

A.O.E.M.: Sea God's Pleasure
Alice Gaines

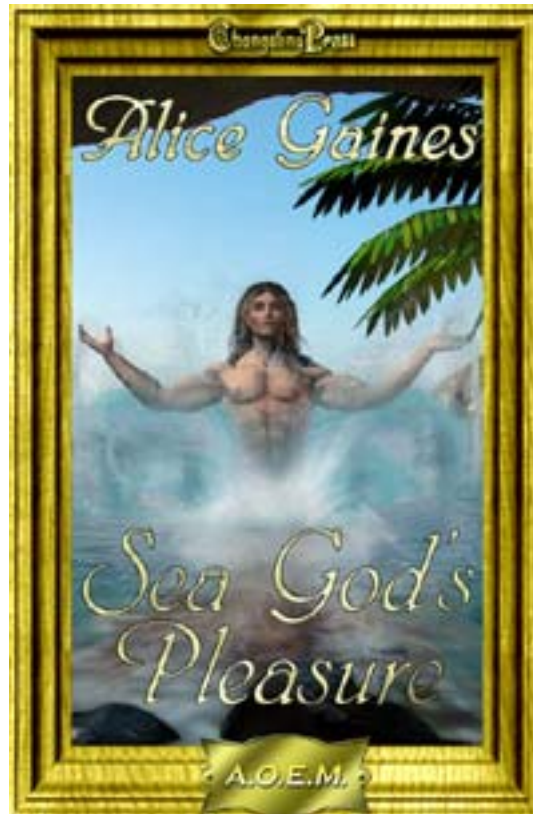
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Editor: *Carolyn Robinson*
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Chapter One

The painting had grown a phallus. DeLande's *The Sea God's Pleasure* sported a hard-on that hadn't been there the day before. A really big one. In all her years running the Hollowel Museum of Art, Gloria VanSant had never seen anything like it. Damage from shipping, forgeries, even intentional destruction by delusional art "lovers," yes. Paintings growing body parts, never. After earning a bachelor's degree in art history, an MFA, and almost a decade at the Hollowel, Gloria could spot a fake. If she was any judge -- and she sure as hell was -- DeLande had painted this huge cock with loving strokes of his brush over one hundred years before. So, why hadn't it been there yesterday?

"Gloria?" said a female voice. Tiffany, the latest upstart the agency had sent over with glowing recommendations.

With a huge show coming up and one of the most important pieces still missing, she didn't have time for crap today. "What?"

Tiff gave her the usual *didn't-you-hear-me?* look. "I talked to Overnight Express. They're bogged down at O'Hare and can't get Samuel's *Orpheus* to us today."

"Oh, for Christ's sake. I'm surrounded by morons. Call them back and tell them to get it here, or I'll sue their asses."

"There's a blizzard covering half of the Midwest. No one's flying in or out of Chicago."

"I didn't ask for a weather report. I want my damned painting."

Tiff crossed her arms over her chest. "When did you get to sleep last night?"

Great. Tiff had gone from upstart to nosey upstart. "I don't report to you."

"You didn't get to sleep, did you? When did you last eat?"

"Eating's over-rated."

"Gloria, you're going to kill yourself."

"Is that any of your damned business?"

Tiff held her hands up in surrender. "Sorry for breathing."

"Find a messenger service and have them send a truck for *Orpheus*."

"To Chicago in the middle of a blizzard? That'd take a week."

Add snippy to nosey and upstart. "Get a military plane to go for it."

"Really, Gloria, listen to yourself."

Gloria glowered at her. That glower had been known to send employees scurrying under their desks. Tiff just stared back at her. "All right," Tiff said finally.

"Who should I call? The Department of Defense or the Air Force?"

"I don't care. Just call someone."

"Right. I'll come back when you're feeling a bit more rational."

Tiff turned to go, but Gloria yanked her back. "Look at this painting."

Tiff pointed at the *Sea God*. "This one?"

Of all the... "Yes, this one."

Tiff stared at it for a while and then shrugged. "It's a good example of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, if you like that style."

"Do you see anything odd about it?"

Shrugging, Tiff gave it a closer look for several seconds. "Nope. Do you?"

"You saw it when it got here yesterday. Did it have a phallus?"

"It's a nude. The guy would look pretty deformed without one."

"But was it that... um... big yesterday?"

Tiff gave her an odd look before staring so hard at the god in the painting her nose almost pressed against his erection. "You call that big?"

"You don't?"

Tiff shrugged again. "It's bigger than when most guys come out of the water, I guess."

"You have to be kidding. It's enormous."

Tiff snorted. "If you think *that's* enormous, you need to get laid more often."

"Gee, thanks."

"You're the one who brought up erections."

"You really don't see a huge cock?"

"Gloria, do yourself a favor and reacquaint yourself with a real penis."

"Smart ass."

Tiff turned and walked away. Gloria really ought to fire the little twerp, but she'd been through six administrative assistants in four months, and the hiring process wreaked havoc with everyone's schedule. Instead, she'd file that away in the "needs improvement" section of Tiffany's next performance review.

She turned back to the painting. She'd admired this work in the catalogue for years. Most people in her profession didn't think much of the Pre-Raphaelites, but Gloria had always been a sucker for the lush colors and dynamic use of light. Realism had fallen out of style long ago, but in the hands of a master like DeLande, the almost excessive use of detail transcended mere reality.

The subject of this painting had always held great appeal for her, too. As a lifetime city-dweller, she'd only dreamed of lush, tropical seascapes. The beach where the god emerged was pure white sand, surrounded by jungles full of flowers and birds of paradise. Behind him lay a sun-washed sky and an ocean so clear as to be transparent.

The man captured her attention, though, despite the beauty of the surroundings. The Sea God didn't appear young but rather a male in his prime. This was a man who'd lived long enough to dominate everything and everyone around him with his mere physical presence. His longish hair had some gray in it, but every aspect of his body possessed an easy kind of power. Broad shoulders, massive chest narrowing to slim hips, and muscled legs. Most impressive of all, right in the center stood that amazing rod. Gloria had had a few men in her day, but she'd never experienced a cock like that inside her.

Well, shit, maybe Tiff was right and she'd just gotten horny from a lack of a good fucking. No matter where she looked in Manhattan, she wasn't likely to find a partner

like the Sea God, so she might as well forget about it. A painting needed rescuing from O'Hare, and she might as well get to it.

* * *

Back in her office, Gloria sank into the chair behind her desk and rifled through the drawers, looking for the catalogue with the reproduction of the Sea God painting. Memos, faxes, bills of lading, various drafts of the contributors' letter, pens without tops, yellow-lined pads with scrawling all over them, loose paperclips, and bottles of dried up correction fluid. Even the spike-heeled shoes she slipped into during visits from corporate bigwigs. Everything but the catalogue she wanted. In the bottom drawer, she found a box of over-the-counter pep pills. She popped two into her mouth then swallowed them without water.

Her chair squeaked when she swiveled to the credenza behind her. Plenty of art books and catalogues there, but not the one she wanted.

"Richard!" she bellowed.

In a moment, her chief assistant showed up at the open door of the office. "What do you need, love?"

"Where's my goddamn catalogue?"

"Which catalogue?"

"We're doing a Pre-Raphaelite show, and I need the Pre-Raphaelite catalogue. Isn't that obvious?"

He lounged against the doorjamb. "*Someone's* in a bad mood, I see."

"I've told you guys not to lose my things. How'm I supposed to run a museum if you two come into my office and lose my things?"

"No one's been in your office, Gloria. You need to calm down."

Easy for him to say. He hadn't gone to the endless fundraising dinner the night before and choked down two swallows of rubber chicken before giving up and finding an unguarded bottle of champagne -- bad champagne at that. He hadn't come back here at midnight to check the inventory for the show that was supposed to start in two days, only to discover that *Orpheus* was AWOL. He hadn't fallen asleep with his head on his

desk, woken up with a wicked kink in his neck, and then gone out onto the floor to find a huge erection on one of the most important paintings in the show.

She put her face into her hands and rubbed her eyes. What would the stuffy contingent among the patrons say when they got a load of the god's boner? Oh gawd, Mrs. Franklin Homersby would have a cow. Gloria had only recently convinced the old bat that penises were acceptable in paintings as long as they were flaccid. The woman would have a coronary when she saw the DeLande painting. There went twenty grand out of next year's budget.

"Get me a cigarette, would you?" she said.

"You gave them up last month, remember?"

"I changed my mind."

"Oh, no. This time I'm holding you to it."

"Damn."

Richard walked to the chair across the desk and sat down. "Rough night, huh?"

She lifted her head and looked at him. "I don't know why I put up with this crap."

"Honey, you create crap. You thrive on it."

"I'm getting too old."

"Tell Auntie Richard what's wrong."

"The DeLande painting. I've wanted to get my hands on it for years."

"The *Sea God*?"

"Have you looked at it yet?"

"Haven't had time."

"Make time. It isn't just the central figure of the god. It's the world he lives in. The ocean, the sand, the jungle. The whole place is magic." Like the stories her parents had told her of Hawaii but hadn't been able to show her for real. "I know it's passé to love realism in this day and age, but I swear, I can feel the breeze on my skin when I look at that painting. I can smell the flowers and hear the surf."

Richard's brows went up in concern. "Is there anything wrong with the painting?"

"It's grown a phallus."

His eyes got wide. "Do tell."

"A great, big, erect cock. The thing's almost pornographic."

"Ooooh. I need to look at that."

"This isn't a joke."

"Believe me, honey, I don't take great, big, erect cocks lightly."

"Damn it. I can't have pornography in my show," she wailed.

He reached across the desk and patted her hand. "Okay, what do you want me to do?"

"Find that catalogue. If the god has a huge boner in that, I'll brazen out the criticism."

"And what if it doesn't?"

"Then we have a case of vandalism and not only can't I use the painting in the show, I have to get the insurance company to pay for some expensive repairs."

"I see the problem."

"Thank you."

Tiffany appeared at the doorway with a bunch of papers in her hand. "Mail."

"I thought nothing was getting through," Gloria said.

"Neither rain nor snow nor dark of night," Tiff recited.

"Great, now she's a poet."

Tiff held out the mail. "You need to look at this."

"Not now. I have other things to worry about."

Tiff walked to the desk and plunked one piece of paper down in the middle. "Read this. Now."

Gloria tried glowering at her again, but again, it had no effect. If anything, Tiff glowered back. So, Gloria picked up the paper, tilted back in her swivel chair, and read.

"Congratulations, Gloria VanSant. You've won an all-expenses-paid week on beautiful Chimera Island."

Gloria looked up at Tiff. "What in hell is this?"

"Just read."

Located in the geographical center of the Bermuda Triangle, Chimera Island offers both mystery and natural beauty beyond compare. Only the most adventurous traveler is welcome on Chimera, and we've determined that's you, Gloria VanSant. Absolutely no obligation, but you must book now. Call 1-800-555-4AEM or visit www.margaretriley.com/aoem.html today, to book your fantasy trip of a lifetime!

Margaret Riley, CEO

"Why are you bothering me with this? It's a goddamn time-share."

"No, it isn't. I called. It's totally on the level."

"Come on. How gullible can you be?"

"They told me it was an exclusive resort -- by invitation only. An anonymous sponsor has arranged for you to spend a whole week there."

Gloria set the letter back on her desk. "Thanks. I'll think about it."

"No, you won't. You're leaving tomorrow. I've arranged it all."

"You did what?"

"Your plane leaves in the morning."

"What in hell is wrong with you? Call them back and cancel."

"I've cleared your calendar for the next week. Everyone sends their best wishes for your aunt's complete recovery."

"I don't have an aunt!"

"Easy, love," Richard said. "Maybe Tiff's on to something here."

"She's on drugs if she thinks I'm leaving town before a huge show."

"I can take care of the show," Richard said. "You've done almost everything. I'll check into the problem with the DeLande painting and hang *Orpheus* when he gets here. Everything else will take care of itself."

"I'll pitch in and work the whole show, no overtime," Tiff said. "You need to do this, Gloria."

"No. The two of you are nuts."

Richard crossed his arms over his chest, giving her his best schoolmarm look. "I didn't want to do this, but if I have to, I will. Either take that vacation, or I quit."

Her jaw dropped as she stared at her chief assistant. "You wouldn't."

"Try me."

"You love the Hollowel," she said. "You wouldn't leave."

"I love you more, Gloria. I'm not going to stick around and watch you kill yourself."

"I don't believe this."

"You were just telling me about the magic in that picture. Go and find your own magic, honey. Everything will be here when you get back."

What could she do? She couldn't operate this museum without Richard. Hell, she didn't *want* to operate it without him. He'd been with her since the beginning. Then, too, maybe -- just maybe -- she could find the island she'd always dreamed of on this Chimera.

"Okay," she said finally. "But there'll be hell to pay if everything isn't perfect when I get back."

The two of them grinned at her.

* * *

The minute Gloria got through the door into her cabin, she found the telephone and punched the "0."

"Front desk, how may I help you?" a male voice said.

"This is Gloria VanSant in..." She checked her room key. "Cabin six."

"Ah yes," the man at the other end said. "I hope it's to your liking."

"There must be some mistake. I don't belong here."

"Your reservation starts today."

"I know, but I don't belong here, out in the middle of nowhere." She'd wanted a tropical island, sure, but something like Hawaii where she could wallow in nature for a while before going out for drinks. As far as she could tell from the helicopter, the only building on the whole place was the tiny cabin she stood in right now.

"Cabin six is on the most beautiful islet in the Chimera archipelago."

"Listen, pal. I don't belong on an archipelago. I'm supposed to be on Chimera." The city she'd seen from the plane wasn't much, but it did appear to have a few restaurants and a club. She might get through a week there. Out here with no one but the palm trees to talk to, she'd go stark raving mad in a couple of days.

"Technically, that island is Chimera," the man said. "If you consult a map..."

"I'm not interested in any damned maps. I want a room in a hotel near the closest thing you have to a shopping district, got me?"

"You'd like to change your accommodations," he said as if he'd never heard of anything like that before.

"Yes, mental genius. Yes, I want to change my accommodations."

"I'm afraid that's quite impossible," he answered as if that settled everything.

"The customer's always right, right?"

"Oh, absolutely. But you see, you're not the customer. Your sponsor specifically directed us to put you in an isolated location."

"All right." She took a breath. "Who's my sponsor?"

"I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to say."

"Let me get this right. Someone paid you a lot of money for me to spend a week here."

"Chimera's an exclusive resort, Miss VanSant. We don't offer cut-rate vacations."

"And that person has told you to stick me out here."

"Correct."

"But, you won't tell me who the sponsor is."

"I can't tell you," he corrected.

"All right. Let me talk to the manager."

"I am the manager."

Oh, great. She sank into a chair. "I'm going to contact the Better Business Bureau."

"We don't have such an organization. Everyone's satisfied on Chimera Island."

"I'm not satisfied," she shouted. "I'm very dissatisfied."

"I'm sorry to hear that," he answered.

"Get me another room, stupid, on the main island!"

"There aren't any."

"You didn't look."

"I didn't have to. I'm the manager."

"All right," she said. "I realize that not all islands are run like Manhattan Island, so I'm going to explain it to you in simple words."

"Please."

"I'm not staying on this little fart in the ocean."

"But your sponsor..."

"I don't give a shit about my sponsor." Whoever the hell he was. "I want you to find me a room on the main island. Put me on a waiting list, if you have to."

"But..."

"Twenty-four hours, pal." She looked at her watch. "You have until three pm tomorrow or I'm tail lights."

"Very well, Miss VanSant, I'll consult your sponsor," he said.

"You do that."

"Is there anything else I can do for you this afternoon?"

"Yes, there is. Get stuffed!"

* * *

Gloria woke with the afternoon sun in her eyes and her bladder full. She glanced at her watch -- 2:30. She must have misread it before when she told the manager-bot it was 3:00. That idiot had made her so crazy she'd forget her own name.

She rose from the bed and padded barefoot into the bathroom. After using the toilet, she brushed her teeth. She'd only slept for half an hour, but somehow her mouth felt like fuzzy slippers. Teeth cleaned, she spiked up her hair as best she could. She'd have to find her mousse to get it right.

Her stomach rumbled. When had she last eaten? Not on the plane, that was for damned sure. Not even in first class could you find anything worth feeding to a pet gerbil. Unless the management here expected her to climb palm trees for coconuts, they had to have some kind of room service. Cabin service? Island service? For Christ's sake, how long would it take them to get something out here for her to eat?

She headed toward the phone, going by the cabin door. A smell stopped her there. Fruit. Exotic, ripe fruit. Fruit so delicious the scent went right into her head and to her brain.

She opened the door and found a tray on the stoop. Metal lids covered each dish, but the perfume of fruit escaped into the air.

She bent and picked up the tray. As well as the dishes, it held a carafe of iced tea and a newspaper. She carried the whole thing into the cabin, kicked the door closed behind her, and walked to the table. By the time she sat, her mouth had already started to water. Under the lids lay a dish with cold meats, a selection of cheeses, and a baguette with butter. A bowl held slices of melon, pineapple, and strawberries. She poured herself a glass of iced tea and tore into the food.

The ham and turkey breast were lightly smoked, the cheese tangy, and the bread a crusty dream. She'd never eaten anything so delicious in her life. After just a minute, she'd eaten the whole thing. Fruit next. Juices ran down her arm as she ate all of that too. How did they get so much flavor into the food here? Steroids? Pheromones? All the food gone, she pushed the plates aside, picked up the newspaper, and rested back in the chair to read it.

The *New York Times*, international edition. Perfect. On the culture page, the headline read "Pre-Raphaelite show opens today at the Hollowel." How could that be? The show didn't start until tomorrow.

She checked the dateline -- tomorrow's date. What the hell? The date across the front page said the same thing -- tomorrow. So did the date function on her watch. Today was tomorrow. Time had warped somehow. Either that, or she'd slept for an entire day.

Could she have slept that long? That would explain the full bladder, the cottony mouth, and the fact that she appeared to have woken up half an hour before she'd fallen asleep. After years of too little sleep, she was used to functioning on an hour or two. She never slept for twenty-four hours. For the first time in ages, she felt completely rested.

This was getting too fucking weird.

She got up, walked to the door, and opened it to look outside.

Whoa. There was a whole lot more than just time weirdness going on. She'd somehow missed it the day before -- probably because she'd been so cheesed at being dumped in the middle of nowhere -- but the view from the cabin was the same as the seascape from the DeLande painting. The same white sand and transparent water. The same lush jungle with colorful flowers.

She stepped out of her cabin into the Twilight Zone and walked along the path, down to the beach. Warm sand shifted under her feet as she walked to the water's edge, and a light breeze ruffled the hairs on her arms.

As she watched, a disturbance appeared between the waves. Sort of a lump that rose under the water. It crested after a moment to reveal a person. A man walking straight out of the water as though he'd walked there along the ocean bottom. Broad shoulders, a massive chest. Un-freaking-believable. The Sea God, the man from the painting. She rubbed her eyes, but when she lowered her hands, the image was still there, standing in water that just reached his calves. Sure enough, he sported the same huge hard-on he had in the painting.

Her jaw dropped as she stood there staring at his cock. She ought to scream. She ought to run back into the cabin, throw the lock, and call security to report a lunatic on her island. A lunatic with an enormous boner. But no force on earth could get her feet to

move. The sand might have turned into concrete for all the chance she had of walking in it.

“Who...” The word came out as a croak, so she swallowed and tried again. “Who in hell are you?”

The man put his hands on his hips and smiled at her. “I’m your sponsor.”

Chapter Two

"You're my sponsor?" Great, now she was squeaking. "But, you're..."

He lifted a shaggy eyebrow. "Yes?"

"You're naked."

"Naked and aroused. I thought we'd mate first and talk later."

Mate. She'd marveled at the size of his member when she'd seen it in the painting. At the time, she'd never imagined she could actually experience taking pleasure with it. In the back of her brain, images exploded. Indistinct and lacking in details, but powerfully erotic. Hands on her breasts. Her body riding on waves while the water massaged her clit. A huge phallus entering her.

She closed her eyes and rubbed her forehead. "I dreamed those. While I was asleep."

"You got my messages."

She opened her eyes again. "You put those dreams into my mind?"

"Promises of what I'd do to you. Images to excite you. Did they work?"

Too well. Gloria's cunt clenched as a surge of energy washed through her. All her breath went out of her, and her knees went weak. She hadn't had a man for months. Hadn't wanted one or missed sex. This man asked to mate with her. He could take that cock and do everything she'd dreamed of the night before. He could give her orgasms strong enough to tear her from reality. Weeks and weeks of doing without, and now she could indulge her senses.

"I'll take that as a yes," he said.

"Yes?"

"The images did excite you."

"Look, I don't know who you are or how you got here, but I don't jump into bed with strangers."

That wasn't exactly true, but it sounded good. She hadn't jumped into bed with anyone for an age, but she could sure do it now with this man and the erection she'd seen in her dreams. Maybe they really did put pheromones in the food, because her cunt was already moist and ready for him.

"I don't plan on taking you to bed," he said.

"You don't?"

"Bed's too far. I'm going to make love to you right on this beach."

"Won't that scare the fish?"

"I hope so."

The man walked toward her slowly, as if she might bolt at any minute. Any sane person would. Most women never encountered a naked man walking up and out of the sea as though his cock was some kind of homing device zeroing in on her. Most women would have run away minutes ago. But, damn it all, she'd dreamed about that cock the night before, and it had driven her wild. Now that she could have it, she sure as hell would.

He stopped a few feet from her and gestured with his hand. Her clothes fell away. The seams split, and the fabric of her dress and half-slip slid along her body to fall at her feet. Her bra and panties dissolved, leaving her completely naked. The sun beat down on her shoulders and breasts. The breeze caressed her skin, and her nipples hardened into peaks.

"How did you do that?" she demanded.

He smiled at her. "It's not important."

"How did you come out of the ocean like that? Where's your scuba gear?"

His eyebrows went up. "Scuba?"

"Self-contained something or other."

He made another gesture with his hands, and a large blanket appeared on the sand. "Will that do for a bed?"

This was all getting too strange. She picked up a corner of the blanket. It seemed real enough.

"A few cushions, perhaps?" he said, and some of those materialized on the blanket. "I don't care, really. I just don't want sand in awkward places."

She skirted around their "bed," holding out her hands to ward him off. "Maybe you ought to rethink this. I mean, I don't know you, and you don't know me. I might have a disease."

"But you don't."

"How do you know?"

He walked around the blanket toward her, but she countered his move.

"I know everything about you, Gloria."

"How?"

"I'm your mate."

She stopped and stared at him. "You're nuts."

"Not at all. I've researched a lot of women, and you're the one."

He moved toward her again, his arms extended, but she danced away.

"I know everything about you," he said. "I know your hair is really red, not black. I know you cry at sad movies. Most important, I know you're so hot right now, you're ready to come."

Damn, he was right. He frightened her, and she wanted him. He might be a lunatic, but she was going to screw him. Right here on this blanket on the beach.

"You've been staring at my cock ever since I walked out of the water. Admit it."

"I could hardly miss it," she answered.

"It's all yours. Every way you want it."

Her mouth went dry, and her breath caught. She had to have a raging case of hormones. She'd wanted his cock since it showed up in the painting, to be totally honest. Now, she could have it, so why was she playing musical chairs with him?

Her hesitation gave him enough time to lunge across the blanket and grab her. He picked her up as though she weighed no more than kindling, let out a whoop, and

twirled her around. Images blurred -- sky followed by ocean followed by jungle and then back to sky. Her skin rubbed against him, and her nipples grazed his chest. He was so incredibly strong she ought to be afraid. She ought to scream and kick and bite. Her heart raced and her pulse pounded, but fear didn't cause any of that. She wanted this man. She wanted him to toss her onto the blanket and plow into her until she climaxed.

He did drop her onto their "bed" and came down right on top of her like an avalanche of flesh. Oddly enough, he didn't crush her, but he did cover her, his body swallowing hers up.

He kissed her then. His mouth descended to hers and caught her lips in a searing caress. She slid her arms around his neck and answered with her own mouth. Their tongues met and sparred while his hands roamed over her ribs. She twisted her hips and rolled him onto his back. He'd let her do that, of course, but damn -- what a feeling of power it gave her to command his body that way. She sat up and ran her hands all over his chest. His chest hairs felt like silk under her palms.

He grinned and cupped her breasts with his huge hands, massaging and squeezing them. The sensitive flesh ached and tingled, and she gasped with the pleasure. Tipping her head back, she closed her eyes while she made her hands into fists, clutching his chest hair.

"More, damn it," she said. "More, more."

He raised his head to take one nipple into his mouth. While he sucked, she whimpered and pressed herself against his face. Her cunt throbbed and grew wetter. The sensations were even more powerful than her dreams. Impossible, but true. Nothing in her life had ever felt like this, and soon he'd enter her, making the pleasure even more intense.

She squirmed against him, moving lower on his body until her buttocks encountered the hard length of his erection. While he moved to tease her other breast, she reached behind her and grasped his cock. It felt like sun-heated velvet under her palm. She grasped it and stroked it, rubbing it over her buttocks.

He growled and rolled them over. "You want me."

"Yes."

"How much?"

She pounded on his shoulder with her fist. "I want you. Fuck me."

"How much?"

"Damn you, fuck me."

He parted her legs with his hand and thrust a finger deep inside her. "How much?"

She arched her back and moaned. "Please, please. Fuck me."

He slid a second finger into her and moved them in and out. Moisture spread over her inner thighs as he pumped her. She was aching, burning, ready to burst out of her skin.

"How much do you want my cock?" he said.

"Fuck me. Please, please. I'm begging you."

He removed his hand, placed himself between her legs, and plunged his massive member into her. She cried out and wrapped her legs around him, lifting her hips to embed him as deep inside her as he could go.

"Woman," he said. "You're tight."

"You're huge," she answered. "Don't stop."

"Damn, it feels good." He moved in and out of her in long, hard strokes. She kept pace with him, straining upward, taking him over and over. This was hotter than any dream, more erotic than any fantasy. Urgent, dangerous, irresistible. She floated on a sea of lust while he touched her every nerve. Her spirit soared, just moments away from orgasm.

"Come for me, mate. Give yourself to me."

"Yes!" The climax hit with the force of a hurricane. It stole her breath and stopped her heart as she flew into little pieces. Her sex exploded in one spasm after another. She shrieked, riding the storm until the climax finally ended.

Overhead, birds took flight on flapping wings, some crying with alarm. She lay spent on the blanket and would have laughed if she'd had the energy. They hadn't scared the fish, but they'd done a number on the birds.

The man rested his head next to hers and chuckled. "You sure can come, mate."

"I've never done it quite like that before."

"Enjoying your vacation?"

"Mmmm."

He withdrew a few inches and then surged forward again.

She opened her eyes and looked into his face. "You're still hard?"

He grinned at her. "I'm not through with you yet."

Oh. My. God. He hadn't finished? He wanted to give her more? If she hadn't been lying down, she would have fallen over.

"You do plan to come at some point, don't you?" she asked.

"I'm going to erupt like Vesuvius."

"I'd like to see that." Watching a massive cock like his spew had to be an experience.

"You will, later. Right now, I think you need another orgasm."

Her throat went dry, but her pussy sure didn't. He moved inside her, and she felt the hunger growing again. Amazing.

"A different way this time, I think." He pulled out of her and rolled off. The ocean breeze washed over her sweat-slicked body while the sun bathed her in warmth.

"Kneel here and look out to sea," he said.

"What are you going to do?"

"Nothing exotic. Unless you want me to."

"Regular will do." She smiled. "For now."

He laughed and sat up. She scrambled to her knees and looked out over the ocean as he'd told her. He positioned himself behind her, doggie-style, and slid the tip of his sex into her.

"Mmmm," she crooned. "That feels so good."

"Want more?"

"Please."

He pushed forward, giving her another few inches. She took him easily. Despite his size, she'd grown that slick. She rocked back against him, taking more of his cock inside her. He moaned and surged forward, filling her.

She breathed in sea air and listened to the surf as he thrust into her from behind. He set a rhythm that resonated with the waves on the shore. Powerful and inevitable. Her breasts hung free, swinging as she met his thrusts with backward movements of her own. Though not as frantic as their first coupling, this seemed just as intimate. She could feel every inch of him, sense his trembling as his own passion built. The universe centered where they were joined with his cock deep inside her sensitized cunt. She whimpered as liquid heat pooled in her belly to signal another orgasm. He'd driven her that close again.

He bent and reached around her waist, seeking her pussy with his fingers. When he found it, he parted the lips to tease her clit. She shuddered and moaned with the intensity of the caress. He kept doing that while his cock kept plundering her. The combination went so far beyond anything she'd ever experienced she could scarcely breathe. Tension coiled in her belly, tightening until it was almost unbearable. She was going to come, with him pounding into her. She was going to dissolve into mindless orgasm.

He thrust deeper and rubbed harder. She gasped, crying out as her pussy spasmed around his member. The climax lasted forever, rocking her to her core, and still, he thrust into her.

After a moment, he grasped her hips and pulled her hard against him while he pounded into her a few more times. Massive, violent surges. He let out a roar and buried himself in her to the hilt as he came. Finally, he fell to his side on the blanket and pulled her against him, her back to his chest.

"I was right," he murmured after a moment.

"About what?"

"You're the one."

"The one what?"

"My mate."

She rolled over and looked into his face. "You said that before. What's it supposed to mean?"

"What it sounds like. I'm going to spend the rest of eternity with you."

"I'm here for a week, pal." Six more days, actually, as she'd already slept one day away. "This was good. We can do it again if you want."

"Good?" he said. "It was a lot more than good."

"All right, it was fantastic, but after a week, I'm heading back to New York."

"But, I don't want to live in New York."

"Did anyone invite you to?"

He stroked a finger down her nose. "Mates live together, mate."

She pulled away and sat up. "Stop calling me that."

"What should I call you?"

"My name, maybe?"

He stretched out on his back and put his hands behind his head. "Gloria."

"How do you know that, anyway?"

"I know everything about you."

"So you said."

"You were born in Wharton's Bend, Idaho, and graduated first in your class of thirty-seven students. You can't stand caviar, and your hair is really red and curly."

"Who wants to eat fish eggs?"

"Why do you do that to your hair, anyway? Black doesn't go with your skin, and it sticks out all over the place."

She reached up and touched her hair. "You think?"

He smiled and shrugged.

Wait a minute. She didn't have to listen to his critique of her appearance. He'd walked out of the ocean and given her a good shtupping, but he didn't own her.

"Who are you, anyway?" she said. "And don't tell me you're my mate again."

"I've had a lot of different names over the years. You'd only recognize a few of them."

"Try me."

"The Greeks called me Poseidon, the Maya call me a *chac*. The fellow who did the portrait of me you liked so much called me the Sea God."

"Did you doctor that painting?" she asked.

"I might have." His grin grew outright smug. "I didn't lie about my dimensions, though, did I?"

"You almost gave me a nervous breakdown."

"I had to get your attention, ma... Gloria."

"How did you do that? How did you do all of this?" She gestured all around her.

"Who the hell *are* you?"

"Better to ask *what* I am."

"All right, what are you?"

"I'm the sea. I'm the origin of all life. I'm the element water. You've heard of earth, wind, fire, and water. I'm water."

She gaped at him. The man was certifiable. Bonkers. One inkblot short of a Rorschach deck. And she was sitting here talking to him.

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Water," she said. "And thanks for the roll in the hay."

"Sand," he corrected.

"But I have to go. Now that you've destroyed my clothes, I'd better unpack and find something else to put on."

"Good idea. You wouldn't want to burn that redheaded skin. I'll wait here."

"You don't understand. I'm going to go into my cabin and call security to tell them there's a maniac on my island."

"It won't do you any good."

"We'll see." She got up and walked off with as much dignity as she could muster, given that she was naked and had just let the man fuck her out of her mind.

"Yes, we will," he called after her. "We certainly will."

* * *

Quarian could have saved his time reading those self-help books. Women obviously didn't want truth and honesty any more than they used to. He should have tried seduction instead of directly telling Gloria VanSant who he was. Bless Creation, women still loved sex as much as they ever had.

No matter. He had most of a week to convince her she belonged with him for eternity. Unfortunately, she'd gone back into her cabin hours ago and hadn't stuck her nose outside since. Would she really stay in there the whole time while a paradise waited for her out here? A paradise and him.

He'd chosen her specifically for her spirit, of course. A docile female could make for a pleasant dalliance, but eternity with one would be pure torture. He needed a woman who could stand up to him, challenge him, keep him at the top of his game.

An element only mated once. He could have hundreds or thousands of affairs over the centuries, but when time came to create an eternal partner, he got only one chance to choose correctly.

The sex told him he'd chosen very well, indeed. Granted, some time had passed since the little French aristocrat had proved so amusing. But he knew the difference between mere lust and a strong sexual pull toward one particular woman. Gloria had done more than pull him. She'd drawn him in so completely, she'd owned him. Even now, hours later, he could still feel her sweet cunt milking his cock into an orgasm so strong it had held all the power of the ocean's waves. Right now, his prick was growing stiff under his loincloth. He needed her again. So soon.

He would seduce her this time. The sun would set in another few hours. By then, he'd have a campaign planned to win her heart. Wine, flowers, and music. A fantasy straight out of her own memories and dreams.

Chapter Three

Quarian knocked on the cabin door again and got the same response.

“Get lost.” It didn’t sound nearly as certain as the last time she’d said it, though.

“You wound me to the quick, Miss VanSant.”

Silence. He could almost hear the wheels turning in her head. The concept of wounding someone to the quick probably didn’t come up too often in her everyday life. She’d be even more perplexed when she opened the door.

He adjusted the lace at his throat.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she said, but she sounded curious this time.

“Does our passion mean nothing to you? I give you my soul, and you cast it aside. I live only to please you.”

“Yeah?” She paused. “How?”

“I’ve brought a modest repast. Quails. Wild mushroom. Crème brulee.”

Soft footsteps approached the other side of the door. “Crème brulee?”

“And champagne.”

“You didn’t murder me this afternoon. I guess you won’t do it now.”

“I only seek from you the small death that brings us life. In that way, yes, I’d kill you a dozen times over.”

The lock turned, and the door opened a crack. “Don’t think this means I’m changing...” She took one look at him, and her voice trailed off. “What are you supposed to be?”

“What do you think I am?”

Her eyes widened, and she backed away with her fingers covering her mouth. Clearly, he'd surprised her with his costume. He entered the room, closed the door, and walked to the table. After setting the dinner tray there, he bowed deeply.

"Don Juan," she whispered.

"At your service, miss."

"How did you know?"

"An astute lover knows how to please his lady." Of course, having access to her most intimate desires helped. The Agency of Extraordinary Mates maintained detailed dossiers on all potential mates. Their exclusive clientele would demand nothing less. He had a whole stock of characters to choose from to win the reluctant Miss VanSant. Don Juan had seemed the most potent, and from her reaction, he might have been right about that. Who cared if her ideal Don Juan held little resemblance to the real person? Her image of the famous lover was what mattered.

"Where did you get that costume?" she asked.

He looked down at the scarlet satin coat and breeches. "I'm resourceful."

"You tied your hair in a queue."

"Do you fancy wigs? I could conjure one if you prefer."

"No. You look..." She stopped and stood for a moment, and then a tiny smile curled her lips. "You look wonderful."

"My spirit soars," he said, placing his palm over his chest. "That you would find my poor person acceptable brings me greater pleasure than I can say."

She giggled. "Hokey, but it works."

"Come, let me give you sustenance." He pulled out a chair and waited until she sat. She looked over her shoulder as he pushed the chair back in. He let his fingers drift to her shoulder. She wore a strapless top, leaving plenty of soft skin for him to explore. When he touched her, she shivered slightly. A good sign. With a flourish, he removed the lid to the tray and set it aside before he sat down.

"This smells delicious," she said.

"I aspire to satisfy all your appetites, dear lady." He snapped his fingers, and lighted candles appeared on the table. In the background, the sound of a mandolin played a love serenade.

"I must be out of my mind letting you in here."

"You allowed me into territory far more intimate than your bedchamber this afternoon," he said. "Priapus is most eager to reacquaint himself with Cunny tonight."

"Why, sir, you make me blush."

Wonderful. She'd entered the fantasy. Even better, she gave him a shy smile, and he could almost imagine that she did blush. Don Juan appeared to be making some headway that Quarian couldn't.

He took her hand in his and raised her fingers to his lips. "A blush becomes you. Over your cheeks and down your throat, all the way to the very seat of your desire."

"I fear I'll need some strength to endure that."

"Let me feed you." He picked up a knife and fork to cut a piece of quail. He lifted it to her mouth, and she took it between her lips.

"You feed all my hungers," he said. "Such tiny, perfect teeth. Like pearls. I'd love to wear a garland of them around the tip of my rod."

She giggled. A thoroughly delightful sound and quite the opposite of what anyone would expect from the hard-edged New Yorker who'd confronted him on the beach. He'd read her history, however, and it described a shy young woman who'd had to scratch and claw her way to the top of the art world. She still had a rich fantasy life, obviously -- one that he could use to good advantage in his quest to win her heart.

After setting the fork aside, he picked up a slice of morel. Creation only knew where the AOEM got a fungus that normally grew in the north woods in the United States. He lifted the morsel to her lips, and she took it into her mouth, giving his fingertips a kiss as she did.

Her eyes closed with pleasure as she chewed and swallowed the mushroom. "Everything tastes so good here. How do they do it?"

"This place is more than an island, fair lady. It's a state of mind."

"I confess it's put me in a state." She gave him a coy smile. "But not by engaging my mind."

He opened the champagne. The cork flew out with a loud pop, which she greeted with more laughter. He smiled at her while he poured two glasses and handed one to her. That done, he moved his chair even closer to hers so that they could link their arms together as they drank.

Her lips came away moist with the wine, so he kissed them. She tasted of fruit and honey. Sweet beyond all reason. He'd kissed human females over the centuries -- some better at it than others. All women were beautiful. All women tempted him. All women could beguile his cock. Only this one could own him with a tender kiss. He had, indeed, found his mate.

She pulled back after a moment, her eyes wide. "How do you do that?"

"Do what?"

"You take me right out of myself. I think I can resist you, but my will dissolves whenever you touch me."

Good. She felt the same pull he did. She could no more fight destiny than he could. He only needed to make her see that.

"We're meant for each other, my love," he said.

"Who are you? Really?"

"I've told you. Really."

"Water."

"The most basic element. Life itself."

She rose and walked to the picture window that looked out over the ocean. The candlelight cast a reflection of her in the glass. He made the appropriate gesture with his hand, and a negligee of the finest white lace replaced her top and shorts. The delicate fabric flowed over her shoulders, leaving the tops of her breasts bare, and outlined her form as it fell to the floor.

She gasped.

He walked up behind her and took her in his arms, pulling her back against him. Her buttocks pressed against his crotch and started the chain reaction that would have him fully erect in moments.

"Don't be afraid, love," he whispered into her ear.

"I don't know who you are, or how you can do these things."

"You know everything you need to know about me." He nibbled at her earlobe and then kissed the soft skin below her jaw. Lower and lower he went, all along her neck to the base of her throat. She sighed and grew pliant in his embrace.

"This is the real you, Gloria," he said. "Feminine, romantic. Woman, through and through."

"I can't be. The world won't let me."

"Ah, yes. Your world demands that you have bigger balls than any man, that you deny your loving side. To hell with that world."

"It's the only one I have."

"You love beauty, and yet your world denies it to you. Tell me what your world says about art like the painting of me in your museum."

"It's trite and unimaginative."

"You know better, though, don't you?" He nuzzled his nose against the side of her face. "Your world won't even let you have your own taste in art."

"Modern work is beautiful, too."

"Nonsense. Today, an artist would paint me as a series of little boxes or squiggly lines. Unrecognizable. You want the real thing."

She didn't answer but stood in his arms with her gaze focused on their reflection in the window.

"This is the real you." He raised his hands to cup her breasts, squeezing them gently. "Soft. Giving. Lovely."

She tipped her head back and closed her eyes. "Yes."

"Yes," he repeated. "I need you."

She turned in his arms and tipped her face up to his. "Take me."

He pulled her against him and took her mouth in a kiss. With as much restraint and tenderness as he could muster, he moved his lips over hers slowly. She leaned into him and responded -- at first cautiously and then with more abandon. After a moment, her mouth opened and her tongue grazed the surface of his upper lip. He moaned, answering with his own tongue, taking them deeper while his cock hardened in his breeches.

No woman had ever inflamed him the way this one did. Just a kiss, and she had him throbbing and hungry for coupling.

He bent and picked her up in his arms. She gazed up at him with complete trust in her expression. How far they'd come since the afternoon. Two souls in need of joining recognized each other, no matter how much intellect might try to resist. Tonight, he'd make her his in every sense of the word. His love, his eternal mate. She wouldn't deny him now.

He carried her to the bed and set her on the spread. Lace flowed all around her, and an angelic expression lit her face. He stripped out of his clothes, almost tearing the satin in his haste, and joined her.

He kissed her again, more roughly this time, taking her mouth as a drowning mortal might take air. Her hands moved over his arms and back, creating friction and urging him on. He trailed his tongue along her throat to her collarbone and below. With her chest rising and falling, her breasts seemed to swell as he cupped one and planted kisses over the top of the other. The stiffened nipple poked up into the lace, so he took it between his lips, fabric and all, and sucked.

She drew in a harsh breath and arched her back, pushing her flesh deeper into his mouth. He let his palms wander all over her while he switched to the other breast. He moved his hands over her ribs and along her sides to her hips. As he did, he bunched the lace up in his hands, pulling it upward over her legs and hips. He slid lower, still massaging her. Lower and lower until his face found the mound between her thighs. After pushing the gown upward to her waist, he could gaze on her sex -- his ultimate goal.

"Sweet Cunny," he murmured. "Sweet, sweet Cunny."

"Kiss it, please," she gasped.

He ran his tongue along the folds of her pussy, from the entrance upward to her clit.

She trembled and whimpered. "More, please."

He repeated the caress a few times, each time more firmly. Her hips jerked each time his tongue found her most sensitive spot, so he ran his arms under her thighs to hold her fast against his mouth. Then, he went to work in earnest.

Her clit had hardened into a firm, little nub that he could pull into his mouth. He teased it, sucking and rubbing it with firm strokes of his tongue. Her cries grew louder, her movements more frantic as she strained against his face. Her movements told him she ached to come, but the longer he could draw this out, the stronger her orgasm would be.

He stopped for a moment to let her rest, and she dug her fingers into his hair to urge him on. He teased her some more, driving her closer to the edge this time. Her whole body tensed, so he paused again.

"Don't stop!" she cried. "Please, don't stop."

"You want to come?"

"I need to. Please."

He took her clit back into his mouth and laved it with every bit of skill he had.

Her cries built, one on another until she sobbed. Suddenly, her hips moved right off the bed, and she shouted as she came. He kept up the pressure, pulling every bit of response out of her while she climaxed. The orgasm seemed to go on forever before she finally fell back, limp.

He let her drift on the pleasure for a moment before sliding up beside her and pulling her into his arms.

"Oh, my," she whispered. "I had no idea."

"We're made for each other. Admit it."

"Oh, my. Oh, my, my."

"My lady's pleased, I take it."

"More than I can say, my lord." She reached between them and took his cock in her hand. "I daresay turnabout's fair play."

"Priapus yearns for you. Soon, he'll weep."

She ran her fingers along the length of him and squeezed. "Such an eager fellow."

He groaned at the pleasure of her touch. "Eager to spill my seed into your delicate palm, although he'd quite prefer to do that into your pussy."

She bit her lip and smiled at him. Quite the coquette she'd become. She stroked the length of his rod and then reached further down to cup his balls. "These jewels have hardened, too. Do they pain you?"

"Quite the contrary. The pleasure is exquisite. I fear any more will undo me," he said. "Pray ride me while I jump the final hurdle."

That last was probably too flowery, but his brain had lost touch a few minutes back with anything but the onrushing orgasm. If she didn't let go of his cock soon, he'd cream all over her hand, the bedspread, and everything else.

She did release him, though, and sat up. He rolled onto his back with his member sticking up into the air like a flagpole. It had grown deep crimson, and a drop of pre-cum glistened at the tip. She swung her leg over him, and he gathered up the gown so that it spread over his chest rather than tangling between them.

The lips of her sex found his cock, and she slid slowly onto him. Slick and tight, her cunt grasped him an inch at a time as she lowered herself. Such delicious agony to let her take him this way when he needed to plow into her until he came. Still, if she wanted slow, he'd give it to her somehow even if it killed him.

She closed her eyes as she eased the last inch down to the base of his cock. "You're so large, sir, I fear I may swoon."

"We'll swoon together."

She moved her hips, rocking forward and back with him buried deep inside her. Her muscles gripped him, relaxed, and gripped him again. Damn, she'd done it on

purpose -- squeezed him with her hot, wet pussy. Enough. No male could withstand that.

He placed his hands on her hips and pumped into her. She felt like heaven, gliding over the length of him as his climax built. He couldn't stop now, had to keep thrusting upwards over and over. Blind, savage lust drove him, until...

Yes, now! Starting at his spine and then to his balls. He slammed into her as his cock exploded. Long, hot waves of semen rushed out of him and into her pussy. He growled and roared. Damn, nothing had ever felt like this.

She came, too. Miraculous creature. Her whole body shuddered as her cunt grabbed at his cock in rhythmic contractions. She threw her head back and gasped for breath.

For several moments they hung like that in pure bliss. His, hers, theirs. Shared eternity until she fell against his chest.

He cradled her there and kissed the top of her head. "Unbelievable."

"You're sure something... hey, what's your name, anyway?" she asked.

"Quarian."

"Well, Quarian, you sure know how to fuck."

"Is that any way for a lady to talk?"

She chuckled and rolled off him. "You did that pretty well, too."

"Did what?"

"The Don Juan thing," she answered. "Cute."

"It wasn't a thing, and it wasn't meant to be cute."

"What was it meant to be?"

"I was trying to make you happy."

"You know how to make me happy, all right. You've made me happy four times today, not that I'm counting."

"It wasn't about sex, either."

She looked at him as if he'd lost his mind. "It wasn't?"

"Not completely."

"Don't get your knickers in a twist," she said. "I'll still respect you in the morning."

"Damn." That was the sort of thing human males said to females just before they grabbed their hats and disappeared forever. He'd said that, or something like it, to hundreds of mortal women, so he ought to know what it meant -- absolutely nothing. "How can you make light of what we just shared?"

"Hey, what did I say?" she asked. "What's gotten into you?"

He sat up and swung his legs over the side of the bed. The woman seemed determined to misunderstand what had just taken place between them. Yes, he'd played a game for her, but not to make her think he was cute. He'd planned everything to convince her to spend eternity with him, not to amuse her for a few days.

"This wasn't just an act, you know," he said. Curse the woman, now he sounded petulant.

"Oh, really?" She swung her legs over, too, and sat up next to him. "You dress up in satin knee breeches all the time?"

"I did it to please you."

"And you did. I told you so."

"I want to show you what immortal life with me would be like."

She crossed her arms over her chest. "Not that mate stuff again."

"It's not stuff," he thundered in the voice he used when he wanted humans to cower.

Gloria VanSant just rolled her eyes. "Oh, I'm so scared."

"You're my mate whether you like it or not. At the end of the week, we'll leave here for our life together."

"At the end of the week, I'm going back to Manhattan. You can go to hell."

"Curse you, woman." He stood, towering over where she still sat on the bed. "You will obey me!"

She glowered right back up at him. "And if I don't?"

His hands clenched into fists, and it took some effort to force himself to unclench them again. As much as he'd love to throw her over his shoulder and carry her into the sea, she'd only drown if he didn't prepare her first. Throttling her wouldn't get him anywhere, either. Clearly, he had a lot more work to do with this stubborn mortal, but he had several more days to do it. Angering her wouldn't help.

"I'm going to go outside and calm down now," he said.

"Don't you want to get dressed first?"

He looked at the pile of clothing on the floor. "In satin knee breeches? I don't think so."

She shrugged. "Suit yourself."

Smug little snippet. She had no idea who she was dealing with. She'd learn soon enough, yes she would. Before the week was over, she'd apologize for all her obstinacy and beg him to mate with her. He'd savor every moment of her surrender.

In the meantime, he needed to get out of here before he did something he'd regret. So, he walked, stark naked, out of the cabin and slammed the door behind him. He'd take a nice, long walk along the sea bottom and spend time among some creatures that made sense -- flounders.

Chapter Four

Gloria had to admit that Quarian had knocked himself out every day to give her pleasure. Don Juan, Tarzan, her favorite bad-boy actor -- he'd played them all for her. She'd never had a vacation like this one -- not that she ever took vacations, but still. They'd splashed naked in the ocean and the lagoon he'd found at the center of the island. No one else ever showed up, just trays of the most delicious food and wine discreetly left at the front door of the cabin. She'd stopped moussing her hair or putting on make-up. What was the point if she spent most of her time either swimming or fucking? Life was good, and she'd get to live out the dream of her adult life this afternoon.

Today they sat in the makeshift classroom he'd set up under a palm tree. The set consisted of a podium, a chalkboard, and one student's desk. Bare bones, but it would serve, as would the more... um... unusual props nearby.

He walked to the chalkboard and wrote on it for a moment. "*Story of O.*"

He dropped the chalk in the tray and turned, dusting his hands. "I imagine some of the feminists in the class will squirm today, so I want to state right now that I don't want to hear any of your whining."

Quarian didn't resemble Professor Glocket in any physical sense. Quarian stood tall and imposing, making the tweed jacket look like something from the cover of *GQ*. Glocket had been a mangy little weasel who didn't seem to wash often. No doubt, all women found him repulsive. He worked out his anger by humiliating the female students in his class on a daily basis. If the subject matter hadn't sounded so intriguing - - Erotic Literature -- she would never have enrolled in his class. Once in, she hadn't found a way to get out.

"Miss VanSant," he said. "Would you care to discuss the post-Freudian symbolism in the use of implants to expand the woman's anus to accommodate a penis?"

"I'd rather not."

"May I remind you that class participation is a major part of your grade?"

"You always do." That had sounded great in the course description. Who didn't want to get class credit for talking about sex? In practice, though, it meant Glocket could force the women to talk about the most violent, goriest parts of his syllabus in front of a bunch of male students with boners in their pants. She ought to bring harassment charges against the bozo, but that would only mean repeating all of the crap in front of yet more men who might also have boners in their pants.

Glocket smirked at her, his weasel-nose all a-twitch. Quarian had his mannerisms down to a tee. "Freudian symbolism, if you please."

"Well..." She could turn this around if she could think quickly enough. "I can see why you'd need it explained to you. I imagine your penis would fit easily into the tightest of anuses."

In her mind, the other women in the room let out a whoop of victory as Glocket sputtered.

"This is about literature," he huffed. "It doesn't have anything to do with me."

"Oh, really? Then, why do you wear pants tight enough that the outline of your pathetic weenie shows every time you get a hard-on?"

More laughter from her imaginary classmates. Quarian clenched Glocket's jaw and got red in the face. Bless him. She'd have to think of a really great way to thank him for this.

"That's insubordination," Glocket shouted.

"You have to be kidding. For my behavior to be insubordinate, I'd have to be subordinate to you, Glocket. In fact, the other women and I passed you on the evolutionary scale a long time ago."

"May I remind you I'll be grading you at the end of the term?"

"Why not? You remind me all the time, but this time I don't give a shit." Damn, but that felt good. "I'm not twenty-one and trying to get through an MFA program any longer. I'm an adult woman with a responsible job in the art world. You're a dirty-minded pinhead who can't get it up except at some poor woman's expense."

"Miss VanSant, leave the room immediately!"

"Not on your life, asshole." She rose from her seat and approached the podium. Glocket's eyes widened, and his Adam's apple bobbed as he watched her approach. Quarian had nothing to fear from her, of course, but he'd agreed to play the coward for her enjoyment.

"I've had enough of your power trips," she said as she got closer. "Today, I'm going to take your itty-bitty pecker out of your pants and make you cream in front of the entire class."

"You wouldn't dare!"

"Ladies, block the doors," she ordered her imaginary classmates. "I don't want any of the men to miss this."

He backed away. "Don't touch me. I'm warning you."

She followed him, punching her finger into his chest. "Or, you'll do what, little man?"

The two of them continued, Quarian backing up toward the other area where the cast iron rings stuck up out of the sand. Any child could pull them out easily enough, but this was all play-acting and a hell of a lot of fun.

When they got there, she bent and picked up the lash -- a smaller version of a cat-o'-nine-tails -- and flicked it against her leg. "Okay, strip."

"Me?"

"No, the Marquis DeSade. Who else but you?"

"I don't want to."

"Did I ask what you want?" She swished the tongues of leather against her leg again. They created a pleasant smarting sensation.

He held up his hands in surrender. "All right, all right. Don't hurt me."

He shed his clothes in record time, throwing garments in every direction. For almost the first time since he'd walked out of the sea that day, his cock hung only semi-hard. He'd managed that to please her, too. Even in that state, his member was impressively long and thick. She'd have him hard and pounding into her in a minute, which would follow a satisfying fantasy with an even more exciting reality.

She made a circular motion with the whip. "Turn around."

He did so, slowly.

"Stop," she ordered when his ass came into view. "Have you ever seen anything so inadequate as his butt, ladies and gentlemen?"

He whimpered, so she slapped the lash against his buttocks. She'd never hit him hard enough to cause major pain, but his flesh did redden.

His butt was anything but inadequate, of course. Round and firm -- powerful like the rest of his body -- it could win any derrière competition it entered. She swatted it again, for the sheer pleasure of watching his flesh tremble.

"All right, lie down," she said. "And spread your arms and legs."

He stretched out on his stomach, his hands and feet near the iron rings.

"On your back, stupid," she said.

He rolled over, and she knelt next to him. After removing the silk bonds from the pocket of her sundress, she moved quickly around him to tie him to all four rings. That done, she stripped out of her dress -- the only piece of clothing she wore -- picked up the lash, and stood.

"Have you ever seen a naked woman before?" she asked.

"Please, Miss VanSant, let me up."

"Oh, I'll let you up, all right." She bent over and nudged his cock upward with the end of the whip. "You're not very well endowed, are you?"

That last bit was ridiculous. He'd hardened some more, but while still not completely erect, he had several inches on lots of men.

"Have you ever watched a woman touch herself?" she asked. "Most men find that erotic."

He swallowed hard, his Adam's apple bobbing again.

Gloria touched herself, found her clit, and rubbed it. His cock immediately swelled to full attention, and she pictured it inside her as she stroked herself. Damn, it felt good, standing here getting wet while a few feet away, he became more and more obviously aroused.

She plunged two fingers into her pussy and moaned with the pleasure. "Do you want to do this with your prick?"

"Yes."

She teased her clit some more until it throbbed. "Do you want to fuck me until I climax?"

"Yes."

"Do you want to be inside me when you come?"

"Yes, yes, yes."

"Well, you can't." She moved her hand and bent over again. Very carefully, she circled his cock with the tips of the lash. Slowly, slowly, while he whimpered and his eyes went wild with fear. One more circle of his member, and she raised the lash to strike. He closed his eyes, and she brought the tongues of leather down, but across his thighs, not his groin.

"That's a warning to be a good boy and do as I tell you," she said.

"I will. Please don't hit me."

She struck his thighs again to punctuate her order and then tossed aside the lash. "I'm going to make you come now so that the whole class can laugh at your pathetic load."

"No," he moaned. "I don't want to."

"Then do your best to resist, but you will climax for all of us to see."

She dropped to her knees beside him and took his cock into her hand. It hardened even further against her palm -- a sure sign that he was fully aroused now and defenseless against whatever she wanted to do to him.

"See if you can take this," she said as she lowered her face. For a moment, she let him anticipate her next move, and then she closed her lips around his tip and sucked.

"Ah," he cried. "Oh, God."

She moved her lips lower, taking more and more of him into her mouth. He tasted pleasantly salty as she worked his cock, sliding up and down over his length.

"Please, I can't," he shouted.

She pulled her mouth from his rod and squeezed the shaft. A drop of moisture appeared at the tip, and she licked it off. His hips jerked at the contact. He was trying to hold himself in control and losing the effort.

"I'm going to make you cream now, but not in my mouth," she said. "If you get any in my mouth, I really will beat you."

"No," he cried again, but from his tone, his plea might have meant the exact opposite.

She bent to his cock again and rasped her teeth gently against the shaft. His whole body went rigid, nearly rising off the sand. He was only a moment away now, and her pussy throbbed in sympathy. She'd get him to satisfy her afterwards, but she wasn't quite through torturing her sadistic prof yet.

She took him into her mouth again and worked him hard. Up and down, sliding over him at a furious pace. He moaned and thrashed as his climax neared.

"Chimera!" he shouted.

The safe word. She released him and spread out on her back, parting her legs for him. With angry movements, he pulled the iron rings out of the sand. Then, in one fluid movement, he rolled onto her and thrust his cock into her throbbing cunt.

"Yes," she cried. "Oh, yes. Do it!"

His answer was animal grunts as he plowed into her over and over. Massive strength, male power, every muscle in his body driving them both on. The whole world disappeared as he pushed her closer to climax.

"Do it, Quarian," she cried. "I love you. Oh, God, I love you."

He plunged into her, deeper and deeper, past endurance, past anything she'd ever known. He shouted -- a great, booming sound -- as he went rigid in climax. Deep inside her, he spilled his essence, and her own body responded in a massive orgasm. Her cries joined his while her sex squeezed his over and over. Finally, he rested his head against her shoulder.

"Did you mean that?" he whispered. "Do you love me?"

At another time, she might have lied. She might have made up some explanation about the heat of the moment and losing her head. *Besides, hey, everyone says I love you when they're about to come.* At this moment, with him still deep inside her and the reverberations of her own fulfillment still grasping at his sex, all she could do was tell the truth. "Yes, I love you," she whispered back.

* * *

She loved him. Quarian could hardly believe it, but he'd heard her clearly enough. She'd admitted that she loved him in a voice that seemed to come from her soul.

He loved her, too, of course, but then, the moment he'd set eyes on her picture in the catalogue, he'd recognized her as the one woman who could make his life complete. After days with her, she'd taken over every part of him. The sun only shone when she smiled. He had no music but her laughter. His member responded only to her, whether in fantasy or reality. He'd had both with her. Never, in his entire existence, had he made love as he had with Gloria. She kept him constantly hard, and she never failed to satisfy him completely. They'd have that for the rest of time.

All he had to do was give her immortality. Once he'd done that, she'd agree to mate with him. If he'd learned anything about human females over the centuries, he'd learned that once they fell in love, they wanted commitment. No matter how many times they claimed to want only a temporary fling, they wanted happily-ever-after and 'til-death-do-us part. Only, he and Gloria would never die, so they'd stay together forever. Nice job if you could get it, and he'd get it this afternoon.

He didn't have to perform the ceremony right now. He still had two full days before her planned departure. Once he'd realized what he had to do, though, the need hit him with all the power of nature. The ache in his loins told him that the time had come for him to spill his seed for her. Not just any ejaculate, the semen dammed up inside him now held the power of eternal life in it. Mixed with sweet wine and herbs, it would make an elixir to turn his lover into his mate.

The urge was on him now. Primal, like the ocean itself. He couldn't fight it if he tried. Semen, seawater, blood -- the very stuff of life. His gift to her. His very essence spilled into a chalice for her to drink. He could no more put this off than he could stop the earth's rotation.

He stripped out of his loincloth and looked out over the sea from the edge of the cliff at the highest point of the island. All lay calm below him now, but in a moment it would reflect the gathering storm inside him.

He picked up the chalice at his feet and raised it toward the sky. The mother of pearl caught all the blues and greens of sky and sea and cast them into his eyes.

"Creation," he bellowed. "I give You my spirit."

A warm breeze stirred up, ruffling his hair. It shifted directions, now blowing into his face.

"I surrender to Your power. Grant me my deepest need. Give me my mate."

A clap of thunder sounded. The signal, as if he'd had any doubt, that Creation approved. His balls felt heavy suddenly, and his cock throbbed in eagerness. With one hand, he lowered the cup while the other one grasped his erection and began to stroke it.

He'd had more than his share of sex over the years. He'd plunged his member into hot, wet pussies. Women had sucked on it, some shyly and others with an abandon that brought him to orgasm in seconds. Nothing had ever felt like this. While the wind blew and the waves crashed below him, he rubbed his hand over the length of his shaft, from the sac below all along to the head and back down again.

Images filled his vision. Gloria in the lace gown as she rode him, her eyes closed and her head thrown back in rapture. Gloria's sweet ass as he plunged into her cunt from behind. The sight of his cock moist with her juices. Gloria standing over him with a whip in her hand while she fingered her clit with the other.

Damn, too much. He yearned to make this last, but he needed just as urgently to empty his love into the chalice so he could take it to her. He squeezed the base of his shaft, holding off the climax. Fighting against it.

The ocean churned beneath him. Huge waves building higher and higher. They pounded against the cliff as the pressure mounted inside him. He positioned the cup carefully. In another moment, he'd have no control of his motions, and he dared not miss.

All around him the wind whipped into a frenzy. It wailed in his ears with the sound of a hundred lovers screaming in their release, and every one of those cries held Gloria's voice in it.

The ocean rose higher, roiling around the rock and climbing nearly to the promontory. He gave up all resistance and resumed the stroking. His cock came alive in his hand, swelling and throbbing in rhythm with the waves. He pulled harder on it as if he could strangle it into submission.

The climax started in his balls. An unbearable tension almost like pain. He moaned as it hit him and stroked on his cock like a madman. The shock wave ran the length of him and burst from the tip as he sprayed semen into the cup.

He opened his throat and howled as he came in one huge surge after another. His hips bucked with the power of it, but he held firm to his cock, guiding all of his essence into the cup.

This, I give to you, his mind shouted. And this, and this and this.

One final ocean wave crested the cliff and sprayed up onto him as the last bit of semen seeped from the head of his cock and fell into the chalice.

It was done.

The ocean subsided, and the wind died down. Birds still cried with alarm, but slowly the island returned to normal. Quarian looked into the cup. All of that had come out of him, and now he'd offer it to his mate along with the gift of immortality. Just as Creation had ordered.

Chapter Five

Gloria watched Quarian approach. Powerful legs carried him quickly over the sand, and his loincloth moved in time with his footsteps. In his hand, he held a goblet of some kind.

He'd grown so beautiful to her over the days. Not just his impressive member, which had entranced her back in New York, but all of him. His smile, his hearty laugh, the way he surrendered totally when they made love. He'd gotten so close to her -- far closer than any other man ever had.

Maybe it was the island. Magic ruled here, enhancing all her senses to overload. She'd pursued beauty her entire life, from her drab hometown through graduate school and on to the dazzle and glitter of New York. How could she have known that she'd discover it on an island so remote she shared it with one other person? But, what a person.

What was she going to do now? She couldn't stay on this island for the rest of her life. She couldn't take someone like Quarian back to her apartment. Imagine what would happen if donors like Mrs. Homersby got a load of him in his loincloth. Maybe they could part for now and agree to meet back here in a year. Maybe she could visit him somewhere in the meantime. Somehow she couldn't let things end when her week ran out.

He smiled as he approached her and held out the goblet to her. "I mixed you a special drink."

She took it from him and studied the chalice. It appeared to be mother-of-pearl, studded here and there with coral of many different colors. "This is beautiful."

"It's quite ancient. Used only for important occasions."

She smiled up at him. "What's the occasion?"

He winked at her. "Drink it and see."

She took a sip. As with everything on Chimera, the liquid exploded with flavor on her tongue. Spices, herbs, and wine that tasted of honey. Underneath all that lay a pleasantly salty tang.

"This is delicious." She held the cup up to him. "Don't you want some?"

"It's all for you, my love. Drink up."

She lifted the goblet to her lips again and swallowed the rest of Quarian's concoction. Finally, she handed the cup back to him. "Okay, are you going to tell me what's the occasion?"

"Come and sit with me for a minute."

Something inside her went way wrong all of a sudden. Her head got light, and her vision dimmed. All the air rushed out of her chest. Her knees turned to water, and she felt herself collapsing. Quarian caught her, helped her down to the sand, and held her in his arms as the world disappeared in a whorl of dizziness. "What's wrong with me?"

"Relax, mate," he said. "It'll pass."

"I'm dying." She'd tried to scream it, but her voice made only a whisper.

"You feel that way, but you'll come out stronger at the end."

"You did this to me!" He was a homicidal maniac, after all. He hadn't knifed her, hadn't beaten her to death as she'd feared when she first saw him. He'd poisoned her. He'd made her love him, and then he'd poisoned her.

"You wouldn't see reason, Gloria. I had to."

"Oh, God."

He rocked her back and forth. "Hush, love. All will be well."

The darkness swallowed her up, pulling her down into a bottomless pit. Her stomach clenched as she fought to stay in the world. Her heartbeat slowed and weakened. She struggled for breath, but no matter how hard she tried, nothing got into her lungs. Quarian's arms were her only reality as he continued to cradle her against his

chest. She loved him and he'd killed her, and she'd die with nothing but the memory of his embrace.

She gave up and let death have her. No use trying to hang on. She let herself float as she sank lower and lower into the abyss. At least there was peace here. She'd never see her parents again. Never see the Hollowel. Never see another sunset. Nothingness awaited her.

Just when she'd started to slip away, everything reversed course. She stopped falling and hung suspended in space and time. Sounds intruded -- distant at first but growing louder. The rhythmic crash of waves on the shore, the calls of sea birds, the rustle of leaves in the wind.

"That's it, love." Quarian's voice. "Come back to me."

Sand appeared under her body. Though her arm felt weighted down, she could stretch out her hand and bury her fingers into the sun-warmed sand. Light burned into her brain, even through her eyelids. She opened her eyes to the glare and immediately shut them again before moaning and rolling onto her side.

Quarian stroked her back. "Feeling better?"

She pulled away from him and forced herself to sit up. Her head swam for a moment and then cleared. When she opened her eyes again, the mists had burned away. The world looked brighter than before, the colors more saturated. Her ears picked up sounds she would normally never have heard. The flapping of birds' wings far above her, the murmuring of sea currents.

"What in hell happened?" she said. "I thought I was dying."

"You were in a way."

"What did you put into that drink?"

"My essence. You're immortal now."

Her jaw dropped, and she stared at him. "You're kidding, right?"

"Not at all. We can be mated now."

"Oh, for Christ's sake." She rose, wobbled slightly, and righted herself. "Not that mate crap again."

He rose, too, and held his hand out to her. "It's not crap. You're my mate, Gloria."

She batted his hand away. "Okay, now I know for sure you're crazy. You slipped some kind of date rape drug into the wine, and you expected I'd agree to be your mate after that?"

"Damn it, woman!" he thundered. "I've been more patient than any god needs to be. You're immortal now. You are my mate, and we will leave here together. We'll go where I say when I say, and you will not argue."

The sound of his voice should have scared her or at least startled her. Instead, it rushed through her like a charge of electricity, increasing her own strength.

"The only place I'm going is back to New York, and I'm not waiting until the week is up. I'm getting off this damned island the minute they can get a boat out here to get me."

"I forbid it," he shouted.

"You can't forbid me anything, pal. You're a maniac, and I'm done playing make-believe with you."

His face turned into the picture of fury and he spread his arms wide. "Do as I say, or I will raise a hurricane and carry you off with me that way."

"Yeah, right. Whatever. I'm going into the cabin now and locking the door behind me. Don't even bother knocking."

She turned and walked off. Let him try to raise a storm. She wouldn't stick around to see it.

* * *

There was a storm that night. Not quite a hurricane, but strong enough to rattle the screen door against the outside of the cabin. Rain pelted the window over Gloria's bed, and the waves slammed against the beach outside. Somehow, in all that madness she could make out each single sound. Damn, but she could swear she heard the birds huddling in the trees. One note came through most clearly, though. A wail. It should have been the wind, but no. A voice. A cry of pure misery.

She sat up in bed and looked out the window. Her vision seemed oddly acute, too. She shouldn't have been able to see anything, but somehow everything came through clearly.

The sea cast its own glow as the froth on the surf shimmered in a ghastly white. A flash of lightning revealed a lone figure on the beach. Quarian stood there with his arms by his sides and his head thrown back. Rain poured over him, and the waves threw water up at his feet. The storm gathered around him, the clouds swarming overhead. One lightning strike and then another hit around him. They should have electrocuted him by now or at the very least thrown him off his feet. None of it moved him. He stood there with that inhuman sound coming out of his throat while the elements went mad around him.

Gloria took a deep breath and lay back down. She should go to him and order him to come inside. But how could she do that without getting herself struck by one of those bolts? Besides, he'd drugged her once in his insane attempts to convince her she should become his mate. She didn't dare trust him again.

No, he'd have to stay out there. When she got to the main island, she could call someone and get him some help. He needed to be in a hospital somewhere where experts could take care of him. She had a lot of her own work to do getting over him and what she'd thought was love.

Sanity would return tomorrow. She only had to endure the storm tonight.

* * *

The door to the cabin opened not long after the sun rose. Quarian rose from the rock he'd been sitting on for the past few hours and watched as Gloria came out. She'd put on tight, black jeans and a clingy black tee shirt that only went to her midriff. She'd painted her face again and spiked up her hair. In each hand, she held a suitcase.

When she saw him, she hesitated briefly. That lasted only a moment, though, before she set her jaw and resumed her determined march to the water's edge.

He walked up beside her. "Are you really going to leave?"

She set down her luggage and stared out over the waves. "Will you let me leave?"

"What do you think?"

"I know now that you can stop me. You really are who you say you are, aren't you?"

"I never tried to hide myself from you."

"What sane person would believe a story like that?"

"I hoped maybe you would. How did you finally figure it out?"

She looked at him for a moment, cold fury in her eyes. "You did make me immortal. I cut myself shaving my legs, and it healed instantly. So, I tried holding my breath to see what would happen. Nothing. I don't seem to need to breathe."

"You don't."

"How could you?" Her voice was low and as cold as ice. "How could you make a decision like that for me?"

He looked down at his feet. He'd never mistreated women before, but he'd never taken them very seriously, either. They were lovely, sweet creatures who could share great pleasure. Eventually, he'd move on, leaving them with wonderful memories. He'd never had to consider their life choices. He did now, and he'd done a piss poor job of it.

"I love you, Gloria," he said. "Do you believe me?"

She ran her fingers through the spikes of her hair. "Yeah, sure. I guess."

"All I can say in my own defense is that the mating urge got the better of me. It's more powerful than even the elements. I must have been crazy with it."

"So, you turned me into... what?" She paused. "What am I, anyway?"

He looked back up at her. "With me, you'd be a part of me. Part of one of life's strongest forces. The ocean, rivers, streams."

"And without you?"

"I don't know." Creation, what had he done? He'd made a being in his own image but given her no choice in the matter. The ultimate betrayal, and she had to see it

as such. If only he could undo his actions of the last twenty-four hours... but he couldn't.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

She sighed, and the sound cut into him like a knife. Damn, how he'd hurt her.

"I haven't decided," she said. "I guess I'll live one life until people realize I'm not aging and then move on to another identity."

"That sounds lonely."

She shrugged. "What else can I do?"

She could come with him, but surely she'd considered that possibility and rejected it. Damn, she'd rejected him.

"What about you?" she said. "Will you get a new mate?"

"I have only one mate -- you."

"You really fucked up, didn't you?"

"I'm sorry, Gloria. I'm so sorry."

"A hundred years from now, I'll be able to speak with authority on today's art because I'll have known the artist personally. I won't be able to tell anyone that for fear they'll have me locked up."

"Damn, I wish there was some way you could kill me."

"I'd like that, too."

"Let me give you one gift before you leave."

She glared at him. "It doesn't involve drinking any potions, I hope."

He raised his hands in surrender. "I'm being completely honest now. I want to show you something that may make up for some of the pain I've caused you."

She sighed again. "What do you want to show me?"

"The sea. I want you to see it the way no one but I have ever seen it before."

"The boat's coming for me."

"It won't be here for some time."

Anger flared in her eyes again.

"I didn't do anything to delay the boat," he said. "I know the schedule."

"Well..."

"Please, Gloria. Just this one thing, and I'll let you go."

* * *

Gloria took Quarian's hand. There had to be some benefits of immortality, although they'd all escaped her when the magnitude of what he'd done had sunk in. Quarian had lived for centuries, and he seemed pretty happy. Maybe he could help her adjust to her new status.

He led her out into the sea. Warm water swirled around her ankles and then her knees as they went. When they got deep enough for the waves to reach her waist, her sodden jeans rubbed between her legs and felt clammy against her skin. Her clothes disappeared -- just vanished -- leaving her naked.

She looked at Quarian. "I'm not having sex with you, if that's what this is about."

He shrugged. "I didn't do anything."

"Then who got rid of my clothes?"

"You did."

"I did?"

"When you have more practice, manipulating objects will come easier."

She glanced down at herself. Her body seemed to belong in the sea, and only nakedness made sense. Anything human-made would get between her and her element. On they went as the water rose higher around her. Over her breasts and to her shoulders. Quarian stopped and held his hand out to her. On his palm lay a clip made out of tortoise shell.

"What's that for?" she asked.

"Put it over your nostrils. Once you're used to doing without breathing, you won't need it."

She clipped it over her nose, cutting off her breath. That strange light-headed feeling returned. Giddy, but pleasantly so. In front of them, a large wave built. A country girl, she'd only encountered the ocean as an adult, and its power had always frightened her. They were already nearly immersed. This swell would take them under.

She watched it come, building and building. It couldn't kill her, but it could scare her pretty well.

Quarian took her hand and squeezed. "Trust me."

As if she had any choice. The wave crested right over their heads and pulled them under. A current caught her up and swept her out to sea. It should have terrified her, but Quarian's hand gripped hers to reassure her. Colors rushed past her -- the crystal blue of the water, the greens of seaweed below them, the rich gold of sunlight as it penetrated the water. Like all the paintings she'd ever loved, but not an illusion this time. Everything she saw was real.

The current gentled after a while, and the images took on more solid form. She and Quarian floated slowly to the sea floor until her feet touched sand. She dropped his hand and turned around slowly. On one side, tall blades of seaweed waved in the current, bending and bowing back and forth. Fish colored like jewels ducked in and out of the branches. Red, blue, brilliant black. A mountain of coral in the loudest hue of pink she'd ever seen stood on her other side, with the fish populating the nooks and crannies there, too.

You love beauty above all else. Tell me what you see. It was Quarian's voice, but it came from inside her head.

She turned and looked at him. *Is that you?*

Sound distorts underwater. Best to talk via thought, he answered. *Now, tell me what you see.*

Everything's incredible. The fish, the coral. The way the sunlight penetrates even down here.

Like one of your favorite paintings, no?

Better.

A small shark swam by, no more than inches from her nose. Only a few feet long, the animal stopped to study her briefly, its eyes filled with ancient wisdom. With a flick of its tail, it dashed away again.

What do you have in New York that compares to this?

Good question. She loved her museum, loved her place in New York's intelligentsia. *Art, of course.*

Bah. Reality offers far more than the small vision of modern mortals.

Contemporary painting is beautiful in its own way.

It's clever, not profound. A mere trick of the intellect. He stretched out his hand and a shrimp flew into it. The tiny creature rose up on its tail and waved its legs in movements reflective of the current around it.

This baby has more to teach us than any hundred of the paintings in your museum.

That isn't true, she said, even though every bone in her body told her it was.

You want beauty, Gloria, and they give you fashion. You want enlightenment, and they give you trends. What did they say of the portrait of me you hung there?

That it was trite. That no one did realism anymore.

And what did your heart say? he asked.

She'd had to fight to convince the board to do a Pre-Raphaelite show. Not a single one of the experts wanted the exhibition, and she'd only managed to sneak it past them by claiming it would bring in more money from Philistines like Mrs. Homersby. The truth was that she'd wanted those paintings in one place where she could delight in the colors and play of light, but she hadn't dared to admit that.

Somewhere along the line, she'd grown ashamed of her own tastes and feelings about art. She'd lost touch with everything that had made her happy. No wonder she didn't eat or drink but did snap at her staff. How could you enjoy life when critics had soured your view of everything that made your spirit soar?

Beauty lives in your heart, not your intellect. It grabs your gut, not your cerebrum.

What do you know about beauty?

I've lived for centuries. Millennia. When you have, too, you'll see what I mean.

She looked around her at the majesty of nature. He could be right. Despite her years spent studying art, she'd never seen anything to rival this. She had all of eternity in front of her. Why shouldn't she spend it here? Quarian had tricked her into immortality, but she did love him, and he'd loved her enough to mate with her for all

time. If she stayed with him, she'd have company. Besides, she could get back at him for his deception for the next couple of centuries. That would serve him right.

I could show you much more than this. Mountain lakes, for instance. They're too cold for mortals, but that wouldn't bother us.

You mean like in the Alps?

The Alps, the Sierras, New Zealand. I know a lovely place on the South Island no human's ever found.

Oh, my.

We could swim the Amazon. Converse with the manatees in the Everglades.

She stared at him. You can talk to them?

They tell me which boats are bothering them, and I put the engines out of operation.

You would.

Come with me, Gloria. What's waiting for you if you don't?

She turned to him. You really do love me. You wouldn't get tired of me and run off?

Tired of you? With your appetites and imagination? Eternity wouldn't be long enough.

I'm not joking, Quarian.

He took her face in his hands and gazed into her eyes. The water shimmered between them. Sunlight in his hair. In his eyes. Her own reflection stared back at her -- a water creature, just like him. They did belong together, even if he had tricked her to bring her here.

I love you, Gloria. Don't make me live forever without you.

Yes, Quarian, my love. I will be your mate.

The End

Or, in the long scheme of things, perhaps just the beginning...

Alice Gaines

Award winning author Alice Gaines has published several sensuous and erotic works. She prefers stories that stretch the imagination, highlighting the power of love and sex. Alice has a Ph.D. in psychology from U. C. Berkeley and lives in Oakland, California, with her collection of orchids and two pet corn snakes, Casper and Sheikh Yerbouti.