fresh-water spring."

"Is there a house or any other buildings?" Jose asked.

"There's a cabin near the spring. It's not in the best shape, but it'll keep the rain off if we need it to."

Bella shook her head. "We're not going to be here long enough to worry about that. Are we?"

Jose scratched at the back of his neck and Trevor searched the empty gulf that stretched around them.

"We don't have any way to call for help," Trevor said. "Unless a boat or plane passes close enough for us to signal, we'll need to prepare to stay here until someone sends out a search party."

"Search party?" Bella stifled a groan. No one would send a search party out for her for a couple of weeks. This was Saturday morning. She was scheduled to take a two-week vacation starting Monday. J.P., her brother, was the only person who'd miss her, but the staff at his care facility wouldn't report her missing if she didn't come by for one of her regular visits. Most patients they cared for rarely got any visitors at all.

"Nobody knows where to look for me," Jose said. "I wanted to keep this place to myself. If word leaked out I was here, paparazzi would plaster it on every newsstand." Anger edged into his voice, but Bella picked up on something else too. He sounded tired.

Who could blame him? Anybody would get tired of that kind of unrelenting attention.

"Nobody's looking for me. What about you?" she asked Trevor. "Somebody will miss you, right?"

Trevor shook his head. "Nah. I've got a habit of taking off and not telling anybody. The ranch is big, and I take my horse out sometimes for a week or more."

Bella stared at his face, as rugged as it was handsome. He was the real deal, a man's man, an outdoorsman to the bone. She could easily picture him riding his ranch looking better than the Marlboro man, but she couldn't figure out why he'd be interested in buying an island.

"I'll walk down past the bend and see if the captain made it ashore," Jose said. "Maybe you can take Bella to the spring for some water."

"You've got to be thirsty too," Bella said.

Jose tossed his orange in the air and caught it. "I'll have some orange juice and meet you over there." He turned to Trevor. "Which way?"

Trevor explained how to find the stream and Jose sauntered off, his long legs taking him quickly down the beach.

Trevor rested his hand at the base of her spine and warmth spread through her hips like hunger. "Wanna have breakfast poolside?"

"Poolside?" He was so appealing it hurt, with that slow southern drawl and sure, unhurried swagger. There wasn't much she wouldn't do with him poolside. Or anywhere else.

"You've never seen this island?" he asked.

She sank ankle-deep into the sugar white sand as they walked toward the nearest dunes. "The listing's not mine. I've never had a reason to come out here until you and Jose asked to see it. The property's been on the market for two years, and I think the two of you are only the second and third people to show any interest in it."

"Who was the first?"

She took a deep breath. "I wanted to tell both of you at the same time, but Jose was busy talking with the captain. And then the storm came ..." She shook off the memory of being plunged into the water, and swimming for her life. "I have to be careful," she said. "I'm representing you, and only showing Jose the property as a favor to Maxine. You're my client, but I'm trying to remain ethical and fair. If you both put in offers and I've divulged something to one of you and not the other, the situation could get sticky. If not legally, for me personally. Maxine is more than a colleague. She's a good friend."

"I don't deal in anything underhanded," Trevor said. "If you want to wait and tell us at the same time, that's fine by me."

The heat from his hand had spread into her belly and settled deep in her chest. He was a straight-shooting kind of guy. She'd known that five minutes after meeting him.

"I'll tell Jose as soon as he joins us. On the ride out here, I got a text from Maxine. She contacted the seller and found out a sales contract was signed yesterday."

"So somebody already bought the place?"

"Not exactly. But if you want it, you'll have to move fast. The buyer has a contingency clause that allows him to sell another piece of property before he's obligated to close on this one. He has thirty days to sell the other property. The seller, on the other hand, has a twenty-four hour first right of refusal. That means if you or Jose put in a cash offer, the original buyer must be able to close within twenty-four hours or you can purchase the property."

"Cash?"

"That's the way the contract's written."

Trevor increased the pressure on her back as he guided her up the bottom of the first dune. "There's a trail over here." He pointed toward a dip in the sand about halfway up and off to their right.

"Of course, there's also the possibility that the buyer won't sell his other property within thirty days. You can put in a standard offer, but you're taking more of a gamble."

They stepped onto the trail between the dunes and her breath caught. The pending real estate transaction skittered from her mind. "Oh my God!" Goosebumps rose on her neck and a shiver danced down her spine.

\* \* \* \*

Jose swiped at his nose. Something in the island air tickled his senses, a scent sweeter than jasmine and earthier leather. The smell was almost familiar, but he couldn't place it. He breathed deep, tasting the flavor at the back of his throat. Heat pooled in his stomach.

A surge of blood rushed to his groin and his cock jumped. He rubbed at his nose again and pounded a fist against his thigh. Damn fine time to get horny. Bella was hot as hell, but after last night's battle it was a miracle to be walking. He shouldn't be aching for sex.

A cliff rose ahead, a rocky crag that hung over a narrow beach and hid the coastline beyond.

"What the—?" He broke into a jog toward a dark object bobbing in the surf.

He scooped up the dark leather satchel he'd seen slung over the captain's shoulder when the man welcomed them onto his boat. Before pulling away from the dock, the captain had stowed the satchel. It must have floated ashore with some of the other debris from the wreck. A jagged piece of the hull had washed up on the beach and lay in the shade of the cliff, but there was no sign of the captain.

Jose worked the brass clasp and lifted the soaked flap. The flat black color was the perfect camouflage for a stocky handgun at the bottom of the dark pouch. Anger pounded the blood through his veins. A water taxi driver didn't have any reason to carry a gun. Was the captain planning to kill them after they got to the island, or sometime before? He tilted his head toward the heavens and crossed himself. No doubt that storm had saved them all. Anger surged again. He wasn't naïve enough to think he would have been the only victim. Trevor and Bella would have been killed too. There's no way the captain would have allowed any witnesses to survive. One thing was certain, his stalker was keeping a better eye on him than he thought, but how in the hell had he found him? Only one person knew where he'd gone.

He bit the inside of his cheek and scanned the horizon. No sign of the captain. He slung the satchel over his shoulder and started around the bend. If the captain had made it ashore, none of them were safe.

Jose clenched his fists. Nothing was going to happen to Bella. Not on his watch. He owed her that much, even if she didn't know it.

He stretched his fingers and forced some of the tension from his muscles. He had known she wouldn't remember him. No one knew who he was anymore. Hell, he could barely recognize himself. But she'd figure it out. And when she did, she'd hate him. And she had every right to.

\* \* \* \*

Bella caught her breath and Trevor gripped her waist. A tropical oasis spread out before them, completely hidden from the beach. "This has to be the best-kept secret in the Caribbean," she said.

"Do you feel it?" His voice dipped low, his hand lower. She felt it all right, right down to her toes. His touch was pure magic.

She licked her lips. "It's beautiful." A low grove of sea grapes grew at the base of the dune and beyond that the landscape was as lush as a rainforest. Hibiscus in reds and yellows, bougainvilleas in fuchsia, and the greenest ferns she'd ever seen grew beneath the shade of towering palms. And everywhere her eyes landed was a fruit tree, orange, lemon, avocado, lime, pomegranate and others she couldn't identify. In the center of it all, a pool was bordered in smooth, rounded stones. A low waterfall trickled at one end, and the water was so clear she could see straight down to the white sandy bottom.

"Come closer," he said, leading her toward the sea grapes. "Tell me if you feel it."

She shook her head to erase the strange fog that had filled her mind. Tingles crept through her limbs, and desire pooled between her legs. She'd never been so horny in her life, and the man was barely touching her. She swallowed hard and licked the dryness from her lips.

"Feel what?" she asked, breathless. She could taste the sweet scent of the flowers, and the colors of the garden began to swim in her eyes. Vibrant colors, delicious flavors and the warmth of the breeze

that wagged the palm fronds overwhelmed her. “It’s like a drug,” she said, leaning into his arm. “A really good drug.”

Trevor’s chest rose and fell. “It’s not just me? You feel it too?” His hand moved to her waist and he held her close.

She lifted her face, and without a word, he met her halfway. His tongue sought hers. His full lips were gentle, but she could feel the tension in his big body. She dropped the fruit he’d brought her and clasped both hands behind his neck. He groaned and dragged her against him. His erection pressed into her belly. His hands dropped to her ass and he squeezed her butt cheeks in his broad hands.

She pressed herself closer, overcome by the fog of desire and an ache so deep in her soul she thought she might die if his tongue left her mouth or his hands left her body.

His hands traveled up her back and wrapped around her shoulders in a strong grip. Abruptly, he jerked back, tearing his mouth from hers.

“It’s this place,” he muttered. “This place—”

“No. It’s you.” She swallowed hard. Her body trembled. Her breath came hard and fast, and the need between her legs had never been so intense. “Please,” she said.

“Come with me.” He took her hand and hurried past the sea grapes to the edge of the pool. “Get in.” The command wasn’t harsh, but there was enough firmness in his voice that she could tell he was fighting back the same ache she was.

She crossed her arms and grabbed the hem of her cotton tank. The linen jacket she’d worn over it in the office was long gone, lost at sea. She pulled the tank over her shoulders and reached back to unhook her bra.

Trevor’s Adam’s apple bobbed, and his blue eyes darkened. He reached around her, covering her hands with his and making quick work of the fasteners at her back. Slowly, he slid the straps off her shoulders and his lips parted as he lowered the bra from her breasts.

“I could eat you right now,” he growled.

She curled her hand around his neck and pulled him closer. Rising to her toes, she offered him a taste.

He led with his mouth, moist tongue, parted lips. His breath hit her shoulder, he brushed her hair aside and his lips closed on her in a kiss. He shook his head and stepped back, breaking the spell again. "Get in," he said. Desperation laced his voice. His shoulders were tense. A long, tight tendon strained in his neck. "Get in," he said again.

Bella slid her skirt over her hips and reached for her panties. He reached them first, pushing them down her thighs and dropping to his knees. He buried his face in her hip and let the panties fall to her feet.

"God, get in now." He was begging, she realized.

She steadied her hand on his shoulder and stepped into the warm water. She had expected it to be cool, but the waterfall was misleading. She sank breast deep into the silky bath, and immediately her mind began to clear. The lusty haze lifted. The surroundings remained stunning in their beauty, but she was no longer at the mercy of a force she couldn't control.

Trevor had torn his shirt over his head and thrown his boots on the ground. How he'd swum through the night with those things on his feet, she would never know. He had his jeans to his calves, removing his underwear at the same time. Even without the haze of lust, he was gorgeous. Muscles carved his thighs. His abdomen was chiseled and his cock ... Oh. My. His cock was impressive. Long. Thick. Pink. And hard as rock. Bella moaned. The water may have cleared her mind, but it didn't douse the fire between her legs.

He placed a palm on one of the porous stones lining the pool and dropped feet first into the water. He cupped water and pushed his hands through his hair. The water rippled against his ribs and he blew a heavy breath.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Don't apologize." She covered her breasts with her arms and chewed the inside of her lip.



“What do you think it is?” He looked around them, slowly scanning the surroundings. The island was quiet except for the roar of the surf, the rustle of the wind through the palms and an occasional call from a bird.

“How did you know the water would cure it?”

“I jumped in earlier to cool myself off after ...” He laughed. “You can figure out why.”

“It was the same when you got the fruit?”

“Worse when you were with me.” He cocked a lopsided smile. “But I reckon that’s to be expected.”

“Maybe we’re just tired. Or it’s a natural reaction to the stress of what we went through.” She grasped at straws and looked hard at the seemingly innocent paradise that surrounded them. “What’s that?” She pointed to a rectangular shape covered with a dense flowering vine.

“A cabin. It’s not fancy, but it’s held up to the elements pretty well.”

“Does it have electricity?”

He chuckled. “We wish.”

“Is it ...” She hesitated. “Did you feel the same when you were in the cabin?”

“It wasn’t as intense. My head cleared for a minute and then a breeze picked up and my hormones got jacked up again.”

“The beach doesn’t affect us like that. Do you think it’s just here in the garden, or is the whole interior of the island an aphrodisiac?”

“I guess we’ll find out when we look the place over.”

There were worse things than testing pheromone-laced air with a gorgeous man. But she couldn’t tour the island with Trevor and not Jose.

“Maybe you and Jose should take a look around, and I’ll stay on the beach.”

He didn’t look sure, but he didn’t argue.

She reached deep for her professional voice, not that she'd used it much when she was buck naked. Well, maybe once. Only they weren't role-playing. He was her client, and she was standing a foot away from him without a stitch of clothes on. She cleared her throat. "The island is two miles long and three-quarters of a mile wide at its widest point on the south end. A quarter-mile wide at its most narrow point on the north end. Shaped like a ..." She caught herself before she said what the island's unusual shape reminded her of.

"Shaped like what?" His eyes glittered and a wicked smile spread across his lips.

"You've seen the aerials haven't you?"

He smile widened into a broad grin. "Shaped like a cock out in the middle of the sea." He laughed. "Maybe that explains what we experienced."

"A phallic island with sex-enhancing air." She giggled and hugged her bare breasts. "This place would be overrun with condos if word got out."

Trevor's face grew grim. "Let's keep it to ourselves, all right?"

"Like I said, I'll divulge everything I know to Jose."

"He'll keep hush about it. He doesn't even want anyone to know he's looking at this place."

The men had been friendly with one another on the boat, and neither of them seemed the cutthroat type. But still. There was one island, and two men who wanted it. Things could get ugly fast.

She bent her knees and sank shoulder deep, letting the warm water caress her back. She trailed her fingertips over her arms and let her head fall back. Sand from the beach clung to her hair and scalp. She submerged completely, rinsing her face and running her hands through her hair.

"Let me," Trevor said, circling behind her. He ran his fingers through her hair and rubbed gently along the back of her scalp. "Caribbean sand will stick in places you never imagined," he said.

He rinsed her hair, parting the tangled strands carefully and plucking out small clumps of sand that had become trapped in her tresses. His knuckles brushed her neck with a touch that was gentle and seductive. She closed her eyes and inhaled the scent of the flowers surrounding them. The island may be an aphrodisiac, but the warmth he spread through her veins right now was all his own doing. Keeping things strictly professional had become impossible after the first kiss. Gorgeous men were hard enough to find. It'd be a shame to waste an opportunity like this. She laid her head against his shoulder and placed a soft kiss against his neck.

"Why does a cowboy want an island?" Her tongue darted out to lick the salt from his skin.

"I've got my reasons. And it ain't so I can put up any goddamn condos." His southern drawl became more prominent when his temper was riled.

She smiled against the straining tendon in his neck. "You're sexy when you're mad."

"You ain't seen me mad." He turned her around, pressing her breasts into his chest and reaching below the water to cup her ass in his calloused hands. With one rough move, he lifted her, drawing her legs around his hips. The stiff ridge of his big cock teased her clit. He held her against him and ran a thumb slowly over her nipple. "Do I feel mad to you?" His lips moved against her temple. His kisses trailed to her ear.

She gripped his shoulders and shivered as the muscles shifted beneath her palms. Goosebumps spread across her skin and she leaned closer to his warmth.

"You're the prettiest thing I ever laid eyes on," he said. He wound a strand of her hair around his finger.

"I bet I'd look better beneath you," she whispered.

"No doubt about that." He flexed his hips, grinding his erection against her clit and spreading her folds with the broad base of his cock.

“Better let me prove it to you.” She nibbled at the scruff on his chin and sucked his bottom lip between hers.

Trevor speared his fingers through her hair and took full control of the kiss, sliding his tongue against hers, forcing her to submit completely. Normally, she'd want more foreplay. But not here. Not now. Not with him. She wanted him deep inside her, thrusting and easing the need that screamed from her core.

She tilted her hips, positioning the broad tip of his cock at her opening. He reached between them, running his fingers over her clit, rubbing and teasing. She squirmed in anticipation and swatted his hand away. He grabbed her hips, readying to give her what she wanted. She locked her ankles over his ass and broke the kiss so she could see the look in his eyes when he pushed himself inside. The pressure of his cock increased as she stretched to welcome him. His eyes darkened, and his breath heated her cheek.

She lay back, letting the water cushion and swirl around her breasts. She played with her nipples. “Don't make me wait.” Her voice was hoarse, her body vibrated with anticipation.

“Oh, honey,” he said, tightening his grip on her hips. Like a movie in slow motion she watched the almost imperceptible withdrawal of his pelvis as he prepared to plunge inside. Her body arched in expectation. She kept her eyes focused on his.

“Didn't mean to interrupt.” Jose's voice jolted her, and Trevor's head jerked around.

Jose's bare feet were planted on the stone surrounding the pool. His dark eyes were black as midnight, his chest heaved, and his designer jeans barely contained his bulging hard-on. The sun glinted on his dark hair and a faint sheen of perspiration accented his olive skin. The garden had him under its spell.

## **Chapter Two**

Bella recognized the haze in Jose's eyes as he hesitated at the side of the pool.

"Who slipped me the Spanish fly?" He clenched his fists and swallowed hard, as if fighting off a desire he could barely managed to contain.

"Come in the water," she said. "It'll help."

"I doubt that." His gaze fell to her breasts and his hand gripped a wet leather satchel he'd slung over his shoulder. "Only one thing's going to help."

Bella unhooked her legs from Trevor's waist and made her way to the side of the pool. She reached up for Jose.

"Get in." In an attempt to get his mind off the sex he craved, she asked, "Any sign of the captain?"

"Doesn't look like he made it."

His words weighed on her heart. The sea was unforgiving and unpredictable.

"I'm surprised any of us are alive," Trevor said.

Bella swallowed back the fear that surfaced whenever her mind went back to their struggle to make it ashore. She was a strong swimmer, but without these men, she wouldn't have made it to the island. It had taken all three of them and every ounce of determination they could muster to make it as far as they had. The coming days wouldn't be easy, but nothing could be harder than what they'd already endured. Together. She reached beneath the bottom of Jose's jeans and held his ankle in her wet hand. "You need to get in," she said again.

He pulled his shirt over his head and reached for his fly. His hands hovered for a brief second before he twisted the button and shoved the jeans to the ground. No underwear peeked from the puddle of denim at his feet. He *would* go commando.

Bella kept her head down, focusing on his neatly trimmed toenails and the shock of dark hair on the tops of his long feet. She closed her eyes, resisting the temptation to see if what they said about men with big feet was true for Jose. She had a feeling he would prove that myth in a spectacular fashion.

He kicked out of his jeans and dropped into the pool. He splashed his face then sank to the bottom and submerged himself for several long seconds. The breath Bella had been holding came out in a rush. God, how could she be so attracted to two men at the same time? If she had to choose one right now, she wouldn't be able to do it.

Jose came up and gave his hair a shake. The longish strands swung out from his head and droplets of shed water sprayed across Bella's chest.

He let out a low whistle. "I guess we know how this island got its name."

"Isla de Amantes?" Bella asked.

"Lovers Island," Jose translated. "What in the hell happened after I crossed that dune?"

Trevor cleared his throat. "It happened to all of us. And I'm guessing it'll happen again as soon as we get out of this pool."

Jose arched a brow at Bella. "Let me apologize ahead of time then, because I'm sure to cross a line."

Trevor grunted. "Maybe we need to get out separately. Head back to the beach one at a time."

"Is this pool what you meant by drinking water?" Bella asked Trevor. Her mouth suddenly felt drier than it had on the beach.

"No. There's another little waterfall on the other side of the cabin. An old tin ladle is hanging on one of the rocks. I drank from it earlier. It's good."

Bella made her way to the side of the pool and readied to push herself up. "I'm going to forget all about the water as soon as I get out of here. There's only going to be one thing I'll want."

"Stay focused. Hurry over there. Then hurry back." Trevor ran his hand through his short blond hair, not looking convinced his plan would work.

"We're right here if you get in trouble," Jose said.

She laughed. "What are you going to do? Get out and get yourself as horny as I'll be?"

"We'll figure something out," Trevor said. "Go on and get a drink. You're dehydrated. We all are."

She swung her knee onto the rough rock and climbed out. She didn't bother with her clothes, just kept her eyes on the flowering vine that covered the back of the cabin. The soft sand shifted beneath her feet and a sweet scent filled her nose. A familiar cloud swirled around her senses.

"Hurry," Trevor called.

She resisted the urge to look back at the men in the pool, knowing without a doubt she'd run to them both if she did. She willed one foot in front of the other, picking up the pace as she went.

By the time she reached the cabin her body prickled with sexual arousal. A delicious ache throbbed between her legs. The urge was so strong she reached down to touch herself. Relief was instantaneous, but fleeting. She continued past the weathered wood structure. Only a dozen paces from the front door the land rose into a rock covered hill. A tiny stream trickled down, falling the last couple of feet into a rocky basin. And there, just as Trevor had said, hung an old tin ladle, well used. Its curved handle fit neatly around the sharp edge of a jutting rock.

The ladle was cool in her hand and the water cold on her tongue. She drank fast, relishing the icy burn that slid down her throat. A shadow in the corner of her eye startled her. She dropped the ladle.

No one was there, but for a moment she'd seen her brother, J.P., standing, although he hadn't been able to stand for years.

Worry squeezed her heart. J.P. needed her. He wouldn't understand if she wasn't there to visit him tomorrow like she did every Sunday to curl up in his bed together and watch the small television in his room until he fell asleep. She had never missed a Sunday with him. Not ever. But that was a small problem compared to the elephant she carried on her shoulders. If she couldn't sell this island to either Trevor or Jose, she'd never afford the mounting expense of J.P.'s care.

She closed her eyes, refusing to think about what might happen to her brother if he had to be removed from the private nursing facility he'd lived in for the past decade. He would never comprehend the whys. And she wouldn't let that happen.

One way or another, she would get off this island and deliver a signed contract to the owner of this property. Guilt tickled her conscience. If Trevor bought the property, the full commission on the sale would be hers. If Jose bought it, she'd have to split the commission with Maxine, and she needed every dime she could get for J.P.'s care.

A breeze rustled a hibiscus covered in red blooms that grew at the base of the hill. She spun around, taking in her surroundings. The fog had lifted from her mind. Her naked body no longer felt crazed for sex. Had the same thing happened to Trevor when he drank from the waterfall? Why hadn't he said so?

The door to the cabin stood ajar. Strings of shells clattered in the open windows, and the vine that covered the back of the house hung like streamers from the thatch awning that ran the length of the house, like a front porch. There was no wood or concrete floor, just thick white sand. A hammock hung in the shade at either end. Although the house had obviously been abandoned, it didn't feel deserted. There was a sense that the people who lived there would return at any time, like they'd just stepped out for a stroll along the beach.



Bella scooped the ladle from the ground and filled it, intending to take the water back to the men. She walked slowly toward the corner of the house, careful not to slosh. Just as she rounded the end of the porch she screamed, spilling the ladle. Trevor reached to steady her, his eyes dark with lust.

She grabbed his hand and ran toward the waterfall, pulling him with her. He had put his jeans on, but carried his shirt and boots in his hand.

“Drink,” she said when they reached the waterfall. She shoved the ladle into his hand. “Drink fast.”

Jose made his way toward them. He held her skirt and tank top in one hand, his shirt in the other. Like Trevor, he’d put his jeans back on. His shoes were nowhere in sight.

“Hurry.” Bella took her clothes and motioned him toward the water. “The water clears your head. Drink.”

Jose dropped his shirt and scrubbed his face first, then gulped water from his cupped hands.

Trevor slowly stepped away from the waterfall. “It didn’t have the same effect when I drank from it earlier,” he said. “Doesn’t make sense.”

Jose sank to his knees and buried his face in his hands. “I’m so fricken’ horny I’m gonna die,” he said.

“You don’t feel better?” Bella asked.

He shook his head without looking at her. “Worse. I’ve got to—” He uncovered his face and looked over his shoulder. In a fluid movement he was on his feet and headed for the cabin.

The door clapped shut behind him, but the open windows didn’t buffer the sound of his heavy breathing, or the slap of his hand as he worked to relieve himself.

Bella’s thighs tensed as she slid her skirt up her hips and pulled her tank top on. She saved her panties for last, aware that Trevor’s gaze was watching every move. If that wasn’t enough to rev her up again, the image of what was going on inside the cabin teased her

mind and sent her libido off like a rocket. The most gorgeous man in Hollywood was giving himself a hand job only a few feet away. And she could hear every stroke.

"Anybody on the mainland ever mention anything that would explain this? Trevor asked.

"It's not in the seller's disclosure, I can assure you."

"It's worse over in the garden than here. Maybe the rest of the island is okay."

"Maybe." She wasn't convinced, and she doubted he was either. "If the fruit trees are all in the garden, we won't be able to avoid it. We have to eat."

His fingers brushed her elbow. "You really want to avoid it?"

Before she could respond a low groan came from inside the cabin. She licked her lips and caught Trevor watching.

"You like that?" he asked.

"Who wouldn't? You think he's okay now?"

"He's doing fine."

No sound came from inside the cabin.

"I'm going to check on him." Bella hurried toward the cabin and pushed open the door. A huge cot filled half the room. There was no mattress. The same cotton rope the hammocks outside were woven from had been stretched and tied to several short posts. Jose lay sprawled across the center of the big bed, his jeans at his ankles, his giant cock still hard against his belly. Eyes closed, he wasn't moving.

Bella ran to the bed and balanced herself on her knees next to him. "Jose?" She gave his shoulder a gentle shake. "Jose?"

He brought the heel of his hand to his forehead. "I'm still hard as a rock. Did Cowboy slip something in the fruit?"

"I didn't eat any and the same thing happened to me." She stroked his hair. "What can I do?"

"Don't ask that." He groaned.

She let her gaze slide over him. His smooth, dark skin accented every line and defined every muscle. She reached for his shoulder. His damp skin heated her fingertips, and he grasped her wrist.

“Let me,” she whispered. “I want to.”

He tangled her hair in his fingers and drew her in for a hungry kiss. In a single move she was on her back and the hottest man in Hollywood hovered above her, breathing hard and a wild gleam in his eye.

She reached between them and closed her hand around his cock.

His hips jumped, and he began to pump. Soft swears escaped his lips and he buried his face in her neck. “I’m sorry,” he murmured against her skin.

“I’m not.” Over his shoulder she could see Trevor standing in the doorway, watching. A sharp twang of excitement hit her clit. She’d never been an extraordinarily wild lover before, but things were about to change. Either one of these men could have brought out the minx in her. Both of them threatened to unleash something much more feral. “Roll over,” she told Jose.

He stopped pumping into her hand and rolled over flat on his back. She licked her lips and gave Trevor a smile before she bent to take Jose’s cock into her mouth. The salty flavor of his first release coated her tongue as she sucked gently on the thick head and worked her way down. She stroked the base of his shaft and cupped his balls. She had never sucked one man while another watched, and judging from the look on Cowboy’s face it turned him on as much as it did her.

Behind her, Jose squeezed her thigh, and panted Spanish words she didn’t understand. The syllables rolled off his tongue like music. Bella sucked harder. Maybe it was the island air, or the bedroom games she’d played in her mind after reading about his wild exploits in the tabloids, whatever it was, she’d never tasted a man so delicious.

Jose lifted her thigh and repositioned his upper body so that she straddled his face. He pushed her skirt over her hips and tugged her

soaked panties aside. He didn't waste any time. His tongue speared her hole and lapped at her folds, teasing her clit with short, breath-hitching strokes. He was better than she ever could have imagined.

Her eyes rolled back and when her vision cleared again she saw Trevor approaching the bed, his big dick putting up a fight against his jeans and his thick chest heaving. He stopped next to the bed and speared his broad fingers through her hair.

"Suck him off," he growled. "I'm next."

She moaned. Jose sucked her clit deep into his mouth and strummed it with his tongue. His hips left the bed and his body shook. Cum hit the back of her throat. She sucked harder, taking every drop. Before her lips released Jose's dick, Trevor had his pants down. His golden thighs stood between Jose's parted knees and his hands steered her head toward him.

She licked the drop of dew that spilled onto the tip of his big cock. Trevor's fingers curled, gently pulling her hair. She grabbed one beefy cheek of his ass with one hand and his throbbing shaft with the other. She stroked and sucked, lightheaded from the suction of Jose's mouth on her clit. The slow coil of an orgasm built deep in her belly. Her thighs trembled. Jose's hands moved up her thighs and clenched her ass, pulling her closer.

Trevor pumped his hips slowly. "Goddamn, honey." He ground the words through clenched teeth. She stroked faster, following the motion of her hand with her head. The heat in her core had spread into dancing flames that licked her breasts, her ass, her pussy. Her inner walls clenched and pulsed as the orgasm shot through her. She could barely hang on to Trevor. Her body threatened to collapse. With a final thrust, he twisted his hands in her hair and released his load. She drank him down, fighting to give him the finish he needed before she melted into a puddle on top of Jose's gorgeous body.

Trevor lifted her head and held her face in his hands. "Damn, little lady." He blew a heavy breath and a slow smile crept across his face.

Jose gave her a last gentle lick that shot another jolt of orgasmic bliss through her body. She lay down next to him.

Trevor crawled into the bed next to her, and Jose rolled to his side with his palm flat against her stomach.

“You feel better?” she asked Jose.

He flashed one of his world-famous smiles. “Sí. I’ve done my share of partying, but I’ve never taken anything that made me feel like that.”

“It’s got to be one of the plants,” Trevor said. “I’ve seen some strange things growing on the ranch and on our little island back home.”

She lay between them staring up at the rough ceiling and letting the salty air cool her heated skin. A soft thud landed against the thatch roof, followed by several more. “Maybe the rain will clear the air,” she said. Trevor pinned her calf beneath his. The coarse hair of his leg sent a shiver down her spine. “You have an island back home?”

He cut his eyes toward Jose, and she guessed he was weighing how much he should reveal in front of the man who wanted the same piece of land he did. “Off the coast of South Carolina. We’re about to lose it, though. A developer swindled my grandfather. His mind isn’t what it used to be. But the deal is ironclad.”

“So that’s why you want this island? To replace the one you’re about to lose?” she asked.

“There’s a herd of wild horses living there. There won’t be room for them and all the condos slated to go up. I need a place to move them to.”

“Are you planning to live here?”

“Not year round. Might spend a week or two now and again.”

“Why not move the horses to your ranch?”

“They’re island horses. Wouldn’t know the first thing about mountain life. I’d probably lose half of them the first winter.”

Jose shifted onto his elbow. “Get some animal rights people on your side and you can probably stop the condos altogether.”

"I am an animal rights activist. Nothing we can do ever stops deep-pocket developers for long. In thirty days the deal will close, and the island won't belong to my family. If I don't get those horses out of there before then, I won't be able to touch them. Ain't no telling where they'll end up."

The rain continued to fall, and the breeze whipping through the open windows picked up, sending the strings of shells into the room like windsocks.

"This probably wasn't a terrible place to live," Bella said.

A wood stove stood in the corner. There was a basin near the far window and an old steamer trunk sat next to a stack of hand-woven baskets. Such a thick layer of fine sand covered the floor, it was impossible to tell what, if anything, lay beneath.

"I could live here," Jose said, tracing a slow circle around her bellybutton.

"What about all the luxuries you're used to?" she asked.

"Privacy is the biggest luxury in the world." He cocked a smile at Trevor. "But hell, a man doesn't get much of that around here either."

Bella reached for both their hands. "How about, whatever happens on Isla de Amantes, stays on Isla de Amantes? There's something going on here that we can't explain and can't control. Who knows what might happen before someone comes to find us."

Trevor laid his hand on her knee and slid it slowly up her thigh. "After the rain lets up we can check out the rest of the island. Until then ..." He planted a kiss just beneath her ear. "I'm game for killing a little more time."

Jose's hand moved toward her breast. "I'm in." His dark eyes practically smoldered as he leveled them with hers and lightly pinched her nipple. "What about you, Bella?"

## Chapter Three

Trevor's kisses were as warm and powerful as the rest of him. Full lips massaged hers, his tongue slid into her mouth slowly, but without hesitation, tangling and tasting, demanding an equal response. He could take her higher than most men with nothing more than a kiss.

Jose's fingers trailed the inside of her thigh, his chest pressed into her shoulder and his breath blew through her hair. His muscular body and smooth skin felt like heaven against her back. She wanted him, but she didn't want to break Trevor's intoxicating kiss. His chest hair was rough against her breasts. He shifted, spreading her knees. Jose's fingers left her thigh and sank into the wet folds of her pussy. He rubbed gently, spreading her juices and tormenting her clit with a slow circular motion. She gasped into Trevor's mouth and he broke the kiss, staring down at her with eyes full of intent. His chest moved with heavy breaths and Jose's lips brushed her jaw, moving steadily toward her mouth. She turned to meet him with a ready kiss, as hungry as she had ever been. He responded, meeting her tongue with his as his finger sank deep into her pussy. She pulled away from his kiss and reached for them both, spearing her fingers through their hair as she pulled them closer.

"Kiss me," she said.

Trevor's hand cupped her breast and both men kissed her mouth. The scratch of their faces against hers, the soft strength of their tongues and the heat passing from their bodies to hers flooded her senses. Her hips pumped in rhythm to Jose's finger strokes. Her nipples ached to be sucked. She drew back just enough to see their

tongues meet. They both recoiled, but she held the backs of their heads and pulled them in again, tangling her tongue with theirs.

"Don't stop," she murmured as she inched back again. Their kiss was tentative at first and again they pulled away.

"For me," she said. "It turns me on." She licked the seam of Trevor's lips and then Jose's, arching her back and tilting her hips to press her breasts and pussy harder against their hands. She drew them together again and initiated another kiss. This time when she pulled away, the men didn't stop. Their mouths ate at one another. Trevor's grip on her breast tightened and Jose pushed another finger into her, pumping faster and harder.

Pulses of pleasure, like a million tiny effervescent bubbles, spiraled in her belly. She felt herself falling, sinking into a dark cloud of bliss. She pumped her hips. "Don't stop," she begged. "Please don't stop." Her tongue darted out to join the fray of their mouths, and they welcomed her, devouring her. Trevor withdrew from the kiss and lowered himself to suck her nipple into his mouth, licking and nibbling. Her thighs trembled. Her vagina spasmed as the orgasm crept closer and then took her completely. She cried out, panting and screaming as the men slowed their delicious assault and gently turned her onto her side to face Jose.

Jose pulled her thigh over his. The thick head of his cock nudged her clit and followed the seam of her folds until it was seated at her opening. He nodded to Trevor, but didn't push himself inside.

Bella attempted to tilt her hips, to welcome that thick, hot cock deep into her core.

Trevor nipped at her shoulder. His hand on her hip held her still, then came around and made its way between her legs. He teased her clit before entering her folds to drench his fingers in her wetness.

Bella bit back her cries and shook with anticipation as Trevor's hand withdrew and his slick fingers slid along the crease of her ass and massaged her anus. "I'll go easy," he whispered close to her ear. "Just relax."



She nodded, biting her lip. Jose thumbed her nipple and kissed her mouth open, joining his tongue with hers in another mind-numbing kiss.

Trevor pressed gently, testing her tight anal opening with the tip of his finger. His teeth grazed her shoulder as he murmured soft curses against her skin. He eased a finger in, knuckle deep, massaging until she relaxed completely.

“Thata girl,” he growled softly, working another finger inside and pumping slowly.

She gripped Jose’s shoulders and met each caress of his tongue. He shifted slightly, easing the tip of his cock just inside her and tormenting her with the need to feel him buried deep.

Trevor moved closer. His hips pressed into her ass. His fingers parted, stretching her, getting her ready for his big dick. He entered slowly, groaning into her hair.

She cried into Jose’s mouth as Trevor’s giant cock stretched her to a burn. Jose grasped her thigh and pulled it high on his hip. In one pulse of his pelvis, he filled her from the front.

“Oh, God!” she screamed. Heat wound its way from her ass and vagina into her stomach and through her chest. Her lungs burned. Every inch of her skin flamed. She reached for her nipple, and pinched it to relieve the ache. But her body only screamed for more. More touch. More kisses. More cocks. More. Just more!

The men found their rhythm, moving slowly at first, covering her with their big bodies. She buried her face against Jose’s shoulder and breathed in the musky scent of his skin. She licked at the strong tendon of his neck, whimpering as the feel of two cocks pumped into her.

“Fuck me harder,” she begged. “Harder, please.”

Trevor sped up, his hips pushing her into Jose. Jose increased his own rhythm.

“Hold on, baby,” Jose said. He buried himself deeper, struggling for traction, searching for the best angle.

Trevor raised himself, angling over her, one hand braced near her back, the other on her hip. He fucked her in long, hard strokes that sent shivers up her spine and made her ass tingle. She'd never had an anal orgasm, and wasn't even sure it was possible. But she had a feeling she was about to find out.

She dropped her hand from her breast and slipped it between the wet skin of Jose's abdomen and hers. She found her clit and slid two fingers around it. Pulling back, she lifted the tiny hood to expose the sensitive bud.

"Oh, God!" The first wave of the orgasm swept through her abdomen. Her pussy clenched Jose's dick and her ass tightened on Trevor's. She screamed. Trevor roared and Jose spoke a rapid stream of Spanish she couldn't begin to understand. Both men slammed into her, releasing a double tide of hot cum. She trembled. Goosebumps puckered her skin and the warm island breeze chilled her fiery skin.

"Oh, God." She could barely whisper the words this time. She withdrew her hand slowly from her throbbing clit and flattened her palm against Jose's smooth, damp chest. Both men pumped slowly, wrenching the last of their orgasms from them, releasing the remainder of their seed.

The cabin was filled with the sound of their breaths and the scent of sex. The rain had slowed, and the shadow of a passing cloud darkened the far window. A branch scraped the outside of the cabin, and briefly the sense of being watched prickled the back of Bella's neck.

Trevor lightly kissed her shoulder, and every other thought fled from her mind. Jose fell back onto the bed beside her. His cock lay limp against his thigh. Trevor withdrew carefully, soothing her with kisses and soft caresses.

She turned to kiss him, and a soft shade of yellow against the dark gray rafters caught her eye. "What's that?" she asked.

## Chapter Four

The rain had finally let up, and the sky was once again a bright Caribbean blue. Trevor carried a small handcrafted table from the cabin out onto the porch and placed it in front of one of the hammocks. Jose brought the only chair. Bella carefully held the bundle of pale cream suede the men had worked down from the rafters.

They had already taken a quick peek, and anticipation danced in her belly. It was a map. An old map. There was little chance a map to a treasure that hadn't been found would be hidden so casually. She kept telling herself even if it did lead to a treasure, it had likely been plundered long ago.

Jose and Trevor moved quickly to get the table set up so they could spread the map out in the sunlight and see it clearly.

Trevor sat in the hammock and patted the space next to him. "Sit with me, sweetheart."

Jose took a seat in the chair and pulled up close to the table. Bella sat in the hammock and slowly unrolled the soft chamois that covered the rougher leather map. The island elements had been hard on the hide, cracking it in places. The ink had faded, but several bold black markings stood out against the deep tan background.

"Did pirates make maps on leather?" Trevor asked.

"None that I've ever heard of," Jose said.

She smoothed the map across the table, and Jose held the corners closest to him. The words were in a language Bella couldn't read. "Spanish?" she asked.

"Portuguese, I think." Jose leaned closer, his eyes narrowing slightly as he tried to make out the neatly scrolled text.

"Can you read it?" Trevor asked.

"Maybe some of it. Some Portuguese words are similar to Spanish, but this is old, like reading old English. It would be hard enough if it was completely legible." His finger hovered near an area that had almost completely faded. "Delgado." His voice dropped to an almost reverent whisper. "It is the map of Delgado."

"It's definitely a map of the island," she said. A phallic shape outlined the majority of the markings. A compass had been penned in the upper right corner and the shallows surrounding the island had been clearly marked. Near the narrow northern tip of the island, a bold black "X" stood out more clearly than any other mark.

"Yes," Jose agreed. "Delgado's map of the island." His finger hovered near the faded letters. "This is his signature."

"If the treasure was there." Trevor tapped the "X." "The couple who lived here would've dug it up. Doesn't look like it'd be hard to find."

Jose nodded.

"What if they didn't?" Bella asked. "Don't you think it's at least worth looking into?"

Trevor looked doubtful and Jose shrugged.

"Looking into it might mean back-breaking labor," Jose said.

"Or it might be as simple as taking the tour of the island we plan to take anyway and seeing if it looks like the ground has ever been disturbed." Bella looked from one man to the other. "I'm not suggesting we go digging for treasure. If we found anything now, it would have to be turned over to the current property owner." She put one hand on Trevor's thigh and reached for Jose's forearm with the other. "If there's reason to believe the treasure's still there, it might make the decision to buy this island easier for one of you."

"Or both of us." Trevor stood quickly, and Bella struggled to steady the swaying hammock.

Jose gave him a dark look. "Considering what we've been through, I'd think we could be gentlemen about this."

Trevor looked back at the map spread on the table. "I hope we can. Money can turn people ugly faster than anything."

Jose let go of the corners, and the old map rolled in on itself. "I've got more money than I can spend. I'm not going to get greedy over a chest full of trinkets. I wouldn't mind finding it though." He flashed one of his big-screen grins. "Who hasn't dreamed of finding buried treasure?"

Bella nodded with enthusiasm. "That's what I'm saying! I would never have any claim to it at all, but I'd love to find it."

"All right." Trevor walked back to the hammock. "I'm in, but first we need to take care of the important stuff. Let's try to signal for help. Then we should go ahead and tour the island like we came here to do. By the time we make it back to the real world, we might not have much time to decide whether or not to put in an offer."

Jose's brows creased. "What do you mean?"

"There's a contract on the property," Bella said. She spent a few minutes explaining the legalities of the situation and what would have to be done if either he or Trevor wanted to purchase the island. While she explained, Trevor walked to the far end of the porch and stared up at the rocky hill in front of the house.

"Who builds a house facing the base of a hill?" Trevor said when he joined them again.

Jose rolled the map and carefully wrapped it in the chamois they'd found it in. "I'll put this away and we can head down to the beach." He tucked the map under his arm. "Are you thinking an SOS big enough to be seen from the sky or you got a better idea?"

Trevor scratched the back of his head. "Might as well start with the SOS until one of us comes up with something better."

Jose nodded and went inside the cabin.

Trevor draped an arm over Bella's shoulders. "I want this island," he said. "When we get back I want you to write up a contract and get it in before any others."

"It's unlikely the seller will step out of the first contract without a cash offer."

"I'm working on that," he said. "One way or another I've got to have this place." Trevor gave her a gentle squeeze as Jose stepped back onto the porch, then strode off toward the beach ahead of them.

Bella could understand his hesitation to trust Jose. Men were competitive by nature. This was like any other game. There was one prize. And only one of them could claim it.

Jose took her hand and started after Trevor. He had headed for a narrow trail between the dunes closest to the house. They weren't going back through the garden, but there were several yards between them and the beach. She disentangled her fingers from Jose's.

"You go ahead," she said. "I'll follow. We might have a better chance of getting there with our clothes on if we don't go together."

He searched the sky and inhaled deeply, first in one direction and then the other. "I don't smell it," he said.

He was right. The sweet scent that had filled her senses before making her crazed with lust wasn't in the air. Maybe the rain had washed it away.

Jose twirled a strand of hair at her temple. "Don't you like getting naked with me?" His beautiful brown eyes twinkled and a smirk cocked his lips.

"I'm just saving some energy for tonight."

His head lowered and his lips brushed hers, gently at first and then connecting fully. She opened for his tongue and grabbed his shoulders for support. His deepening kiss shot straight to her knees, then converged like a firestorm between her thighs.

His hands caught her waist and his big cock hardened against her stomach. She grew dizzy with desire, and pulled back, afraid the

sweet island air had worked its magic again. She breathed deeply, but only the scent of fresh rain and saltwater tickled her senses.

“What was that for?” she asked.

“To show you I don’t need an aphrodisiac.” He pressed another kiss to her cheek.

She played with the thick hair at his nape and studied the handsome masculine features that had made him an international heartthrob. She had to be careful. His father was a damn good actor capable of convincing millions of people he was a Greek god, or an insane killer. Or madly in love. Jose might very well have those same talents. She stared into his expressive eyes and swallowed down the flurry of excitement in her stomach. She had to guard herself better. Jose Marco may be able to summon feelings on a whim, but she couldn’t. More importantly, she couldn’t just turn her emotions off when the scene ended.

She wouldn’t turn down the sex. She would be a fool to walk away from that. But she’d have to watch out for those impromptu kisses. Those were dangerous.

“Are you two coming?” Trevor called from the dune.

“Not yet.” Jose answered with a grin.

“Yes!” Bella said, then caught herself. “I mean, we’re on our way,” she yelled.

Jose grabbed her hand again. Laughter danced in his dark eyes. And her heart skipped a beat. Not good. Really not good.

She dropped his hand and ran ahead. Trevor watched her approach. An odd look clouded his rugged face.

“What’s wrong, Cowboy?”

His jaw tensed, but he didn’t answer.

“If you’re worried about what you told me,” she said, “don’t be. You’re my client. And business is business.”

He nodded and turned toward the beach, walking too fast for her to keep up without jogging. She let him have his space and focused on the sea oats growing out of the dune. With each step, she sank ankle-

deep in warm white sand, and the island sun beat down on her shoulders.

At the crest of the dune, she stopped. Waves crashed on the beach below and a piece of the boat they'd been on bobbed in the shallow surf. A chill tripped up Bella's spine and goose bumps sprang up on her flesh. They were lucky to be alive. Luckier than the captain. God rest his soul.

Jose wrapped his arm around her. She hadn't heard him approach. She blinked back the tears that threatened to spill from her eyes.

"You okay?" he asked.

She nodded, not trusting herself to speak. Her throat felt like a beefy fist had closed around it. Jose rubbed the chill from her arm and tucked her close to his side.

"I need to go home," she whispered. An image of J.P.'s worried face brought a fresh sting of tears. He wouldn't understand why she wasn't there to visit him tomorrow. "My brother needs me."

Jose lifted her chin. His face blurred behind her unshed tears. She blinked hard, determined not to cry.

"Help will be here soon." He spread his broad fingers across her face. "You take care of your brother?"

Her lips trembled. "He's not able to care for himself, and I'm the only family he's got left. He won't understand why I don't come to see him tomorrow."

Jose pressed a kiss to her forehead. "We'll get off this island soon. I promise." He tugged her hand and led her down to the beach.

Trevor had already started collecting dark brown seaweed from the tide line. He carried an armload up higher on the beach and laid it out in a thick curve. The beginning of the letter "S." Jose and Bella combined their efforts and within half an hour a huge SOS was spelled out on the sand. Big enough for an airplane to see, and maybe even a passing ship, if anyone aboard was looking hard enough.

A splash sounded down the beach. Bella whipped around. At the bend, below a low, rocky cliff, a head bobbed in the surf.



## **Chapter Five**

Bella tensed as the swimmer moved closer to shore. Maybe the captain had made it after all. The men took off running down the beach. She lifted her skirt above her knees and ran after them. Her heart pounded. Her hair blew across her face and clung to her damp, salty skin.

Trevor and Jose both stopped at the same time. Beneath the cliff, the swimmer had come ashore on all four legs. The goat opened its mouth, bleating. Another goat stepped from the shadow of the rocks and together they raced to the top of the cliff again. Their sure feet quickly took them to the top.

Bella stood between Trevor and Jose and the three of them watched the goats jump into the water again.

“They’re playing,” she said.

Trevor grunted.

Jose stretched his long arms toward the sky. “A swim’s not a bad idea. I didn’t see a shower in the cabin, did you?”

“Not in the cabin.” Trevor grabbed Bella’s hand. “Come on. I’ve got a surprise.”

“I hope it’s soap.” Bella’s arms itched from the salt and seaweed, and she was aching for the fresh scent of soap. “You guys smell sexy as hell, but I don’t want to smell like you much longer.”

Jose gave her ass a squeeze. “If we don’t get rescued soon, you’re going to spend a lot of time smelling like us.”

Trevor gripped her hand a little tighter, and the three of them made their way back toward the dunes. They followed the trail between the dunes closest to the cabin, but came to a stop before

crossing the threshold that would take them off the beach and into the inner part of the island.

Bella inhaled with hesitation, and detected the same sweet scent that she had encountered the first time she'd gone inland. "I guess we know why the couple who lived on this island never made it to the mainland."

Jose chuckled. "Why leave when you can stay high and get laid all day."

Trevor shot him a look before settling his gaze back on Bella. "You can go ahead of us. We'll wait."

"Didn't you have something to show us?"

He pointed toward the rocky hill that rose up in front of the cabin. "Follow the hill around to the right, past the waterfall. You'll see the surprise. I'll grab some other stuff I saw inside the cabin and meet you there."

Bella flattened her palm against the cowboy's cheek. "Are you always such a gentleman?"

"I think you know the answer to that." His gaze fell to her breasts and when his eyes rose to hers again they were dark with desire.

A shiver zipped down her spine. The island's sweet aphrodisiac filled her nose and tickled the back of her throat. Trevor was like any other man when his cock got hard. He might treat her like a lady, but he was hell-bent on taking what he needed when the time came.

Jose groaned. "I'm fucking hard as a rock."

"It's got to be one of the plants," Trevor said. He turned to Bella. "You better get going, sweetheart, if you aren't ready for a repeat performance."

The ache between Bella's legs had already begun to build. If she wanted to find out if Trevor's surprise was the shower she was hoping for without getting waylaid, she'd better go now.

Jose palmed her ass and bent to inhale the scent of her neck. "I want you," he whispered in her ear.

A delicious tremor hit her clit and rained down to her vagina. A drop of dewy desire fell against the inside of her thigh, and she swallowed hard. Suddenly the shower didn't seem nearly as enticing as these two gorgeous men.

A strangled growl rose in Trevor's chest. "Go." His voice was harsh with restraint. "Hurry."

Bella shook off the cloud of lust that crept into her vision. They had important things to take care of. There was still an island to canvass. A possible treasure to be found. And a sale to be made. J.P.'s face filled her mind, and she sobered instantly. She had a job to do. The fucking could wait. At least for a little while.

## Chapter Six

Trevor's surprise was exactly what she had hoped it would be. Water streamed over the rocky hillside, falling in a sheet from twenty-feet above her head. It landed in a roar into a shallow pool that was surrounded by a thick grove of sea grapes. A dark grotto was carved into the rock behind the waterfall. Bright pink bougainvillea climbed over the hillside. The beautiful flowers disguised the vine's sharp thorns and danced in the island breeze that was stronger on this side of the hill. A smaller plant grew in the crevices. Purple, cup-shaped blossoms stood stiff, unmoved by the breeze.

The sweet, intoxicating scent of the garden was stronger here, and Bella's nipples tightened as heat crawled beneath her skin. She pulled her tank top over her head and threw it into the pool. A washing machine was out of the question, but a good rinse was better than nothing. She stepped out of her skirt and threw it in too. Her panties were back at the cabin. Somewhere.

She stepped into the pool. Warm water swirled around her knees and sand shifted beneath her feet. She made her way to the waterfall. The pool grew deeper with every step. Directly beneath the falls, the water reached high on her thighs. She dipped her head back and let the water wash the sand and salt from her skin. With her back to the grotto and her eyes closed to the encroaching flora of the island, she lost herself in the scents and serenity.

A rustle in the sea grapes sent a tingle of excitement into her already aching nipples and heavy breasts. The men had arrived, and if they were half as ready as she was, round two would be one for the record books.

“What took you so long?” She opened her eyes, and her throat closed tight, cutting off her scream before she ever made a sound.

\* \* \* \*

Trevor swallowed hard. His dick throbbed against the worn denim of his jeans, and that damn drug hung heavy in the air.

Bella had disappeared around the far side of the hill and the sway of her ass still had his heart thumping. He’d want to fuck her under any circumstances. He damn sure didn’t need any island voodoo to give him a hard-on. His cock pulsed in response.

“Fuck.” Jose groaned and ran his hand over the front of his designer denim.

He better hope that fancy zipper could hold back that big dick of his.

“Are you as horny as I am?” Jose asked.

Trevor bit the inside of his lip. “I’m horny enough to fuck you. Come on. I saw some stuff in the cabin our little lady might like.”

The men headed toward the cabin in a trot. The extra friction against his dick didn’t do anything to relieve Trevor’s raging hard-on.

Inside the cabin, it took a second for his eyes to adjust to the dim light. He crossed the single room while Jose braced his arms in the open doorway with his damp hair clinging to his head and his breath coming fast. For whatever reason, Mr. Hollywood seemed to have a stronger reaction to the tainted air than either himself or Bella.

“You all right?” Trevor asked.

Jose slumped forward, his forearms braced in the doorway. A thin sheen of sweat covered his skin. He shook his head slowly.

Trevor kept an eye on him and grabbed a couple of bottles from the basin’s ledge. Homemade shampoo and scented oil that he had noticed earlier. He made his way back to the door, but Jose blocked the entrance. His arms shook and his chest heaved.

"Come on," Trevor said, fighting the hunger that clouded his mind. "A shower will do you good."

Jose shook his head again. "I can't." Jose lunged. His hands clenched Trevor's shirt and his mouth came down hard on Trevor's lips.

Trevor dropped both bottles to the ground and gave Jose a hard shove, pushing him back through the open doorway. The reaction was reflexive, but in the next instant a rush of blood slammed into his cock and his tongue swelled. In two long strides he had Jose's head in his hands and their tongues sparred, neither wanting to give up control.

Jose ripped at Trevor's shirt, yanking it off his shoulders. His rough touch sent another surge into Trevor's dick and the grind of denim to denim lashed through his groin.

Trevor growled. The deeper Jose's tongue ventured into his mouth the more he wanted it on his cock. He twisted the button of his fly and shoved his jeans down to his thighs. "Suck me." With a woman he would have asked, but right now the command was all he could muster.

Jose dropped to his knees and wrapped one hand around the base of Trevor's cock. He jerked like a man, a man who knew how to handle a throbbing shaft. Trevor tossed his head back and closed his eyes. He was vaguely aware of Jose shifting and reaching for something on the ground.

Through glazed eyes, Trevor saw one of the bottles he'd found by the basin. Fuck. He had the oil. Another firm stroke and Jose was on his feet, guiding Trevor to the bed by his dick.

Jose fell onto the bed and Trevor hovered over him. He was turned on, ready to fuck like the devil, but this was new territory. "You done this before?" Trevor asked.

Jose twisted the cap off the top of the oil bottle. "Hell, no." He poured a puddle of oil into his palm and reached for Trevor's cock.

His hand glided effortlessly over the head. Trevor's thighs tensed and his ass tightened as Jose stroked him. The pressure built in his loins. Jose's arm trembled and his eyes were black as midnight. Jose needed release, and he needed it fast.

"Get your ass naked." Trevor grabbed the oil and soaked his own palm while Jose shed his jeans and kicked them to the sand-covered floor. He leaned over Jose, reaching between them to grab his cock. Jose returned the favor, giving him another fluid stroke. The oil had a feminine scent. Probably vanilla mixed with some of the native flowers, but the heat inside the cabin was pure male. Sweat, testosterone and a driving hunger that wouldn't quit.

Sweat dripped from Trevor's chest and landed on Jose's darker skin. Their tongues found one another again and their hips pumped. The oil kicked the handjob up a notch and the tension built in Trevor's balls. He was going to come. Come hard. And he was going to spray himself all over Jose's movie star abs. Damn, if he was going to fuck a man, he'd damned sure started at the top.

Jose groaned into his mouth and the pistoning of his hips increased. He was close. The man needed to blow. Trevor's balls clenched and he stroked faster, harder. Jose's body stiffened. His free hand flew to clutch at his own hair and he arched against the bed.

"Oh, fuck!" Jose yelled. "Fuck! Fuck! Fuck yeah!"

Hot cum hit Trevor's chest and his own cock gave a final swell. He pushed himself hard into Jose's hand and spewed load after load. A chill settled over his heated skin and his muscles threatened to give. He pumped a handful of times, emptying himself completely and then collapsed face down at Jose's side.

"Do me a favor and don't sell that to the tabloids," Jose said, his voice still ragged.

Trevor laughed into the woven rope beneath him. "What happens on the island ..." With a moan, he rolled over.

A shriek pierced the room and both of them leapt to their feet. Not bothering with pants, they bolted for the door and around the hill where Bella had gone.



## Chapter Seven

Bella stood frozen with the waterfall at her back. A huge snake had wound its way around the edge of the pool, effectively blocking her exit. And now it was dipping toward the water. Its head was wider than her hand. Its body had to be over twenty feet long. The thought of touching the reptile's skin sent pure terror through her. Snakes were her biggest fear. And the wildly patterned one easing its way toward her was a monster.

Common sense screamed for her to climb over the tail, the least dangerous end, and get away from it before it slithered into the water and trapped her. Common sense may have been screaming, but fear silenced her muscles. She couldn't move. She could barely breathe.

She screamed again, trying desperately to call the men by name, but her mouth couldn't form words. Her throat only croaked out an unintelligible sound. She didn't stop, forcing her constricted throat to give. She struggled for one scream after another, each attempt louder than the last, until finally her ears rang with the sound of her own voice.

She willed her legs to move, but nothing happened. Fat tears rolled down her cheeks. After surviving a shipwreck, she was about to die in the most horrible way she could imagine, crushed in the scaly grip of her biggest fear.

The thunder of feet sounded seconds before Trevor and Jose rounded the hillside and raced toward her. Trevor went for the snake, wrapping both hands behind the massive animal's head. Jose jumped into the pool and pulled Bella over the rocks near the snake's tail. As soon as she was on dry land, Trevor released the beast, and the snake

dropped headfirst beneath the water. Its body followed, gliding beneath the waterfall and into the grotto.

Bella shivered. Thank God the thing hadn't been in the grotto when she got in the water. She never would have seen it coming. "Was that an anaconda?" she asked.

"Reticulated python," Jose said. "One of the only snakes known to have eaten humans."

Trevor followed the reptile's print in the sand with his eyes. He scanned the small grove of sea grapes and then turned his gaze on the hillside. "Think there are more of them?"

Jose wrapped his arm around Bella's shoulder and rubbed his hand over her trembling arm. "Had to be a pet. If more than one was breeding, the island would be crawling with them by now. There aren't likely to be any natural enemies here."

"You ever seen one that big?" Trevor said.

"Not even close. Wasn't overly aggressive, though. He didn't give you much of a fight."

Bella closed her eyes, and the darkness of her mind immediately filled with the diamond pattern on the snake's back. She shivered hard and moved closer to the man at her side. Jose's bare thigh grazed hers. Fear subsided and the half-naked state of her heroes registered. Her chest bounced with relief-fueled laughter.

"Having a little fun without me?" She swatted Jose's ass and gave his shirttail a tug.

Trevor dropped onto his stomach and fished her clothes from the bottom of the pool, his naked body already bronzing from the sun. He grinned up at her. "Just getting ready for that nude tour of the island you promised."

"I didn't ..." She squeezed Jose's firm bottom and laughed. "I'd be a fool to argue. Let's take the map with us." Then to Jose. "You sure there aren't any more snakes?"

"Not like that one."

Her gaze fell on the wide track the serpent's belly had carved in the sand. Trevor hung her clothes on the rocks to dry and shed his shirt. Jose followed suit and hung his shirt on the craggy hillside too.

"At least we won't have tan lines," Bella said.

Trevor glanced down at his cock then squinted into the bright sky. "I'm grabbing my drawers. I ain't getting sunburn on the boys."

Bella grinned at Jose. "What about your boys? Surely there's some aloe around here I can rub on them."

"Cowboy's got the right idea. But I'll take that aloe rub anytime you want to give it."

They made their way back to the cabin where their jeans and Trevor's shirt still lay on the sandy floor.

Jose fingered the medallion around his neck while Bella gingerly picked up the ancient map. Her thin fingers held the old leather gently and her eyes danced with excitement. "What if we find it?" she asked. "Can you imagine?"

Jose could imagine. He nodded slowly. "It'd be a miracle."

"Hell of a long shot," Trevor agreed.

"I know. But just think if we did." Her squeal of delight rang out in the shady room. "It would almost make being shipwrecked worth it."

## Chapter Eight

At the narrow tip of the island, Bella counted off paces, extending one bronze leg after the other toward the area marked on the map by the traditional "X." She stopped and twisted her heels in the sand.

Jose slipped his hands into the back pockets of his jeans and watched in silence. What were the chances she'd stumble on the treasure after all these years? He hoped they were as slim as he figured they'd be.

"If that's the right tree," she said, pointing to the towering date palm he stood under, "the treasure is here."

"What if it's that palm?" Trevor pointed to another tree nearby. His grin and the glint of his eye gave away how much he loved to tease her.

"Or it could one of the others," Jose said.

"There's only one palm on the map." Bella put her hands on her hips. "Why would he only draw one palm if there are this many of them?"

"Maybe there was only one when he made the map," Trevor said.

"Or maybe Delgado didn't want you to find his treasure." Jose headed toward the water. The waves rolled onto the shore one after the other, almost angry in their intensity. His father's medallion burned his chest. Invisible stakes shot into his pectorals and dug into his flesh. The pressure built. The pain intensified until Jose breathed the words his father had taught him. "Medo não, Delgado, seu tesouro está seguro comigo."

Fear not, Delgado. Your treasure is safe with me.

Jose Delgado didn't want anyone to find his treasure, and he had ways to make them pay if they did.

The curse on the treasure was no secret in Jose's family. Nor was the treasure's whereabouts. This island should have been first his father's, and then his. The treasure and its curse belonged to the Marcos, and now that he was the only Marco left, to him. If Bella and Trevor found the treasure, they'd all share the curse.

"Aren't you going to help?" Bella called to him.

He shook his head. "I'll see what I can catch for lunch." He followed the curve of the shoreline without looking back. Bella's laughter trailed after him, and a twinge of jealousy curled his gut. Trevor kept a smile on her face. And Jose knew he'd be the one to bring tears to her eyes. Hurting a woman was never easy. Knowing he would hurt Bella tore him up inside. He would give her the world, but first he would break her heart. And there wasn't any way around it. He had to come clean and tell her who he was.

\* \* \* \*

Trevor wrapped his arms around Bella's waist and pulled her close.

"I thought we were treasure hunting," she said.

"I just struck gold, darlin'." He nipped at her ear. "Smell that?"

She inhaled the island air expecting to catch wind of the sweet aphrodisiac again, but all she smelled was salt and sea.

"You don't smell it?" he asked.

"No."

"Me neither and I still want you."

"You've been wanting me a lot, Cowboy." She teased his bottom lip and ran her fingers through his hair. "Don't you have a lady friend back home?"

"Keep too busy to hang my hat anywhere." He spread his broad hands across her ass. "And I get horny when I ain't got nothing better to do."

"So you're just using me to pass the time?" A smile tugged at her lips. He was such a tease, but she could give as well as she got.

"Hell no. You had my head swimming before we ever washed up on this crazy island. Damn, woman, how in the hell have you stayed single this long?"

The familiar weight of her life threatened to come crashing down again, but she shook it off. For this moment she had no choice but to let her responsibilities to her brother go. Her hands were tied. And the freedom that came with that knowledge was more than she had dared hope for.

"What are you waiting for, honey?" She rubbed her pussy against the bulge in his jeans. "Looks like we've both got time to kill."

Trevor ground his pelvis into her and dug his hands deep into her ass before he lifted her. "I need some pussy," he growled.

"And I thought you and Jose were having fun without me."

"We did. Now I want to have fun with you." His hands spread across her back in a rough caress.

She winced. Her skin stung from too much sun.

He lowered her to the ground and turned her around to inspect her back. "Let's get you inside before this gets worse."

They made their way back to the cabin quickly, the sexual tension simmering between them. She hovered inside while Trevor harvested thick blades of aloe that grew in the shade next to the porch.

She picked up several bottles marked "lotion" and "shampoo" from the sandy floor. The concoctions appeared to be homemade and she could imagine how they ended up on the floor, especially after she found the bottle of oil next to the cot. She carried them over to the sink and set them down next to an unmarked jar.

The jar was fat and round, and a thick cream filled the inside. She unscrewed the lid and a sweet, familiar scent filled the room. Sex in a jar.

She dipped a finger into the cold cream and rubbed it across her chest. Relief from the sunburn was instantaneous and so was her head-clouding arousal.

\* \* \* \*

Trevor recognized the look in Bella's eyes the moment he entered the cabin. He drew in a deep breath but caught only the faintest trace of the island's mystery scent. There definitely wasn't enough of it in the air to affect her the way it had. Then he noticed the jar in her hand.

"What've you got there?"

"It makes the sunburn go away." She dipped a finger into the jar and pulled out a dollop of cream. "Rub it on my back?"

Trevor crossed the room and dropped his handful of aloe in the sink. He turned her around slowly before taking the cream from her hand. She trembled beneath his touch, hot breath flared from her lips and a slow rosy glow crept up her chest and onto her neck. She wanted him. She wanted sex.

"This stuff makes you horny," he whispered near her ear as he spread the cream across her shoulders and trailed his hands down her back. Her narrow waist sent a thrill down his spine. He wanted her too, and his desire didn't have anything to do with the damn cream. Her soft skin and feminine curves wreaked havoc on every ounce of common sense he had. Women had always done that to him, but Bella did it better than most. His hands sank into her velvety skin, and he breathed in the scent of the cream on her skin. His head clouded with lust, but not the kind he'd experienced in the garden. He wasn't in a drug-induced fog. Only a real woman, flesh and blood, could make his heart pound the way it pounded now. Only the scent of her skin,

the heat of her soft body next to his and those gorgeous breasts could send the blood from his brain and straight to his groin. His cock stood like a soldier ready to charge full-speed ahead, but Trevor's hands couldn't get enough of her. He massaged her nipples, flattened his palms over her flat belly, pressed his thighs into her ass and held her to him like a salve to a wound. She healed him, filled an aching empty void that he had ignored for years.

She leaned into his chest. Her sighs hit his ears and shot another jolt into his dick.

"Wait here," he whispered and reluctantly stepped back.

He grabbed an armload of blankets from the chest in the corner and spread them out on the floor before dropping down onto them himself. Her heated gaze followed his every move, but she didn't say a word. The cream had done a number on her, but she seemed content to let him take the lead. He had fucked her like a siren and now he needed to love her like a lady as much for himself as for her. He needed to lose himself in her, forget everything but that soft, sweet body beneath his.

He patted the blanket and she walked over, long legs and curvy hips, narrow shoulders and tits that wiped his mind clear of everything else. His mouth practically watered and his balls weighed a ton. He gripped the blankets in his fists, forcing himself not to jump her and bury himself deep.

"Get over here, darlin'." He heard the desperation in his voice but it didn't betray half of what he was feeling. His muscles had taken on a deep burn. She stepped onto the blankets and he dragged her down beside him. Her chest heaved beneath his. Her warm breath heated his neck and not another damn thing in the world mattered. He spread her legs with his knee and eased his cock into her tight pussy. Foreplay might have been more gentlemanly of him, but hell, a man has his limits. Her already dark eyes grew darker and the sweetest sound he'd ever heard rose from her throat. Goddamn, she was a drug. The best kind.



He moved slowly and she matched him stroke for stroke. He sank so deep into her body he couldn't breathe, couldn't think, couldn't do anything but feel the magic in her. Her slender fingertips dragged down his back, her body arched for his and everything else in the room disappeared into a blurry haze. He ate at her lips, tasted her tongue and pushed for more with every stroke.

"Trevor!" Her voice was heavy with breath. "Oh, God, Trevor!"

He felt her shatter beneath him. She held on for dear life and he buried himself into her again and again. His throat tightened. His chest contracted. Every part of his body pulled in on itself before the dark wave of release shot sparks through his nerves and enveloped him in a cloud so dark all he could do was fall.

"Trevor?" Bella's hands stroked his back. "Trevor?"

Shit. How long had he been out? She lay trapped beneath him, his face planted in the blanket next to her head, his body spent and satisfied like it hadn't been in years. He moved slowly, pulling his dick from the warmth of her and lifting himself from the comfort of her body.

"Sorry," he muttered.

"You're apologizing for *that*?" Laughter touched her words. "My God, that was amazing."

He planted a quick kiss on her mouth and pushed himself up completely. He left the cabin with jeans in hand. She called after him but he didn't look back. He'd made plenty of mistakes in his life, but this wasn't one he planned to make again.

## Chapter Nine

Bella's arm rested on Jose's bare stomach, moving with the rhythm of his breath. A gentle breeze flowed through the open windows and outside the sea rumbled onto the shore. Trevor's big body sprawled behind her and his easy breathing blended with the other sounds of the island.

Jose reached over to stroke her cheek, then rolled closer to plant a kiss on her forehead. "Want to take a walk?" he whispered.

She nodded. Her body was exhausted, but her mind was too wired for sleep. Trevor hadn't come back until after she and Jose had gone to bed. Something had happened between them, something he didn't want any part of and something she hadn't ever felt before.

On top of the confusion, a heavy dose of guilt had settled into her chest. How many times had she lost herself in Trevor and Jose's arms? How many times had she been in such awe of the island that she completely forgot about the life that waited for her back home? She couldn't help but worry about J.P. even though she knew he was well cared for, but hours had passed when he hadn't even crossed her mind. He deserved more than that from her.

Jose scooted to the edge of the bed and turned back, extending his hand to her. She took it and let him help her off the bed. He pulled his clothes off a peg on the wall and held his shirt open for her to slip her arms inside. While she buttoned it up, he tugged his jeans on.

Minutes later they were outside. Clouds hid all but a soft glow from the moon. Jose led the way toward the trail between the dunes. His touch was gentle, but his posture was stiff. Something heavy

weighed on his mind too. Even with all its magic, there were some things this island couldn't remedy.

She guessed his tension centered around the pending real estate transaction. He wanted this island as much as Trevor did, maybe more. One island and two men. One of them wasn't going to get what he wanted.

Jose stopped between the dunes and let out a heavy breath. "I guess the air's fresher at night."

Bella took a deep breath. He was right. There was no sign of the aphrodisiac that had been driving them all wild. "Maybe the heat from the sun makes it worse."

Jose didn't answer. Instead he gripped her hand harder and started for the beach.

She walked quickly to keep up, but the thick sand grabbed at her ankles and each of his long strides required two of hers.

He mumbled an apology and slowed his pace. Closer to the shore the wind whipped and the roar of the waves became deafening. The sea was dark as steel and the caps of waves gathered the soft moonlight and reflected it back in bright flashes of white.

"You okay?" Bella asked.

Jose stopped and speared his hands into her hair. His lips touched hers with a devastating softness and a restrained hunger that pulled her stomach tight and made her heart race. His tongue caressed hers. He owned the kiss and in the real world a man who twisted her insides the way he did would own her heart. But this island had a way of distorting the truth.

He continued his tender assault until every ounce of tension in her body melted away and she clung to his shoulders to keep from sinking into the sand at his feet. When he finally broke the kiss they were both breathless. He held her, his forehead resting against hers, until she forced him to look her in the eye.

"You kiss all the girls like that?"

"I can't get enough of you." His voice was filled with regret.

“And that’s a bad thing?”

He stroked her shoulders with his warm hands. “It shouldn’t be.”

“But it is?” Tension crept into the muscles between her shoulder blades and her heart braced itself for another letdown. First Trevor and now Jose, two men whose bodies promised more than their hearts were able to deliver.

“No. It’s not a bad thing.” He pushed her hair back and the cresting waves flickered in his dark eyes. “But ...”

“But what?”

“You don’t want to get mixed up with me. Trevor’s got it bad for you. He seems like a decent guy.”

“He is. And so are you.”

“I’m not who you think I am.”

“I don’t read the tabloids. And I don’t believe the headlines either.”

His jaw tightened and he started to say something, but she cut him off with a kiss. Right here, right now, the real world didn’t exist and whatever he thought she wouldn’t like about him was too far away to matter.

A flood of want and warmth surged from her tongue to her belly and exited her clit with a jolt that nearly buckled her knees. He reached beneath the shirttails and stroked her swollen slit. Juices ran toward his touch, her body ready for him, but he held back. He twisted one hand in her hair, pulling her head back. He licked and sucked at her neck while the rough pad of his finger stroked a wide circle around her heated nether lips. Each pass, he moved closer to her throbbing little clit. Her body trembled with anticipation. His slick fingers teased until her inner walls tightened, begging for the relief only his big cock could bring.

She pumped her hips toward his hand.

“Bella.” He pulled away from her. “There’s something about me you have to know.”

She stepped closer, pressing her stomach against his hard cock. “I’ll listen to every word after you make love to me.”

“I can’t do that, love.” He gripped her wrists in his hands. “First I have a confession to make.”

“You know more about the treasure map than you told us, don’t you?” Trevor said.

They both turned. Trevor had crossed the dunes and was steadily making his way toward them.

Jose stiffened and released his grip on Bella. “What makes you think that?”

He pointed toward Jose’s chest. “I took another peek at the map while you two were asleep. That medallion you wear is on the map.”

Jose’s fingers went to the necklace around his neck and he gave a slow nod. “It is.”

“Did you know about the treasure before we found the map?” Bella asked.

“I knew.” His jaw tensed. “And it’s better to leave the treasure alone. Finding it will only bring trouble.”

“Trouble for you if I buy this island?” Trevor asked. The challenge was clear in his voice.

“No. I already live with the curse. If we find Delgado’s treasure, we’ll all share his wrath.”

“I’m willing to take the chance.” Trevor gave Bella a quick glance. “I’m willing to bet the lady is too.”

## Chapter Ten

The waterfall hit the shallow water below with a low roar. Trevor sat on the edge of the shower pool with his legs dangling in the water. The rocks were so warm beneath him, it was a wonder the island python hadn't made another appearance here. Not that he was in a hurry to come across that beast again.

Bella had settled into the crook of his arm, her soft body and the tender touch of her hand on his bare thigh were doing more for him than the island air. If he had half a brain, he'd keep his distance from her, but running out last night hadn't helped any. Running away today wouldn't either. He couldn't get her off his mind and he didn't want to get her off his body.

On the other side of Bella, Jose worked shampoo into his hair. "We've got better things to do than look for treasure that's long gone."

"What makes you so sure it's gone?" If Bella weren't in his arms, Trevor would slug the dense jackass. Couldn't he see they all needed a distraction, something to pass the time? Something other than sex.

Bella picked her head up off his chest and turned toward Jose. "Yeah, how do you know?"

Jose jumped into the pool and headed for the waterfall. "People lived on this island for nearly half a century. Don't you think if the treasure was here they would've found it?"

He dipped his head beneath the water and rinsed the suds from his hair.

Bella pulled away from Trevor and stepped into the pool. "They hardly ever left here. Even if they did find it, what makes you think

they didn't leave it here? Maybe even hide it somewhere themselves." She motioned toward the cabin. "They definitely didn't build a mansion with it."

Jose's forehead creased in a frown and he dipped his head back again, letting the water stream down his face. Bella crossed the distance between them and put her hands flat on his chest.

"Why don't you want to look for the treasure?"

A long minute passed before he lifted his head and faced her. "I never said I didn't want to look for it."

"You've been dragging your feet since we found the map. No. Wait. You were excited about the map. You just didn't want to look for the treasure. Are you allergic to work, pretty boy? Or maybe you just want to wait until you own the island to find the treasure." She gave him a little shove. "Are you afraid you'd have to share?"

He shook the excess water from his hair and took her by the shoulders. "Fine. We'll look for your treasure. We'll find it. And then we'll see if it was worth the effort."

"Can you read the map?" Bella asked.

Jose blew a heavy sigh. "Most of it."

"Why didn't you say so?" Trevor asked.

Jose jerked his head up and stared him down, man to man. "The treasure's here. And we can find it. But it's not as simple as you think. Delgado never intended for anyone to take what was his."

"What do you mean?" Bella asked.

"I mean he didn't like to share. He was a ruthless pirate and an even more ruthless lover. This island wasn't just a rest stop between pillages. This was a prison paradise. A place to keep his most treasured possessions."

"What kind of treasure are we talking about?" Trevor asked.

"Not just gold and jewels." He stepped out of the waterfall and seated himself on the smooth rock surrounding the pool. "Have either of you ever heard of Delgado?"

"The Pirate Lover, right?" Bella asked. "He had a reputation for being a ladies man. A *senorita* in every port."

Jose nodded. "Yes, but he was more than that. He was a smart man. A greedy man. More lustful than any you'll meet. And, he was the patriarch of my family."

"Thought your last name was Marco," Trevor said.

Jose nodded. "It is. Jose Marco Delgado dropped his last name when his parents disowned him. His mother swore she'd have no pirate for a son, and his father swore if he ever came face to face with him again, one of them would die. The history books never erased his surname, but Delgado did. Probably not long after he drew up that map and moved to this island for good."

"You still call him Delgado," Bella said.

"There's been a Jose in every generation. Delgado is the easiest way to speak of him without confusion."

"So you carry his name?" Bella's voice softened. "And if there is any treasure here, it's rightfully yours."

Trevor sized the other man up. Either he had a legitimate right to the riches or he'd spun a hell of a tale. Impossible to know which. People were fools for money.

Jose slid into the water and sat on the sandy bottom, his head back against the rocks. "It's Delgado's treasure. He doesn't share. Not even with family."

"What in the hell are you talking about?" Trevor asked.

Jose leveled his gaze on Trevor's. "The treasure's cursed. If we do find it, we will be too."



## Chapter Eleven

Jose stoked the fire he'd built in the small barbeque pit close to the porch. Eggs Trevor had collected from the hens roosting in the garden sizzled on a flat griddle above the flames. Trevor had gathered breakfast, but he'd been keeping to himself since the three had showered.

"Smells great," Bella said.

Jose sprinkled some fresh cilantro on the eggs. "Where's Cowboy? Off milking the goats?" Something had happened between the two of them. Something that had rattled Cowboy's cage.

Trevor rounded the side of the house and headed straight for the ladle hanging next to the waterfall. From the stiffness of his gait, it was easy to see he'd made another trip to the garden. He clutched an armload of fruit and poured water from the ladle into his mouth.

He kept his back to them until his shoulders relaxed and his head fell forward. He turned around slowly and grinned at Jose. "After that handjob you gave me, milking goats is your job." He dropped a bunch of bananas, papayas and a pineapple onto the table in front of Bella, but didn't look her in the eye or take the stool across from her. Instead he walked over to the porch and stretched out in a hammock. "Let's hear more about Delgado."

Jose spooned the eggs onto plates and took the seat Trevor left vacant. Bella offered him a slice of papaya. He ate the sweet fruit from her fingers and his cock stirred. She enamored him and the old pirate tale brought pride to his heart. His chest swelled. Not every family could boast such a legacy of love and lore. And not every man could spend time on this island with a woman who took his breath

away. He still needed to talk to her. There was still hell to pay. But he needed to tell her privately.

Trevor came over to carve the pineapple and fix himself a plate while Jose began.

“Jose Marco Delgado loved ladies almost as much as he loved gold. He was said to have plenty of both stashed on islands throughout the Caribbean, but there was one island he guarded like no other.” Jose spread his arms. “This one. Isla de Amantes.

“He had a reputation for carousing in every port he entered, but Delgado was madly in love with his wife, Carmella Delgado. Carmella had ancestors from the magical islands of Haiti and Aruba and she dabbled in some of the old family recipes and potions. Some swore she had cast a spell over Delgado. A spell that made him mad with desire for her.”

Trevor grunted and went back to his hammock.

“Others say Carmella could put that spell on any man with nothing more than a smile. She was a beauty. Plenty of swords were drawn defending her honor, and finally Delgado decided it was no longer safe to leave her at home while he was at sea. But in his mind, a pirate ship was no place for a lady, especially a looker like Carmella.

“So for years he prepared Isla de Amantes, transforming it from a wild, deserted island to an oasis. He brought flowers and fruit trees from all over the Caribbean and created a garden for his love.”

“I’m falling for him myself,” Bella said softly.

Jose nodded. “Many women did. But that was the least of his worries. There was another problem with leaving Carmella behind. She shared her husband’s amorous spirit, and it is said she kept young men at her beck and call for the long nights that Delgado spent at sea. The young men didn’t seem to bother Delgado as much as the constant attempts of his peers to win the hand – or body – of his wife.

“After a particularly rough jaunt at sea in which he narrowly escaped with his life, Delgado came home to find one of his cousins

forcing his way into Carmella's chamber. She and her servants were fending him off, but he likely would have gained entry if Delgado hadn't arrived when he did. A brawl ensued. Delgado's cousin lay dead and Delgado packed up his wife and her servants and had them aboard his finest ship before morning."

"This is true?" Bella asked. "How awful."

"It's true, and it gets worse. After a few days at sea, the mutiny began. Spurred by the temptation of having a woman aboard, the crew rose up against Delgado. The battle was fierce. Several men died. Delgado was injured, but accounts are varied in how severely. Not even my family knows for sure.

"By moonlight, Delgado and Carmella escaped in a dinghy with a couple of trusted servants and a single chest of treasure. Delgado set fire to the ship and sent the remainder of his crew to a watery grave. After days at sea, Delgado, Carmella and their loyal servants stumbled onto the shore of Isla de Amantes."

"So why doesn't this island still belong to you?" Trevor set his plate on the ground and stretched his arms over his head.

"It should. But things happen. Kind of the way your grandfather's island should have been yours." Jose poured another glass of water from the pitcher on the table. "It will be mine."

## Chapter Twelve

Still naked from his swim, Trevor skated his hand through his three-day beard and dug his toes in the sand. Here on the rocky side of the island, the sea beat the shoreline with a constant crash and hiss, but the sound wasn't loud enough to drown out his thoughts. Being stuck in paradise was a hell of a way to lose the horses. He needed every minute he had to find another piece of property. There was no way he could outbid Jose, not with the kind of money those Hollywood types made. Trevor swore under his breath. There had to be another way. He couldn't outbid him. He'd have to outsmart him. Trevor flung a gnarled piece of driftwood toward the sea. Losing wasn't his game. No way in hell.

"What are you doing out here by yourself, Cowboy?" Bella stretched her arms over her head and smiled into the soft sunlight. "Still avoiding me?"

Damn, she was every woman he'd ever wanted all rolled into one tight little package with an ass that wouldn't quit. Like this island, though, he didn't know if she'd ever be his. If he was smart, he'd make sure that never happened.

"Was it something I did, or did you just wake up on the wrong side of the hammock?" She slinked toward him in that way she had. Her hair was still damp and her little white tank top and panties didn't leave much to the imagination.

Every step she took brought her closer and knocked another block out of the wall he kept around his heart. His body felt a hunger that threatened to unglue him and there was only one way to feed it.

He grabbed her so fast she lost her balance and fell into his chest. Her hands dug into his skin, and the sting of too much sun stabbed into his nerves.

“I wanted you in the shower.”

“I ain’t in the sharing mood.” The words ground out of his throat and the scent of her freshly washed hair spiked his adrenaline higher.

She laughed and ran her fingers through his beard. “We’re the only two here right now.”

His mouth came down hard. Too hard. But goddamn if he could help himself. He dragged her hips against his. A noise rose in her throat. It might as well have been a siren call. She met his kiss with a hungry tongue and pressed her breasts against his chest. Her soft flesh against his sent goose bumps skittering over his skin. This woman did things to him he couldn’t explain. He had to have her like he had to have air. One stroke of her tongue left him satisfied and starving all at the same time. Damn this island spell. He squeezed her sweet ass in his hands. He needed to sink into her heat, to fuck her until he dove so deep he couldn’t remember his own name.

She moved against him. And he knew that sweet pussy was sopping wet. She was ready. Bella had never told him no. Never acted for a second like she didn’t want him as much as he wanted her. She fucked like he did. Like she was ready to let go of everything, just for a few minutes of mind-erasing sex.

Aw, hell.

Trevor’s breath staggered as he pulled away from her and looked deep into her dark eyes. “What is it, baby?” He held her pretty face between his hands and fought to get his breath under control. “What do you need to get away from?”

Bella’s stare was blank for a long minute. Then fire lit her eyes. She jerked away from him. “What are you talking about?”

“What is it back home that’s got you by the balls?”

“I thought you wanted to fuck me.” A blush spread over her neck and into her cheeks, but it didn’t hide the hurt and defiance he saw in

her eyes. "What happened between us yesterday that's got you acting like this?"

He grabbed her wrist and pressed her hand to his rock-hard cock. Her touch triggered a shot of heat and need through his groin, but he held back. "This ain't about me and there's no question I want to fuck you." He pulled her close and trailed his fingers down her cheek. "Tell me what you do back on the mainland that keeps you locked up. A woman doesn't explode like you do if she ain't packed down tight." His voice softened. "You're too old to be living under daddy's thumb. Are you married?"

She shook her head, and her lips tightened into a frown.

"Boyfriend?"

"No."

Realization trickled down his neck like icy rain. "How many kids you got?"

"None." Her gaze bore into his and she laughed.

Relief washed over him. "What's so funny?"

"You sure look relieved."

"I reckon I am." Not because he didn't like kids. He'd always figured one day he might have a couple. But he didn't like the idea of her having kids with someone else. Whoa! Slow down, Cowboy. He looked at her hard. Damn. Did he want to have kids with her? Give her a house and a picket fence and all that stuff women always seemed to want? He shook his head. He wasn't one to be fenced in. Better to let go of those thoughts now before he fooled himself into believing them. Or worse, before he fooled her into thinking that was the kind of man he was.

"What's wrong with kids?" she asked.

"You haven't answered my question yet." He smoothed the frown lines between her eyes with his thumb. "Whatever it is, I ain't gonna hold it against you."

"There's something I wish you would hold against me." She wound a leg around his hip and ground her pussy against his erection.

He growled and sank his hands into her ass again. She did a damn fine job of changing the subject. Her hips rotated slowly and his cock swelled against the thin cotton of her panties. The urge to find out what skeletons she was hiding slid out of his mind and his original intentions came slamming back. She might have clammed up for now, but he knew how to have her screaming in just a few minutes. She clung to his neck as he stood and toted her toward the waves.

Her mouth descended on his, blocking everything from view but her pretty face. He couldn't see where he was going, but he kept planting one foot in front of the other. If he believed in fences, he would have built one around that kiss. He could have crawled right into her and never surfaced again. But fences never held anything for long. Sooner or later the greener grass would call and he'd be off.

## Chapter Thirteen

Still glowing from the orgasm, Trevor had given her, Bella looked more like a goddess than ever. Jose loved watching her fuck. Trevor, too. They were both beautiful. One a picture of femininity, the other pure male.

From the beach he had watched the strain of Trevor's muscles as he lifted her on and off his shaft in the rolling waves. And Bella's breasts left his mouth watering for a taste as they bounced, her head thrown back, her arms trembling around Trevor as he made her cry out again and again. Jose was hard just thinking about it, but afterward, Trevor had seemed more distant than before and had taken off toward the far end of the island.

"What are you waiting for?" Jose waited at the mouth of a cave he'd discovered on the broad end of the island. Inside, sunlight snaked like lightning across the constantly moving water.

"I'm not waiting." Bella shifted her gaze from the sea back to the opening of the cavern and her mouth softened into a frown. "I'm not going in there."

"What are you afraid of?"

"If something happens to me..." She shrugged. "I have responsibilities back home."

"You have a life too. Or you should." He reached for her hand. "I know your brother needs you, but you deserve so much."

She stiffened, her whole body ready for a fight. "So does he. Do you think he deserves to be in that wheelchair? That bed? Nobody loved life the way he did. And now he just wants to die."



The weight of the guilt he'd been carrying for years pressed on Jose's chest, cutting off his breath. "He doesn't deserve any of it." The words barely eked from his throat. "I should be there. Not him."

A frown creased Bella's forehead. "You don't even know him."

Jose shook his head. The moment of reckoning had come. There was no backing down now. "I do. I know him."

A look of total disbelief skewed her beautiful face. "How?"

Jose swallowed the rock in his throat. It was time to be a man, to tell her who he was. He deserved for her to hate him. And he was even more despicable for not telling her the truth before he made love to her.

"You don't remember me, but I came to your house once. The day of the accident." He grabbed onto the rocks at the entrance to the cave and pounded his fist against the hard, wet stone. Damn it! He had to tell her. But the words hurt. The memories just about killed him and he knew they would rip her apart too. There were some wounds time wouldn't heal. J.P. would never walk again. Never be the daredevil his soul craved to be. "Remember how much he used to laugh?" His throat tightened around the words and his chest burned.

Behind him, Bella's shadow didn't move.

"We used to call him Hyena," Jose continued. "Told him he cackled like an old lady, and he'd laugh at anything. The whole goddamn world was funny to him. No such thing as a bad day."

"Who are you?" The shadows of her hands clenched into fists.

Jose turned to face her. "It was my plane he jumped out of. I was flying it."

Her palm landed against his cheek with enough force to turn his head. The sting of the slap was nothing compared to the way his heart ripped when he saw the look in her eye.

She hated him. He had never seen such pure hatred before. He didn't know a single word he could say that would stand a chance of changing her mind. Tears rimmed her eyes but she was gone before they fell.

Jose watched her run down the beach away from him. He wanted more than anything to go after her, but he knew she didn't want him anywhere near her and he couldn't blame her. Without the magic of the island, he never would have laid a hand on her without telling her the truth first. But he carried the magic in his blood. He was powerless against it. He couldn't fight off the magic any more than he could stop loving Bella. He would make her understand. And he knew just how he would do it.

## Chapter Fourteen

Bella doubled over, breathing hard. What a fucking asshole! She'd known there was something familiar about him. She mentally kicked herself for not putting two and two together. Yes, she had met him at her house, but then he'd been in his usual paparazzi disguise. Ball cap pulled low. Dark sunglasses. J.P. ran with a crowd like that all the time. She'd long before given up paying attention to them. Most of the ones he brought home were wannabe stars, eking by as extras and valets. But they all had one thing in common. Just like J.P., they liked to live on the edge, wring every ounce out of life.

He'd loved his gig as a stuntman. Living in Miami in the '80s, he had more than his share of work. On television and the big screen, smooth detectives were always chasing drug-loaded yachts or Lamborghinis. His career was soaring. And then he climbed into Jose's plane and their whole world changed.

She'd lost the best big brother in the world, and J.P. had lost his ability to do everything that made him happy. Being trapped inside a body that didn't work was torment for an untamed soul like J.P. It was a fate worse than death. Worse than prison.

How had she started to fall in love with the man flying the plane? How had she started to fall in love at all? If J.P. couldn't have a life, what gave her the right?

She swung her fists in the air. Fighting a fight she'd never win. She would sacrifice everything she had just to give J.P. a life again. It didn't have to be the life he'd had. Just a life that brought him at least a little satisfaction every day. A life that gave him hope.

A hot wind ripped down the beach, blowing sand against her legs and into her face. She protected her eyes with her arms and sucked in a deep breath. Then she smelled it.

Nausea rose in her stomach as the sickeningly sweet scent of the island clung to her nose and throat. A large, masculine hand came to rest on her shoulder. She spun around, ready to let loose all the anger and guilt that raged through her veins. She would kill Jose before she slept with him again. She swung blindly, but her arms were caught before she landed a punch.

Trevor pulled her in close to his chest and wrapped his strong arms around her.

"Let her go." Jose's voice was close. Too close. The haze had settled into her head. The island was working its magic, and Jose's response to the aphrodisiac was bound to be stronger than hers.

"Stay away from me," she hissed.

Trevor let go of her. "What's the matter?"

"It's me she wants to hit. Let her." Jose held his arms out in invitation. "Go on, Bella. Give me what I deserve."

His chest heaved. His dark eyes were clouded with lust and his big cock strained against his jeans. "I won't touch you," he said. "I swear I won't do anything you don't want me to do. Even if this damned island kills me."

Something rough and wet slid against the back of her ankle. Bella jumped and the giant python continued up the beach, its thin tail dripping sea water, its piercing eyes pointed toward the sea grapes higher on the shore.

Her breath burned her lungs and panic froze her muscles. She needed to put every mile of this island between herself and Jose, but the serpent left her as immobile as stone.

## Chapter Fifteen

Whatever had happened between Jose and Bella, she wasn't talking and neither was he. Trevor didn't know whether to kick Jose's ass or let them work it out themselves. If Jose had laid a hand on her physically there wouldn't have been any question, but she swore he hadn't. Other than that she wouldn't talk about Jose at all. And looking for treasure seemed to be the last thing on her mind.

Here on this grassy hill in the center of the island, she clung to him as night crept in.

"Why don't you have a little cowgirl back at the ranch keeping your bed warm?" Bella teased his nipple with the tip of her nail and eased the sting with her tongue. His cock stirred and his groin tightened.

"I told you. Relationships ain't my thing."

"Now or ever?"

He felt his lips tighten and his jaw locked down tight. The little lady didn't know she was treading in dangerous waters. Back home people knew better than to question him, or push him to talk about women. Some things were better left unsaid.

She raised up on her elbow. "Cat got your tongue?"

He pulled her on top of him. The feel of her soft skin against his sent another surge of blood to his cock and his hips rose toward the pull of her pussy.

"I'm the strong, silent type." His voice was gruff.

She laughed and rubbed her slick nether lips over the ridge of his shaft. "Since when, Cowboy?"

He flipped her flat on her back and spread her thighs with one of his. She gasped in surprise, but before she could push him for more information, he covered her mouth in a kiss and pushed his dick into her tight, wet hole. Gentle wasn't on his mind. She was ready. She wanted him inside her as bad as he wanted to be there. He thrust deep and pounded faster and harder than he'd ever fucked her before. She panted. Fingernails dug into his shoulders and her calves wound around his back.

"God, yes!" she screamed. "Don't stop. Don't ever stop!"

Even through the pounding of blood in his veins and the rush of pulse in his ears he heard the sadness in her voice. She needed something he couldn't give her. Some kind of escape he didn't hold the key to.

"Hold on, darlin'." He slowed just enough to maintain control, but drove as deep as he could go. She wasn't the only one who needed to freefall away from this world. He couldn't take her far, but he could wipe her worries free for a little while. He could take her with him when he soared.

Her pussy clutched his cock and her body drew up as tight. He saw the second her dark eyes lost focus and she let go of every burden. Her sweet body gave him everything he needed and wrenched every ounce of pleasure from him. His balls tightened. His spine cracked and his muscles shook. He came with a roar. Releasing himself into her was almost enough to convince him he'd changed. That he deserved a woman like this.

Almost.

## Chapter Sixteen

Jose found the candles exactly where he knew they'd be, the same place his grandmother had kept them in her house. He lifted them carefully from the niche in the wall and pushed the wash basin back in place. The fine linen wrapped around the hand-poured wax was coated in a fine layer of sand. He unwound the blessing cloth carefully and the scent of pomegranate and fig drifted into his nose. The familiar smell hitched his heart. The smell of loss and love, hurt and hope. Burned on the night table beside his father's bed the night he passed. Burned for both his grandparents as they parted from this world.

But today the candles weren't going to be used for death. They had another purpose. One he'd only heard of once, when he was boy hiding in his cousin's closet, eavesdropping on her and her best friend. Learning about life and women, the best way he knew how.

He pressed the wax to his nose and inhaled deeply. They were still potent. The scent was strong and the wax had already begun to warm in his hand. He would need a few more things, but they could all be found in the garden.

Delgado had planted everything he would need for his Carmella. He had known what he was doing, and now Jose did too. Bella would forgive him. At least for a minute. And if could get into her heart for a minute, maybe he could find his way back for good. He didn't deserve her. But the world was full of undeserving people.

He could make it up to her. He would. But first he had to convince her to give him a chance. One chance, that's all he'd need. He'd make sure of that.

An hour later, candlelight flickered off the wet walls of the cavern. Green moss climbed near the top and high-water marks stained the walls with uneven lines. The surf hissed and bubbled near the entrance, but here deep inside, a sandy bottom and stones worn smooth by years of sea salt made the perfect spot for the perfect seduction.

Jose laid the herbs he had gathered in a bundle by the candles. The aroma of fruit filled the space and the slosh of water signaled Bella's approach.

Jose sucked in a deep breath. This was it. He ducked into the shadows and waited. If she saw him, she'd likely turn and run. She was expecting to meet Trevor. He owed the cowboy for his help in getting her here. She hadn't even been willing to sleep between them on the cot last night, choosing to sleep with Trevor in the middle instead. And this morning she left for the beach before breakfast.

He had convinced Trevor he needed some time alone with her, and Trevor had agreed to lure her to the cave. And now here she was. He couldn't blow this.

His chest burned and his thighs shook with restraint. The hot nature of his blood didn't make for patience. If he had less restraint he'd run and throw his arms around her and show her what loving him could be like, but he knew better. His body didn't agree, but his mind was sure. Bella was ready to be seduced, but Jose wasn't the man she had in mind. She expected Trevor. She wanted Trevor.

She rounded the bend and stood ankle-deep in water. Her white skirt shifted in the slow current and her sun-bronzed skin shone in the candlelight. With her dark hair brushing her shoulders she looked like a deity better suited for a painting than this dim cave on a remote island where only two sets of eyes could see how beautiful she was.

"Tão belo," he whispered.

She started, swiveling around to face him. Jose stepped from the shadows and reached for her wrist before she could run.



“Wait. Just give me a few minutes. I promise, it’s all I’ll ask. If you still hate me after that, I’ll leave you alone. Forever.” His voice trembled, but fever ran through his veins. He couldn’t touch her and not feel his blood heat, his heart pound. He couldn’t lose her. He wouldn’t.

“What did you say?”

“I said, ‘You’re so beautiful.’”

She shook her head. “‘Hermosa’ is beautiful in Spanish.”

“I spoke—” He stopped himself. He’d spoken in Portuguese. The language of the candles and his ancestry. “The language doesn’t matter. It’s true no matter how I say it.”

“What do you want? Where’s Trevor?”

“He’s not here. It’s just you and me.”

She turned, twisted out of his grasp, but he caught her again before she could retreat. Her smooth skin burned beneath his touch and anger flared in her eyes. “Let go of me.”

“I will. First promise me you won’t run. I just want a few minutes with you.”

Indecision settled into her gaze.

“Please, Bella. You know I never wanted to hurt you.”

“But you did. And that’s nothing compared to what you did to J.P.”

Jose dropped her arm. His gut felt like a hammer had just landed in it. “I’d trade places with him if I could. I swear I would.” His voice caught in his throat and he stopped. Maybe he shouldn’t have tricked her into coming here. What right did he have to ask her to forgive him, to ask her for anything?

He turned toward the back of the cave and closed his eyes. His shoulders strained with the weight of regret and his arms shook with restraint. He’d never wanted anything more than to feel her in his arms again, to see her look at him with those dark passionate eyes. But he didn’t deserve that any more than J.P. deserved what had happened to him.

Water splashed as she took a step. He didn't move. He didn't want to watch her leave. Some things were better left unseen. His heart knew she was gone and the hollow she left in it burned like hunger.

He flinched as her fingertips landed gingerly between his shoulder blades. Her touch was warm against his back, tentative at first and then more sure.

"Turn around," she said. "I love J.P., and he was robbed of more than most people ever even dream of."

Jose squeezed his eyes shut harder and let the warmth of her hand spread over his back. He was afraid to turn around and lose this connection, this brief moment of hope. She had offered him an olive branch when she should have hung him from one. She couldn't beat him up any harder than he'd beaten himself over the years.

"There's more to that day than anyone else knows." His jaw tightened. He knew he would regret telling her, but there was no way around it. She needed to know the truth, the whole truth, and then maybe, just maybe, she could understand how he could have been stupid enough to let J.P. end up the way he was.

He turned around slowly and met her gaze. Her hand fell to her side, but he lifted it again and held it between his palms.

He led her over to one of the smooth stones, wide enough for both of them to sit. After she sat down, he eased down next to her, holding her hand like a life preserver. This is where he would sink or swim. The words he chose would make all the difference, but ultimately the decision would be hers.

The scent of the candles wafted toward them. He reached for one and swirled the melted wax around the wick. Dipping one fingertip into the hot liquid, he let it harden on his skin and then brought it to her chest. He pressed his finger above her heart. The steady rhythm of her heartbeat pounded between them and the heat of their connection warmed the wax. When he lifted his hand, the print of his finger remained on her skin, like an apricot-colored birthmark.

“That means ...” He swallowed hard and started again. “These candles are sacred. In my family there are rituals that go back generations. Recipes and traditions that we will never lose or discredit. There are only two times we burn these candles.” He stopped, not sure how she would respond when he told her what he’d just done.

“When do you use them?”

“When someone is about to die, and ...” Again he faltered.

“Am I about to die?”

He shook his head and brushed a stray hair from her cheek. “No. I marked you. It means no matter what happens, whether you forgive me or not, I’ve given you a part of me. I’m a part of you. Forever.”

She glanced down at the mark on her chest and then at the candle he held. She dipped her fingertip in the melted wax and watched it harden as it cooled on her skin. Then she pushed his shirt open and placed her finger over his heart. As the wax melted between them, she looked him in the eye.

“I don’t want to be forgotten either.”

He pulled her face toward his and placed a soft kiss on her lips. He’d been in love before. He knew the signs, but he also knew his love didn’t mean anything if she couldn’t return it.

“I’ll tell you everything that happened. I’ll be completely honest and I’ll take every bit of the blame,” he said. “I’ve always known I ruined J.P.’s life, but I never knew what I’d done to yours.”

She flinched. “My life is fine.”

“You shouldn’t have such a burden.”

“J.P.’s not a burden.”

He knew better than to argue. Now wasn’t the time.

“There’s only one thing I want to know about that day. Tell me it was an accident, Jose. Tell me you didn’t mean to hurt him.”

“Not a day has passed I didn’t wish I’d told him no. I could’ve refused to fly over the canyon. I could’ve stopped him from diving.”

Bella choked on a laugh. "Nobody could ever stop J.P. from doing anything he wanted to do." She stared hard at him. "He strapped the parachute on. He dove out of the plane. I can't blame you for that, Jose. But you didn't have to abandon him afterward."

"Your father told me to stay away. Told all of J.P.'s friends to stay away. He said it was too hard for your mother and for you to relive what he could've been. To see his friends carrying on without him."

Jose reached for her hand. "I didn't know your parents died. I didn't know his care had fallen on you."

"Would it have mattered?"

He pulled her close. "It matters to me."

\* \* \* \*

Beneath her cheek she could feel Jose's heartbeat, slow and steady. The familiar rhythm filled her with longing. An ache opened in her soul, threatening to swallow her when they got off this island and the real world sucked them back into their real lives. Her anger at him had come so quickly and with such force it frightened her, but forgiveness had come even more swiftly. She loved him, and wouldn't even try to deny it.

His hand twisted in her hair and tugged gently, raising her face to his. "Tell me you love me." His eyes searched hers and his breath blew soft against her cheek. "Don't lie. Tell me the truth."

"Jose—" Her voice cracked. She buried her face in his chest. Candlelight bounced off the cavern walls. The scent of his skin filled her lungs and warmed her heart. She'd grown closer to him than she'd ever been to any man other than Trevor. But once they left the island, neither of them would be hers. She knew she loved him, but what good would confessing it do?

She breathed in his masculine scent and kissed the smooth skin beneath his lips. "Are we ever going to get off this island?"

"I'm not in a hurry. Are you?"

She rocked her head from side to side. No. Back home, she'd be alone.

Trevor's long shadow filled the mouth of the cave. "A boat!" He yelled. "By God, I think it's the Coast Guard!"

Jose bolted out of the cavern, taking her with him. Her heart sank deeper with every step. The fantasy had come to an end.

## Chapter Seventeen

Trevor surveyed the grassy hills and gently sloping pasture below the hill where he stood. The Coast Guard craft that cut close to the island never stopped. And though he'd stayed awake most of the night listening in case it came back, it never did.

There were worse places to be stranded. If he didn't have business to take care of at home, he'd never leave Isla de Amantes. This land was perfect for him and for the horses. But he didn't know how in the hell he'd be able to afford it. Even if he managed to outsmart Jose and win the bid, he'd have to figure out a way to make a profit. He couldn't live without income.

"Good morning, Cowboy." Bella's hand cupped his ass. He hadn't heard her approach.

"You walk through the garden or just wake up horny?" He wrapped his arm around her shoulders and drew her in close. She snuggled in next to him.

"Maybe I just like your ass."

"Makes two of us."

"Is that a stream down there?" She pointed to the far end of the pasture where water sparkled like a silver snake in the grass.

"A little one. Big enough for a watering hole."

"You've got big plans for this island, don't you? How many horses you plan on bringing out here?"

"About thirty of them to start with. More if this island makes them as horny as it does us."

"So you'll move out here all by yourself with a bunch of animals. No cowgirl to keep you company?"

“That’s the plan.”

“You don’t like to talk about her, do you?”

“Who?”

“The one who broke your heart.”

Trevor dropped his arm from her shoulders and started toward an overgrown path between the rocks. Ahead of him the pasture spread out, a little overgrown, but not too bad. It wouldn’t be hard to get it ready for the horses. He could live in the cabin, just fix it up a little. He didn’t need much. Hell, half the time he slept on the ground anyway. He liked it like that. Nothing to hold him in. Just a blanket of stars and a bed of grass. He had enough sense to come in out of the rain, most of the time, but outdoors was the only place he could breathe.

Trevor filled his lungs with the clean island air. A hint of the familiar erotic scent landed on the back of his tongue, but he swallowed it down. He didn’t need an aphrodisiac to want Bella, and he knew enough about women to know you could only take one to bed so many times before she started expecting more than a good fuck.

Bella had followed him. Her small hands circled his hips and her forehead pressed into the center of his back. The heat of her body so close to his drew his balls in tight. She didn’t say a word. Her hands slipped beneath the front of his shirt and caressed his abs, his ribs. Her fingertips traced a line beneath his pecs and then slowly circled his flat nipples. Another shot of awareness lit a trail down his spine. His cock stretched, poking out of the waistband of his briefs. He bit his lip. If he had half a brain, he’d push her hands away and let her down easy. But he’d never been smart when it came to women.

“Why do the horses mean so much to you?” Bella’s gaze was gentle, her voice soft. “I mean, I understand that you fight for animal rights, but don’t you think the developers will find them a good home?”

"No. I don't trust them to do that, and ..." He scratched the back of his neck and squinted into the sun. He'd never told anyone what the horses meant to him. Didn't know if he could.

"And what?" Bella caressed his chest. "Tell me, Trevor."

"I was engaged. And young. Too stupid to pull my head out of my ass and be a real man. She loved me." His voice cracked and he stopped. He couldn't do this. He couldn't talk about her. Even after all these years he couldn't say her name. After he lost her, the horses were the only ones who hadn't questioned him. He had lived with them, near them, for nearly a month. They were the only company he wanted. And he would never forget what he owed them.

"I can't imagine a woman not loving you." Bella's fingers stroked his skin. "You're easy to love." He could hear the honesty in her voice and he knew he had to tell her the truth about himself. She needed to run for the hills and after he told her who he was, she would. He had no doubt about that.

"No I ain't. I'm a man. Worse than most." He took a deep breath. "And it's best you know it. I had everything a man should want, but I met a pretty little thing that I wanted a piece of. Figured I was too young to tie myself down and broke off the engagement for a piece of ass."

"Maybe she wasn't the one you were supposed to marry. Maybe you were too young."

He pushed her hands away and turned to face her. "Don't sugarcoat this, Bella. She loved me, and I loved her. But it wasn't enough for me. I ran off to have a good time, didn't think twice about what I'd done to her. And ..."

He walked off. He couldn't do it. Couldn't say the words. Hell, he tried every day to block out the memory of what he'd done, but he'd never shake that guilt. And he'd never make the mistake of letting a woman fall in love with him again.



Bella came up behind him again. Her hands slipped around his waist. Her forehead pressed into his back and her palms flattened against his stomach. “What happened?”

He stared straight ahead into the clear blue sky. He didn’t dare turn around to see Bella’s reaction. “She killed herself. She was pregnant, but I didn’t know that part.”

“Would it have changed anything if you’d known?”

He shook his head. “I don’t know. It’s hard to remember who I was back then, or what would have made sense to me at the time.”

He expected her to leave. To run as far away as she could. But her arms tightened around him. “Make love to me,” she said.

## Chapter Eighteen

Bella's skin burned from the rub of Trevor's whiskers. Her pussy lips were so swollen they ached, but pure satisfaction made her muscles feel warm and liquid. The sun shone behind him like a halo as he looked down at her, his cock still buried deep and the smell of sex as fragrant as the grass beneath her head.

"You sure you won't need a cowgirl out here if you buy this place?" She squeezed his biceps. The corded muscles and smooth skin beneath her palms shot another twang of satisfaction between her legs. Her inner walls contracted, squeezing his dick and his eyelids lowered in response.

He bent closer, kissing her collarbone, her neck, earlobe and then he stopped. "I like you, sweetheart. But I wasn't lying. I don't do relationships."

She turned to see his eyes, clouded now. "Don't worry, Cowboy, it's just pillow talk. I couldn't stay here if I wanted to."

A heavy breath of relief landed against her cheek and he kissed her. "We all got things to take care of when we get back," he said. "But when it's all said and done, I don't want you to think I ever lied to you. My word is solid."

She lifted her hips, pressing her body closer to his. "I don't expect anything more than this."

Indecision played out on his rugged face. He was deciding whether or not to believe her. Fine. He could think what he liked. She wasn't playing a game. Even if she wanted him, she couldn't have him. She couldn't run off with any man. Her brother needed her. What she wanted didn't matter.

“Having breakfast without me?” Bella twisted her head around to see Jose. He had pulled on his jeans, but hadn’t bothered with a shirt. His dark skin had grown darker in the days they’d been on the island and the scruff that had been on his face was gone.

“Look what I found.” He held up an old-fashioned razor, the straight-blade kind she’d seen in old television show barbershops.

Trevor glanced down at her and stroked the stubble burn on her neck. “Reckon I ought to use that myself.”

Bella pushed her fingers through the short beard that was coming in on his chin. “I like you scruffy, but I vote yes. I don’t know how much more my skin can take.”

“I found something else for our lady.” Jose held up a tall narrow bottle with a cork in one end. The glass was a pale shade of green, but there was no label. Another homemade concoction, no doubt.

“What is it?” Bella pushed herself onto her elbows.

“Bath oil.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yep. Old family recipe. Wait ’til you smell it.” He walked toward them and knelt down. He removed the cork and moved the bottle toward her nose, but before he got near her face, he tipped the bottle. A stream of warm oil slid onto her chest, into the valley between her breasts and made a beeline toward her navel.

“Taste it,” he said to Trevor.

“Oil?”

“Edible oil.” He grinned from ear to ear. “My family never believed a bedroom should be boring.”

The warm oil pooled in her bellybutton. She arched her back, rubbing some of it on Trevor. Crooking her hand behind Jose’s head, she pulled him closer. “You eat it,” she said.

He raised a dark eyebrow. “Um, senorita. You’re too good to me.”

Trevor shifted to the side, pulling Bella’s thigh with him. His cock had begun to stiffen again. She gripped him with her vagina as he

turned them, never breaking the connection. She twisted just enough to see Jose.

Jose's hand slid up her stomach, beneath the curve of one breast and then the other. There was no better feeling in the world than having the two of them this close, touching her, tasting her, making love to her. Trevor's fingers dug into her hip, holding her body to his. Jose moved closer. His hand caressed her breast, and the smooth heat of his tongue dipped into the valley of her throat where some of the warm, fragrant oil had pooled. The scent was intoxicating, having some of the same tones as the air in the garden. Nerves in her clit danced with excitement. Her nipples hardened to a sting. He took his time, dipping his tongue slowly, spreading the oil across the base of her throat, nibbling and licking it off her skin.

She pulled the curls at the base of his neck and pushed her hips into Trevor. Trevor reached between them. His broad thumb pressed the side of her clit and rubbed slowly. She arched back against Jose and thrust her hips again, demanding more contact from both of them. Neither changed a thing they were doing.

"Please." She gasped. "Please give me more."

Jose kept a steady pace but moved lower, toward her nipple. She pulled his hair harder and tried to lift her breast to his face, anything to get him there faster. Trevor continued the maddeningly slow ministrations to her clit. Torture had never felt so good. Fire spread through her body. Sexual hunger ate at her. Anticipation had her muscles on edge and her scalp tingling.

Trevor's big cock had swelled, stretching her channel, but he wouldn't pump like she wanted him too, and he effectively stopped her hips when she pushed for more. "Give it to me," she begged. "Please. Both of you. Please."

Jose murmured in Spanish as he leaned over her, his head between her chest and Trevor's. His tongue dove between her breasts, licking slowly, not leaving a drop of the delicious-smelling oil on her skin.

An unexpected smack landed against her ass. The sting surprised her. She yelped, but instantly wanted more.

“Again!” she pleaded.

Jose rubbed the pain away, and then spanked her again. Harder this time. She cried out and rose up, pushing her breast to his mouth. He sucked her nipple in hard and smacked her ass again.

“Oh, God!” she panted. A tear slipped from the corner of her eye.

Trevor slung her knee over his shoulder and twisted her body more. The first thrust of his cock nearly sent her over the edge. He wrapped his arm around her thigh and drove his cock in deep. Jose coated his fingertip in oil from her bellybutton then drew a slick circle around her anus. She whimpered.

“You like that, don’t you?” Jose whispered near her ear. He smacked her ass again. “You bad girl.”

Trevor pulled his cock out so slowly she almost cried to have it back again. Her vagina tightened, holding him as hard as she could, not wanting to let him go.

Only the broad tip of his shaft remained inside her. “How bad do you want it?” Trevor asked.

“I’ll do anything.” She licked the dryness from her lips. “Anything at all. Please just fuck me.”

He glanced at Jose, who gave him a grin before leaning down to take her nipple between his teeth. Jose bit gently and tugged with his teeth. She gripped his hair hard. He smacked her ass again. Flames tore through her. The sting of his slap, his teeth, the torturous stretch of Trevor’s cock at the edge of her hole.

“I’m going to fuck your ass hard,” Jose warned her. “I’m not going to stop until I come and when I’m done, if you’re a good girl, Trevor will fuck you like you want him to. You understand?”

“No.” She flung her head from side to side and tried again to shift her hips so Trevor’s cock would slide deep inside her.

“You don’t understand? Or you don’t want to play?” Jose asked. “I won’t hurt you. If you want to stop, just say ‘mercy’ and the

game's over." He pressed his finger into her tight, puckered ass, just far enough to let her know he meant business. "Now do you understand?"

"Yes!"

"Say you want me to fuck your ass hard."

"Fuck me hard," she said.

He smacked her again. "Fuck your *ass* hard."

"Fuck my ass hard," she said.

Trevor rolled onto his back, taking her with him. She sank onto his thick shaft and relief trickled like water through her nerves. He was inside her. God, now all she had to do was ride him and relief would come. But he didn't move. He held her hips against his, trapping her.

Warm oil hit the base of her neck and ran down her back and into the crack of her ass. Jose licked high on her spine, then followed the trail down. When he got to her ass, he spread her cheeks and dipped his tongue into her crease with long slow strokes. Bella squealed in surprise and then shock turned to pure ecstasy as he lapped his way to her anus. Her nipples felt like stones pressed between her chest and Trevor's. She tried again to ride Trevor's cock, but he growled and shook his head.

"You want me to fuck you when he's done, you better be good now."

Bella bit her bottom lip hard and held on. They were torturing her, but God, she loved every minute of it.

Jose tongued her ass slowly at first and then faster. His soft tongue went stiff and stabbed at her ass, trying to get in. She squeezed her cheeks. The sound of his palm smacking her flesh rang like a gunshot in her ear, but before she could cry from the sting she screamed from the sensation of his tongue in her ass, exploring the rim of her anus, fucking her in short, fast strokes that made her want more.

She buried her mouth in Trevor's neck, licking and tasting his skin, wishing she could come all over him, feel him explode inside

her. His hands twisted in her hair and he groaned. He wanted her too. The restraint must be killing him. His hips moved just enough to bury his cock one more fraction of an inch, mash her clit against his pelvic bone and send a rain of tingles through her pussy.

Jose's tongue traveled the crease of her ass and up her back. His teeth grazed her shoulders as his big cock pushed against her anus. His hands weren't on her. She smelled the oil and knew he'd put it on his cock. The bottle landed on the ground with a thud and his oiled hands grabbed her hips. His cock teased twice, barely stretching her tight ass. She sucked in a breath, anticipating the burn as he entered.

"You ready?" he asked, close to her ear. "I'm gonna fuck you so hard. Are you ready, baby?"

She whimpered a response and gripped the grass at either side of Trevor's head.

Jose entered her just an inch, testing the fit. "Okay?" The word ground out of him.

"Um-hmm," she managed, trembling with the ache that filled her belly. She had two cocks in her and neither were giving her what she wanted. But she knew they could. They would. If they didn't tease her to death first.

Jose was true to his word. He thrust in hard and fast, fucking her like an animal. Her body jarred with each thrust, finally giving her the freedom to ride Trevor's cock the way she wanted to. Both of them. So hard. So fast. So big. Her pants turned to moans then screams. Her arms shook. Her thighs burned and her pussy and ass were both ready to explode. She was there, so there. So ready.

Jose slammed into her. Trevor followed his lead, shoving himself deep and hard. Both men came, filling her with wave after wave of hot liquid cream. The first burst of her orgasm took her breath away. The second wrenched another scream from her throat.

She collapsed on Trevor's chest, completely spent, unable to move a muscle. Hands soothed her body. Lips brushed her skin. Wrapped in their arms, cocooned between their bodies, her heart

broke. This wouldn't last. It couldn't. But she'd never wanted anything more.



## Chapter Nineteen

The snake didn't make an appearance while Bella showered, but it was comforting to have Jose and Trevor beneath the waterfall with her. The soaps Jose found smelled like the garden, intoxicating in their intensity, the scents so beautifully blended she felt like royalty.

Pampering wasn't something she had a lot of time for. Between work and making sure J.P. was being cared for, there wasn't much time left over in the day. A twinge of guilt pricked her chest, but she inhaled the sweet soap and let it slip away. She couldn't get to him now. There was absolutely nothing she could do. And in some ways that left her more free than she had been in years. She would do anything she could for her brother, give up her life to make sure his was the best it could be, but sometimes she forgot how tired she was. Or how much she needed a minute to herself.

Jose's arm brushed hers, his skin slick with soap. She opened her eyes. His back was to her. His dark hair, black when it was wet, lay in long curls at the base of his neck. His back muscles shifted as he scrubbed his chest. Her heart did a little flip and her stomach tightened. He was gorgeous. Every inch of his body made her mouth water. On the mainland, they never would have done the things they'd done here. She wouldn't have done them with anyone. But on the island the laws of reality didn't exist. She was half convinced she'd wake up at any minute and discover it was all just a dream.

Trevor's hands massaged her shoulders. "I'll get your back," he said. She turned so he could reach her better and allowed herself to be bathed. Yes, this was definitely a dream. And she did not want to wake up.

The buzz of an airplane jerked their heads toward the sky.

Sun glinted off the white body of the plane as it paralleled the island. Bella shaded her eyes with her hand and peered into the pale blue sky. "Do you think the Coast Guard is back?" she whispered.

Jose and Trevor scrambled to the top of the hill above the waterfall, their naked bodies in motion against the gray rocks and green vegetation. Jose reached the summit first. Jumping up and down, waving his arms he shouted to the plane. Trevor joined him. The pilot would be an idiot not to stop for those two.

"Please," she whispered. "Please find us." A pang stabbed her heart and she looked back at the men. Her men. At least until they left this island and went back to their real lives. She glanced back at the plane, but didn't utter a word. She did want to be rescued. Didn't she?

What was wrong with spending another day or two out here? They had food and shelter. Enough clothes, not that they needed many. She bit her bottom lip and squeezed her eyes shut. J.P. needed her. There was no telling how worried he must be. His body might be useless, but his mind ran a million thoughts a minute. And she had no doubt right now that she was in every one of them. He would be worried and angry. Maybe scared. But most of all he'd be angry. Since the accident, anger seemed to be the emotion that suited him. The one he'd rarely shown when life was on his side. She couldn't blame him. He'd had it all. And everything had been snatched from him in the blink of an eye. One minute he was on top of the world, flying like a bird. The next he couldn't even spread his fingers. He had every right to be angry and she had to get off this island. She raised her arms in the air and waved at the plane. For a second the sun glinted off the wings and the plane looked as if it might be turning toward them. Then the pilot banked. The aircraft and any hope of rescue flew off toward the horizon.

Bella lowered her arms and pressed her hands to her heart. She'd never been so selfish in her life. How could she want to stay here in this fantasy world while her brother lay helpless in a nursing facility?

And of all things not to jog her sense of responsibility, she had been staring at a plane. A small recreational plane not all that different from the one he'd jumped out of. He'd been looking for a thrill, another spike of adrenalin, like all the others he jammed into his daily routine. Instead, he'd landed in a heap on the ground, a tangled parachute nearby and his life hanging by a thread. How many times had he told her he wished he'd died that day? That death would be better than the life he had now?

She didn't blame him for being angry, or difficult, or that his sour days came more often than his lighter ones. How long had it been since she'd seen his smile, heard his laugh? She hung her head. How could she have wished for a minute to stay here and not gone back to him?

\* \* \* \*

Trevor jumped down the last couple of feet and landed at the base of the hill. If the plane had skirted the other side of the island the pilot would have seen their SOS, but from his vantage point they'd probably looked like a couple of nudists putting on a show.

There were worse places to be stranded, that was for damn sure, but if he wanted to own this piece of dirt, he needed to get back to the mainland in time to get together an offer that Jose wasn't expecting.

Bella stood on the edge of the pool, head bowed, shoulders trembling. Ah, hell. He hurried over. This wasn't any place for a lady. She didn't even have a pillow beneath her head at night.

"Don't cry, darlin'." He stroked her hair, still soaked from the shower. "We'll be off here soon enough. I think the pilot might have seen us."

"Why didn't he fly closer?"

He scowled at the empty sky where the plane had been. "Maybe he didn't want to get a better look at our dicks."

She choked out a laugh and leaned into his chest.

"You'll be all right 'til we get back. We ain't going to let anything happen to you." He tilted her chin to look into her dark eyes. "We might even have a little fun while we're here."

"Goddamn it!" Jose strode up next to them. "Why do you think that asshole didn't let us know he'd seen us?"

"Gives us more time to look for the treasure Bella's itching to find." He stroked her head again. "Wouldn't surprise me if he radioed the Coast Guard or maybe he'll ask around when he gets back to the mainland."

"Or maybe that plane's got a bellyful of coke and he's not radioing anybody. Or doing anything but flying under the radar the whole way."

## Chapter Twenty

Bella pulled her skirt over her hips and tied her hair in a knot. The island breeze was minimal and the afternoon sun was bearing down. She rubbed some of the scented oil Jose had found along her arms and neck before joining the two men on the porch.

Her stomach tightened as they both looked up with appraising stares. They were drop-dead gorgeous and they made her feel like she was the most desirable woman in the world. On the mainland she wouldn't have dared dream she could be with either of them. But here, they were hers. Both of them. A tingle of excitement danced down her spine. Life flooded her veins like she had never let it before. For the first time, she had a sense of what J.P. must have felt performing all his stunts before the accident. He'd lived for the thrill. One death-defying thrill after another.

She shook off the memories of the days following the accident. The minute-to-minute question of whether he would live or die. The doctors had saved him. Just like she had prayed they would. And now he didn't want to be alive.

The weight of his misery lay on her like lead. Had her prayers been answered? If she hadn't prayed so hard, would he be free now? Would his soul be soaring the way he had always loved to do.

"What's the matter, darlin'?" Concern etched Trevor's eyes.

She mustered a smile and joined him in the hammock. Jose had the treasure map spread open on the table in front of them. His fingers traced a trail from one mark to the other and he muttered words she couldn't understand. Portuguese. Old Portuguese. Some of it sounded like Spanish, but not enough that she could follow along.

"Has he deciphered the curse yet?" she asked Trevor.

"He's working on it."

\* \* \* \*

While Bella napped in the hammock, Jose started off toward the water with a reel and tackle box he'd found in the cabin. He carried a net over his shoulder. The first thing he'd have to catch was bait. Trevor had taken off to roam the island, probably trying to decide whether or not to try and buy the place.

Whatever his intentions were, unfortunately, he wasn't going to see them come to fruition. Not on his terms anyway. Even if Jose didn't want the island, he didn't have a choice. But he did want it. From the minute he woke up beached on the shore, he'd known he was home. The air filled him. The wind sang to him and the rhythm of the gulf matched the pulse of his blood. Because it was in his blood. Just like it had been in Delgado's.

He was a slave to this land. He'd promised to protect it from falling into hands outside the family, but more than that, he had discovered that he belonged to this island as much as it rightfully belonged to him. Trevor could find another place to do whatever it was he wanted to do, and Jose would pay any price to make sure Isla de Amantes remained in the family.

He followed an overgrown path to the rocky side of the island, avoiding the garden and its sweet air. In the grasses ahead, something moved. Something big. He slowed his pace and then froze completely. The python's pattern was dark against the pale vegetation. It was easily the biggest snake he'd ever seen. Too big to be handled by one man and too wild to trust for even a minute.

The serpent lifted its broad head. Its forked tongue fluttered in front of its snout. An animal this magnificent commanded respect, but this one more than most. The treasure map Delgado had drawn had a long reptile curled around the phallic-shaped island just above the

widest part, the part that looked like balls. The serpent in the drawing was wound tight, like a cock ring, delaying the pleasure, and making every moment more intense than the last. This snake was as much a part of this land as the garden, even though it couldn't be the one in Delgado's drawing. It was here for a reason.

The pattern on the snake's back stood out against its paler skin. Its scales shimmered in the sunlight, as if it had just taken a swim. This one could probably hunt in the water almost as easily as it could on land. There were animals on the island, but a reptile this size had to have a healthy appetite.

Jose hesitated. The snake lowered its head and slithered another two feet forward, blocking the trail in front of him. He could circle around, but his curiosity got the better of him. Had this been a pet? Now that there were people on the island again, was it looking for a handout? Chances were, if this was a pet, it had been allowed to roam free by the couple who'd lived here before. It probably helped control the rodents and kept the rabbits from destroying the vegetables and herbs that grew in the garden.

A memory tickled the back of his mind. A story his grandmother used to tell about a snake and a man. A pirate. He searched deeper for the memory, but the details escaped him. It could have been an old family tale or maybe one the whole world knew. His childhood had been filled with stories, but now they all ran together. The only ones he could remember in detail were the ones about Delgado. He'd always been fascinated by his notorious ancestor. And now he was standing on the very land he'd heard about in the stories. And in just a couple of weeks it would be his. Back in the family where it belonged.

The snake lowered its head again and slid its long body toward the low-growing vegetation. Jose watched as it disappeared as silently as it had lain there watching him. A predator had never been more stealthy. A guardian had never been more protective.

## Chapter Twenty-One

Gray smoke curled toward the navy sky. Flames leapt over the stack of driftwood in the fire pit and licked the filleted fish on the spits. The aroma was earthy and primitive. Bella's stomach growled as she sliced fruit for the tropical salsa she was preparing. The scent of cilantro rose above the others. Chopped banana, tomato and green onions filled the bottom of a carved wooden bowl and fresh limes sat on the table ready to be squeezed over the rest when all the chopping was done.

"Bananas in salsa?" Trevor asked, his breath warm on her shoulder.

"You don't trust my cooking?"

His laugh was low in his chest, sexier by firelight.

She tossed the cilantro into the bowl. "Just wait, Cowboy. I might surprise you yet."

He kissed her shoulder and gave her waist a squeeze. "You've already taken care of that, sweetheart."

Warmth spread through her chest and swirled in her womb. She had fallen hard for him, and she didn't care. It had been years since she'd felt the thrill of emotions as strong as these. Sure, she'd dated, but her evenings with men tended to be more like job interviews. With J.P. to care for she couldn't fill the requirements they were looking for in a relationship and they couldn't give her anything her dildo couldn't. Except maybe a nice kiss now and then or a warm body in her bed. She shook off the regret that sat like a cold void in her soul. The problem with kisses and warm bodies was once wasn't



enough. Her bed always felt emptier after they left than before they came. It would be a tomb without Trevor and Jose.

Trevor moved her hair and kissed her neck. Letting her guard down with him and Jose was the most fulfillment she'd ever had, and if she could only have it for a few days, she was ready to jump in with both feet. Nothing would be worse than the regret she would face if she didn't take this moment by the horns and ride it for everything it was worth.

"I've got an idea." His lips brushed her ear.

"What's that?"

"If I don't like the salsa, I get to take the rest of that banana and eat it off you."

Her clit sang and goose bumps scampering across her skin. "How about I save a whole banana, and you can eat it off me whether you like my salsa or not?"

"You got a deal."

Jose lifted one of the spits and examined the fish he'd caught. "Are you two making plans without me?"

"One for all." Bella laughed.

"And all for one," Jose finished. "What are you going to eat off me?"

"Me?" She raised her brows and let her eyes trail over his bare chest.

"Both of you," Jose said with his lips pushed into a smirk.

Trevor ran his hands around Bella's waist and rested his palms on her belly. "I might fuck you up the ass, but I don't think I'm gonna be eating off you."

Jose put the fish back over the fire and grinned. "Only if I get to fuck you first. We got company." Jose pointed toward the sea grapes that edged up to the clearing in front of the cabin.

Bella strained her eyes. At first she couldn't see anything but the shadowy outline of the plants and the uneven drift of the sand. Then her breath caught in her throat and her muscles froze. The snake.

"Why is he watching us," she whispered.

"It's used to people," Trevor told her.

Jose nodded. "I ran into it earlier today and it did the same thing."

Bella leaned into Trevor's arms. "Can we make it go away?"

Jose grunted. "A snake that size is going to do what it wants. I don't want to tangle with it again if we don't have to." He pulled the fish off the fire and laid the spits on the long wooden platter they'd found inside the cabin. Dishes were scarce, the cupboards almost empty. The couple of bowls and handful of serving pieces she'd found were hand-carved and well-worn. The forks and cutlery were high-quality silver, bulkier than any that would be sold today and appeared to be old. Really old. So old they might have belonged to Delgado. Perhaps Jose was right and the old couple had found the treasure, but surely a treasure that required a map would consist of more than silverware.

Jose worked the fish off the spits and Bella spooned her banana salsa over the top. She added avocado slices and filled silver goblets with water she'd collected from the waterfall. The goblets were heavy and the same aged quality as the silverware. But it was impossible to tell if they'd once belonged to Delgado or if the couple had bought them because they fit the aura of their island home.

Jose raised his glass in a toast. "To the three of us, this island, and the taste of banana-soaked skin."

Bella laughed and raised her glass. Trevor joined the toast, but his mind seemed to have drifted off.

"Did you hear that?" he asked.

Bella perked her ears. At first she couldn't hear anything but the rub of the ocean against the shore and the breeze rattling the trees. At night, the birds grew quiet and the sea grew loud. Plants rustled as the snake slithered away quickly. The music of the island.

The couple who had lived here had everything they needed, but nothing more. There weren't any extravagances aside from the homemade lotions and oils. But what more did they need, especially if

they were in love. Everything about the place was romantic, and if they spent any time in the garden at all, they'd go through plenty of the oil.

"I translated the message on the map," Jose said. "I believe it translates to: 'Seek and ye may find. Beware ye lust. Mine be mine. 'Til eternity turns it to dust.'"

"Ominous isn't it?" Bella shivered and snuggled closer to Trevor.

"What the hell do you make of it?" Trevor asked.

"Delgado doesn't share. Even if we find the treasure, he's not going to make it easy for us to just walk off with it," Jose said. "But I already knew that."

"Does it say anything else?" Bella peered over at the map. There were a lot of squiggles and markings. Some were letters. Others appeared to be ornate doodles.

"Not in words," Jose said. "But I think there's a message somewhere in these pictures. Delgado was crafty. He liked to hide things in plain sight."

"You figured out anything else, yet?" Trevor asked.

Jose placed the tip of his finger at the base of the penis-shaped island. "Here's a snake. A big snake."

Bella leaned away from the map. "You mean there's always been a snake on this island? They don't live that long do they?"

Jose shook his head. "No. But I'm guessing at one time there was more than one. Delgado must have brought them here. Maybe to keep other pirates off what he'd claimed as his own. No doubt there were plenty of men in his crew and other ship's crews that didn't like snakes any more than you do. It wouldn't take long for the island to get a reputation for being overrun by giant reptiles and uninhabitable. And consequently avoided."

"Listen!" Trevor said. He stared hard at the darkness, in the same direction the snake had slithered off in. "Something's out there."

## Chapter Twenty-Two

Trevor grabbed the lantern from the corner of the porch and started for the dark hillside. Bella hurried after him. Jose ducked into the cabin and pulled the handgun from the satchel he'd hidden behind the old trunk.

He followed the dancing light of the lantern and caught up quickly. The back side of the hill angled in a steep slope toward the sea. The three picked their way down carefully, following the sound of a ruckus near the bottom. Twigs snapped. Pebbles rolled down in an unsteady rain.

Jose gripped the gun, praying it still worked. He'd cleaned it as best he could, but he'd been careful not to let Trevor or Bella know he had it. He didn't have any intention of ever letting them know they could've both died at the end of its barrel.

"Shit!" Trevor held the lantern high and hurried down toward the craggy drop-off at the edge of the sea.

"Oh, God!" Bella stopped dead in her tracks.

Jose hurried around her. The massive serpent's coils were wrapped around the man who had captained their water taxi, the one who wanted him dead.

The lantern went flying and Trevor hit the ground hard. He swore and scrambled to his feet, but not before Jose saw the long tail of the python whip back.

Trevor went for the snake.

"I've got a gun," Jose said. "Move out of the way."

Trevor backed off and picked up the lantern. "Shoot! What in the hell are you waiting for?"

Jose leveled the gun on the captain's head. Then dropped his arm. The giant snake had the man's neck in its mouth. Its body wrapped around the squirming victim, pinning his arms and legs, constricting the life out of him.

Trevor went for the snake again.

"Don't," Bella yelled.

The snake twisted. Rocks sprayed. An instant later they were gone, over the cliff. A splash sounded in the rough sea below.

The gun hung loose in Jose's hand.

"You couldn't get a shot?" Trevor asked. "You should've thrown me the damn gun!"

"Was that the captain?" Bella sobbed.

Jose walked passed her. "He was my stalker," he said. "He's been threatening me for the past year. When I found his bag and the gun, but no trace of him I thought he was dead. I don't know how he found out I was coming here, or managed to be the one who escorted us to the island. But that storm saved our lives. He would've killed us all."

"Why the hell didn't you say something?" Trevor asked.

"I thought he was dead. And a crazed stalker isn't exactly something I go around bragging about."

Twice now, their lives had been saved since coming to this island. Delgado looked out for his own. Centuries wouldn't change that.

## **Chapter Twenty-Three**

At the top of the hill Trevor liked so much, Bella was more than happy to let him ease her mind the way he did best. The orgasm he'd just given her still sent off aftershocks and heated her skin. This morning, she hadn't been the only one still shaken from the night before. Jose had taken a walk alone, probably coming to terms with witnessing the death of the man who wanted to kill him.

She studied the silver flecks in Trevor's gray-blue eyes. He was so tender for a man built to be so rough, but he held back. Even in the moments of their most intimate connections, she was aware the distance he kept between them. The gap seemed to be closing, but she felt certain there was a piece of him that he would never share, a part of his life that she would never be privy to.

She ran her fingers through his hair. Holding himself on his elbows above her, their bodies still joined, he drifted to that place he never let her go. "You can relax. I'm not going to tell you I love you."

He blinked and a frown deepened the lines of his face. He made a noise low in his throat, but didn't answer. His fiancée's suicide had taught him not to trust in his emotions, and had shoved the lesson so deep in his face he probably never would love another woman.

She hooked her hands behind his neck and raised herself to press a kiss to his lips, a tender kiss that she hoped would convey how much she'd grown to care for him. How big a place he'd taken up in her heart. Even if what they had was only temporary, it didn't make it any less real.

He took control of the kiss, driving it deeper, answering her tongue with his, curling lust in her belly and giving her another reason to fall harder for him.

She dropped her head back to the ground and traced the line of his jaw, the bone of his cheek and the soft pad of his earlobe. "You don't have to love me, but you can't stop what I feel," she whispered.

The instant the words left her mouth, the curtain came down over his eyes. The steely distance had never been more defined than it was at that moment. He pushed himself up, disconnecting them physically and emotionally.

His mouth set in a firm line, he yanked his jeans over his hips and snatched his shirt off the ground.

"Why does that bother you? I didn't ask for a picket fence or even next week."

"I ain't the man to go falling in love with."

He strode off, toward the stream at the bottom of the pasture. Bella chewed her bottom lip. She hadn't expected him to profess the same feelings, but she didn't expect to piss him off either.

She picked up her tank top and worked it over her head. He couldn't go far and sooner or later he'd blow it off. She reached for her skirt when a movement in the grass stopped her cold. A familiar pattern peeked between the broad blades of grass. The snake was moving away from her headed in the same direction Trevor had gone. A cold sweat broke out on her upper lip and her arms shook. Her heartbeat pounded in her ears as what seemed like an hour passed before the reptile had pulled its long body away from her. She slowly got to her feet and backed away, afraid to turn her back on the snake.

"We should name him," Jose said.

She jumped. She hadn't heard him walk up.

"The snake?"

He shrugged. "I'll bet he had a name. Might make him easier to live with if we called him something."

"I don't want to live with him."

"For now, sweetheart, you don't have a choice."

Bella started toward the cabin, her skirt in her hand. If she never saw that snake again it would be too soon.

She had just made it to the base of the hill when a gurgling sound stopped her. She looked around, heart pounding. The last thing she needed to see right now was another wild animal. In the soft sand at her feet the wide path carved by the snake's belly was still visible in the sand, and in the center of the groove, something sparkled. Water. Bubbling water.

"I found something!" she yelled.

Jose arrived first. Bella stared down at the bubbles emerging from the ground at an increasingly steady pace. What had started as a hole large enough for a single bubble to escape through had widened. The hole was now as big as her fist and several bubbles appeared at once, eating away at the edges of the hole, widening it more.

"What is it?" she asked. "A sink hole?"

"Maybe. Looks like Monty uncovered it for us."

"Monty?"

"Python."

She laughed. At least something about that snake was humorous. "Didn't you see it when you came this way?"

Jose nodded to a small rise in the land to their right. "I climbed over that hill there. I was watching from a distance to see where he was headed."

The rise he'd indicated would have given him a great view of her and Trevor too. "You sure you were watching Monty?"

"I was until you and Trevor distracted me." He gave her shoulder a squeeze then knelt to examine the growing hole.

"How big do you think it'll get?" she asked. "Should we be this close?"

"Hard to say. The ground's definitely hollow here. No way to know how deep though."



“What you got?” Trevor asked. He hadn’t hurried when she called, and his reluctance to be there was written clearly in his stiff posture and the distance he stood apart from them.

Bella stepped aside so he could get a better view. “We don’t know exactly,” she said.

Trevor bent down and grabbed a handful of earth at the edge of the hole. He peeled back a fist-sized chunk no more than four inches thick. Jose joined him and soon they had cleared a hole the size of a basketball. The water below was clouded with swirling sand that had fallen in, and the bubbles had stopped forming.

The sand settled and Bella squealed. “Is that what it looks like?” she asked. Her breath had started to come in pants. In the hole, beneath the slow moving water the top six inches of a chest rose from the sand. The metal had been corroded by the water, but the shape was easily recognizable.

Trevor reached for it, but Jose grabbed his arm.

“You don’t know what the curse is,” he warned.

“I thought treasure chests were made of wood,” Bella said.

Trevor rapped on the top of the chest. “Lead or cast iron. Something heavy and thick. If it dates back to the early eighteenth century, it’s cast iron.”

“I’m not sure we could even get it out of here if we tried,” Jose said. “It must weigh a ton.”

Trevor leaned back. “Any ideas?”

“I don’t want to mess with it until you both know what we’re getting ourselves into,” Jose said. “I only know parts of the legend, and believe me, it’s nothing to mess around with.”

“You really believe in that curse shit?” Trevor asked.

“You ever walked through a garden that would make you fuck anything that moved before you came here? Tell me you don’t think there are things that can’t be explained on this island.”

Bella knelt to join the men on the ground. "Maybe we should check the map again. The treasure's not going anywhere. And neither are we."

Trevor avoided her eyes, but Jose agreed. "All right. Let's head back, see if we can figure any of it out. And maybe we can check around the cabin for something we can use to leverage this thing out of here."

"It's nowhere near where the X was on the map," Bella said, as much to herself as to the others. "What do you make of that?"

"Maybe the old folks who lived here moved it," Trevor said.

"Or Delgado didn't make the map as obvious as we thought," Jose said. "I told you he was smart."

"And he didn't have any intention of sharing," Bella added. "Come on. Let's figure this out. How hard can it be?"

"The single hammock!" Jose said.

Bella glanced at him. "What?"

"The pulley holding it to the roof of the porch. I'll bet that's what the couple who lived here used to get this out of the ground the first time."

"You're convinced they moved it?" It made sense, but she just wanted to hear him say it, or maybe she just wanted him to talk to make up for the cold silence surrounding Trevor.

"I bet the silverware in the cabin came out of here." Trevor didn't look at her when he spoke. He stayed focused on the chest.

"You think they just took what they needed and left the rest?" Her heart pounded with the possibility of what may be inside that rusted iron chest. Even if it wasn't hers, if it never would be, the excitement of the find was a thrill in itself.

"If they read the map, they knew about the curse," Jose said. "Maybe that's all Delgado would let them have."

Trevor grunted.

"How do we use the pulley?" Bella asked. "Don't we need something to rig it to?"

Jose ran his hand through his dark hair. "Physics never were my thing, but we can figure it out." He turned to Trevor. "You think we can use the pulley near the ground, or do we have to find a way to get it up high?"

Trevor swirled his hand in the water and pushed his fingers into the sand. "The sand isn't hard packed, at least not close to the surface. I don't have any way of knowing how big this thing is or how deep it's buried. If it's not too deep and the sand isn't rock solid further down, we might be able to keep the pulley pretty low."

"What can we use?" Bella asked. "Did you see anything at the cabin?" She held her breath waiting for Trevor's response, waiting to see if his voice held any of the ice she felt in her veins.

Jose jumped in. "What are the chances we can dig down below the lid and pry it open without moving it?"

Trevor scratched at the stubble on his jaw, obviously in deep thought.

"Do you think this water rises with the tide?" Bella asked.

Trevor jerked his head up, his jaw tight with concentration. "She might be on to something. Did you see any shovels back at the cabin?" he asked Jose.

Jose nodded. "That little tool shed on the back corner of the house next to the bathroom looked like it had the basics."

"Come on." Trevor hurried down the trail with the other two behind him. "Did you see rope or chain?" he asked without looking back.

"Definitely rope," Jose answered. "I don't know about chain."

"What do you have in mind?" Bella asked.

"Simple pulley and additional leverage. If the water rises with the tide, we might be able to use that to our advantage."

Bella hurried to keep up. Trevor's anger had subsided. At least for now. Maybe later, she'd have a chance to ease him off the edge.

Jose reached back. His hand caught hers and he pulled her forward. She jogged to keep up, but the warmth and strength of his grip comforted her.

They reached the back corner of the cabin and Trevor wasted no time jerking the door open.

"You need me to get the pulley off the porch?" Jose asked.

"Yeah, grab it," Trevor said.

Bella peered around Trevor's broad shoulders. The interior of the little shed was dark, but the outlines of garden tools lined the walls and leaned in the corners. He pulled out two shovels and handed them both to her. The handles were stocky with rubber-covered triangle-shaped grips at the top. He pulled out a thick cord of rope and tossed it to the ground before stepping into the dark shed. He came out with another thick rope wound over his shoulder and the fire of excitement in his eyes. He picked up the first coil of rope he'd thrown to the ground and took one of the shovels from Bella.

Jose came around the house, carrying the block-and-tackle-style pulley that had been holding the hammock.

Trevor grinned, flashing such a broad smile that Bella's heart gave a flutter. She sucked in a deep breath and tried to tamp her emotions down. She had it bad, all right. He wasn't pissed anymore, but he didn't feel the same way she did.

Trevor started back toward the treasure chest and she and Jose hurried behind him.

"What about the curse?" Bella asked. "Are we just taking our chances now?"

"I don't believe in that curse bullshit," Trevor said.

Bella stiffened.

"I'm willing to take my chances," Jose said. "Delgado would want the treasure to stay in the family. I'm the end of the line."

"So it's rightfully yours?" Trevor asked. "Even if all three of us dig it up and Bella's the one who found it."

"It belongs to my family, but I'm not as selfish as Delgado."

Trevor kept walking. Without turning around he said, "I want to buy this island with my share."

"I'm buying the island," Jose said. "And I don't need the treasure to do it."

Trevor stopped and turned around slowly. "If I don't help you dig this hunk of junk up, you won't ever know what's in it. Because when I buy the island, all of it will be mine." His eyes were steel and his jaw set firmly, but he stood as relaxed as ever and shrugged beneath the weight of the ropes on his shoulders. "I'm not asking you for money. All I want in exchange for my share of what we find is for you to walk away from the property. Don't put in a bid."

Bella shivered from the tension between them. Jose wasn't about to walk away from this island and the family history that had taken place here.

Jose threw the pulley and the shovels to the ground. They landed in a heap next to the rope Trevor had dropped. Both men stood eerily quiet. Neither looked like he'd back down an inch.

"You can't buy the property," Jose said evenly. "It belongs to my family and that's where it's going to stay."

"If it's yours why didn't you inherit it?"

A muscle in Jose's jaw jumped. His shoulders tightened and his hands curled into fists. "Somebody screwed up," he said. "But I plan to set things right again."

Trevor's arms hung easily at his sides. The only indication he was ready for the fight was the hard glare in his eyes. Bella swallowed the lump that had risen in her throat. She couldn't help but think she had something to do with his frustration. She stepped between them.

"Why do we have to settle this now?" she asked. "We don't even know if we're going to get back to the mainland in time for either of you to put in an offer on the island." She glanced from one to the other. "Sorry. But it's true." Her fingers pressed into her hips. "A fine group we are. Not a single one of our disappearances has set off an alarm bell." Neither man reacted, and her frustration level kicked up a

notch. "Fine. Beat the hell out of each other if that's what you want to do. If you need my help with the treasure, find me."

She strode off, shaking. Rescue from this island was nowhere in sight, and she had more important things to worry about than their pissing contest. As long as one of them bought the land, J.P. wouldn't have to move and her life would go on as normal. She batted at a more persistent tear. Normal? Just what she needed, to get back to the loneliness that waited for her at home.

Trevor eyed Jose. Jose's face registered his intent. He wasn't about to give up this island without a fight. Beating the shit out of one another wouldn't get them anywhere. Even if he kicked Jose's ass, it wouldn't stop him from putting in an offer a cowboy couldn't compete with. He didn't know how he was going to come up with enough cash to snatch the contract from the first buyer. There was no way he could drum up enough money to outbid a rich boy like Jose.

His blood pumped through his veins, making him feel like a trapped animal. He didn't like being on the losing end of anything. But sometimes it paid to walk away. When the time came to fight, he'd bring everything he had to the table. Now wasn't that time.

Trevor picked up one of the shovels and handed it back to Jose. "This ain't getting us anywhere," he said.

Jose took the shovel. "You need to understand what I know about the curse first."

Trevor grunted. That damn curse business was ridiculous. "If the chest is empty, we'll know that curse ain't worth the leather it's printed on."

Jose shook his head. "It won't be empty."

"Let's go find out." Trevor picked up the rope and handed Jose the other shovel. "You want to go get the little lady or you want me to?"

Jose's gaze traveled down to Trevor's crotch. "We can get her in a minute. Fighting makes me horny."

"You want to fuck me?"

“No. I want to suck your dick.”

Trevor’s cock jumped. Hell. He’d never had a man turn him on before, but he’d never fucked around with one either. At least Jose wouldn’t be declaring his love after a handful of orgasms. He’d let him suck his dick all right, and he’d love every minute of it.

## **Chapter Twenty-Four**

They had explored most of the island. The only area they hadn't checked out was the relatively narrow tip at the north end. Bella followed the shoreline, her bare feet washed by the waves and sand sinking beneath her heels. Ahead, large gray boulders bleached white on top by the sun blocked her path. This is where they had turned back when they first explored this side of the island. Now alone, she had no intention of turning back.

The men could beat the hell out of one another for all she cared. Fighting over treasure wasn't her idea of fun, and refereeing wasn't either.

She turned her body sideways to slip between two close boulders. Beyond them lay a maze of others, varying in size and shape and spread on the shore in no particular pattern. Here the water was shallow, but the beach was narrow. Inland the vegetation was too dense and thorny to walk in. She continued between the rocks, avoiding small stones with her feet and climbing over a long low boulder that would have taken longer to walk around. Finally she reached the end of the island, the head of the phallus-shaped land in the middle of the blue-green Caribbean. What she saw took her breath away. The beach was as sandy and white as the one they had landed on their first night here. But more boulders lay in the shallow waters just off shore. These were in a semi-circular pattern, protecting the beach from the rougher waters off the island and creating a peaceful pool with plenty of space to sun and lounge. She waded into the warm water, lifting her skirt as it caressed her calves. Without thinking, she lifted her tank top over her head and tossed it onto one of the rocks.



Her skirt followed. She lay down. The sun kissed her naked skin and what happened next can only be described as magical. The water held her, like a warm velvety cloud. She floated in its caresses. Sunlight reflected like diamonds all around her.

She closed her eyes. Something sensuous wrapped around her thigh, spreading her legs. Another gentle touch slid along her waist. A low voice whispered in her ear, a language she couldn't understand but words that made her heart swell and her body pulse.

Delgado's spirit was alive and well on this island. She had no doubt. And she never wanted to leave. She floated for what seemed an eternity, drifting in and out of a foggy state, her body in a constant state of arousal.

"Bella!" The alarm in Jose's voice jerked her upright. Her ass bumped the sandy bottom of the shallow water and a rough touch slid beneath her calves as the python swam away.

The snake was long gone before Jose and Trevor reached her, but none of the fear she expected gripped her. "I don't think his name is Monty," she said, keeping her eyes on the dark pattern as it maneuvered swiftly through the water.

Jose's brows furrowed in question.

"We better call him Delgado. He has a wicked tongue."

Jose laughed as the snake slithered onto the beach and disappeared into the thorny vegetation. "No doubt. We have the chest out of the ground. Do you want to open it with us?"

## Chapter Twenty-Five

Jose grasped the lid of the treasure box in both hands. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Open it," Trevor said.

Bella nodded.

The stubborn lid creaked open and the scent of old air slammed the back of Bella's throat. Her eyes burned and her breath caught, but the mass of gold, silver and jewels stopped her heart. The glitter was gone from most of the pieces, but that didn't diminish her awe.

"Shit," Trevor said in a low voice.

"It's ours now." Jose's voice shook. "We have to guard it with our lives."

"Can we touch it?" Bella asked.

He nodded. "Your whole life's about to change if you do."

"What do you mean?" Trevor's hand hung in the air over the curved blade of a short cutlass. The handle of the weapon was embedded with jewels.

"We are bound to guard this now," Jose said. "But if we take possession of any of the pieces, Delgado's second curse will fall."

"You didn't tell us about a second curse." Bella searched his dark eyes. Nothing but open honesty shone back at her.

"I just read it." He slowly closed the chest and ran his fingers over the words engraved along the edges. "Truth of heart has its reward. A heart denied beats no more."

Trevor drew his hand back and Bella sat still. Denial was her survival mechanism. And now it might kill her?

Jose reached into the chest and pulled out a hand overflowing with loot. He lifted out a thick ring, dark with tarnish and slid it on his finger. Fear gripped Bella.

“What have you done?” she asked.

“I’ve bound myself to truth or death.” He sat back. “This island is where I belong. Where we all belong, free to be who we are. I’ve been playing with an idea. We could open this place up to other people.”

“Develop it?” Trevor growled.

Jose shook his head. “Maybe another cabin or two, but no condos, no strip malls. Just a place other people can come and find what’s inside them. Stay with me. Both of you. Let’s stay here.” He caught Bella’s eye. “J.P.’s just a boat ride away. We can both visit him.” He turned back to Trevor. “The horses would love it here.”

“You want to share the island?” Bella asked.

“I want to share everything.” He nodded toward the treasure. “If you want something, it’s yours. Just heed the warning.”

She hesitated. Could she be true to her heart?

“But the land will still legally be yours?” Trevor asked. “Provided we can get back to the mainland in time to buy it.”

Jose shook his head. “Ours. Equal shares, never to be separated. If one of us wants out, the other two divide that share.”

Bella swallowed hard. “I can’t afford two square feet of it. Every dime I have goes to J.P.”

“You don’t need money, Bella.” His eyes softened. “Everything you’ll ever need is right here. J.P. will be cared for. But what about you? Are you ready to take care of yourself?”

Trevor reached for her hand. “Don’t do anything you don’t want to do,” he told her.

Jose nodded. “If you choose to stay here and this island is not in your heart, you will die.”

A rustle in the grass sent a shiver down her spine. She didn’t have to turn around to know the snake was there, only a few feet away. She didn’t fear the serpent. She feared the truth. Her heart wanted to be

free. She would never shirk her responsibility to J.P. but she wanted more. So much more.

"What if we don't get back in time to buy this place?" Trevor asked.

Jose twisted the ring on his finger. "We already own it."

Bella's heart pumped. "That's not possible."

"The treasure has curses and the island does too. To own Lovers Island, one must love. I bought it," Jose said. "I already carry the curse. If I had taken possession of the island without finding you, Bella," he turned to Trevor, "and you. I would die too. Just like my father."

"Your father?"

"He inherited the island, but refused to honor his responsibility. He never wanted to live here. He died the day the deed transferred."

"So you didn't have to buy the island. It was already yours." Trevor said.

Jose shook his head. "It went to my father's trust and sat there until I was ready. Then I purchased it from the trust."

"What if we don't stay here?" Bella asked.

Jose twisted the ring again. "I die."

"Why? You're planning to stay here."

"We're in this together now. I shared the treasure with you. Our souls are linked. What happens to one, happens to all."

Trevor fisted his hands. "You mean, if all this isn't bullshit, you just trapped us on this island forever?"

Jose shook his head. "No. You don't have to stay here. Unless you accept your share of the island, you're only bound to the curse on the treasure. You're bound to guard it. If you take something from the chest, you have to be true to yourself. Living on the island and sharing the magic with other people is just an idea. If your heart is elsewhere, follow it."

"How long do we have to decide?" Bella asked.

“Until the contract is sealed and the land legally falls into my hands.”

The whirl of a boat motor broke through the soft hush of the breeze. Bella’s heart pounded. “Someone’s here!”

Trevor jumped to his feet, but stopped. His gaze fell on Bella and his jaw tightened. “I don’t do relationships,” he said.

She nodded. “I know.”

He glanced at Jose quickly before heading off toward the beach and the sound of rescue.

“What about you, Bella?”

She swallowed hard. “I love you both.” She reached into the treasure and lifted out a simple necklace, a feminine version of the medallion Jose already wore around his neck. “I’d rather die here with you, than live without either of you.”

## **Chapter Twenty-Six**

Returning to the island felt like coming home. After only two days on the mainland, Bella had started craving the salty air, the sweet, magical scent that clung to the breeze and both her men.

At the bow of the boat, Jose stood next to her, his arm draped around her waist. He had set up an account to financially care for J.P. after they passed away, and he had spent a day at his old friend's side doing what he should've done a long time ago.

Bella couldn't hold the past against him. Mistakes are made. People learn. Good people make amends when they can. Jose was a good person, and she didn't regret for a moment choosing him over the lackluster existence she had before they met.

The captain guided the boat close to shore, and Jose jumped into the calf-deep water first. He held his hand out to help her down.

The captain passed down their bags, two small duffels with only a few changes of clothes. What else did they need? The island had it all. And it was only a matter of time before the curse killed them anyway.

To be true to her heart, Bella needed both the men she loved. Trevor had chosen not to take the treasure. He wasn't in the curse's debt. He could deny his heart for a long time to come.

Bella waded ashore. The warm sand pulled at her ankles as she and Jose made their way between the dunes toward the cabin.

An unexpected sound shot through the air, startling them both. Bella saw the horses and her mouth spread into a grin. "He's here!"

A horse whinnied again and Trevor stepped out of the garden. The shade of an old Stetson hid his handsome face, but nothing could have hidden his smile.

Bella ran to him. His big arms wrapped around her in a crushing embrace and his hungry lips devoured her mouth. Jose's hand curled around the back of her neck and her heart swelled. She pulled away from the kiss slowly and sank against Trevor's chest. Jose pressed a kiss to her cheek, then met Trevor's masculine lips with his own. Their kiss was explosive, shooting through Bella like lightning. Not a single thing in her life was missing.

The wispy grass and sea oats rustled and out of the corner of her eye she saw the familiar pattern of Monty Delgado's skin. The large snake moved slowly, encircling them until his broad head touched his narrow tail. Surrounded by what had once been her biggest fear, Bella had never felt more at peace or more free in her life.

She looked up at Trevor, unable to contain the smile on her face. "I thought you didn't do relationships."

"I didn't." One broad hand clasped her ass and the other gripped Jose's hip. A familiar medallion hung against his bare chest. He had taken Delgado's treasure. "I couldn't surrender the booty." His smile softened. "And I couldn't stop loving you."

# THE END

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Carmie L'Rae is an erotic author who has published several books under other names. She has become hard to pin down over the years, relishing her privacy. If you like erotica so hot flames leap from the pages, you'll love Carmie's work.





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