

Chapter Twenty Eight

We slept late. I woke in Sam's arms and lay watching him. I had never seen him sleep. His face was relaxed, blonde curls falling over his forehead. He was so handsome it made my heart ache with my love for him.

I moved very carefully, not to disturb him, then found where our clothes had landed in our urgency to be rid of them. I picked up Sam's shirt and dropped it over my head. It fell to mid thigh.

I padded down to the kitchen in bare feet to get a drink. As I poured a glass of water, I looked out the window to the sea. It must have been a beautiful day. The sea was shimmering with the last of the sunlight, in deep blue splendour. The colour of Sam's eyes when he'd made love to me. Shivers of pleasure coursed through me.

My imagination had been seriously deficient.

I turned to hurry back to him when I heard my cell phone ringing somewhere. Where was my handbag? I remembered I'd given it to Leiana to bring upstairs before we'd left for Sam's ancestral home.

I followed the sound to the leather sofa. It stopped ringing just as I found my bag. I dug inside. Three missed calls displayed. They were from Uncle Clive. The phone started ringing again, loudly now it was not muffled inside the bag. The sound made me jump. It was Uncle Clive again.

“Uncle Clive?” I said. “Sorry, I missed your calls. I didn’t have my phone...”

“Tessa! I’m so sorry, sweetheart. There’s some bad news. Are you near a TV?” he cut me off.

I looked at the large flat screen on the wall. “Yes. Why? What’s wrong?” but I already knew. I looked for the remote to turn the TV on, spotting it on the coffee table.

“There’s been a fire, Tessa, your Mum and Dad’s house. It’s on the news headlines. It happened around 3am this morning. It looks like the house has been destroyed. I’ve been in court all day and just got the message from the police. Thank goodness, the house was empty. Don’t worry, sweetheart, I made sure the insurance was up to date.”

He promised to ring back as soon as he had more details.

I was so busy pushing every button on the remote to make the TV come on I didn’t realise Sam was next

to me until he took it out of my hands and clicked a button. He flicked through the channels, finding a news report.

Sam sat beside me. The footage was on a loop. We watched the flames shooting out of the windows, engulfing the house. When the roof collapsed, I couldn't watch any more. Having seen it before, in Neia's mist, didn't make it any easier.

Sam held me close to his bare chest. He'd only pulled on a pair of jeans to come out to the living room. I listened to the anchor reading the bulletin. "... neighbours told us the owners of the house died in a tragic car crash in December, the house has been unoccupied since then. Fire crews confirmed there was no one inside. Preliminary reports indicate an electrical fault more than likely started the blaze."

Sam clicked the TV off.

"Is fate satisfied now? Are all the events realigned?" I asked.

He nodded. "I'm sorry you lost your family home, Tessa."

I put my hand on his chest, felt his heart beat.

"You are my home, Sam."

He picked me and carried me back to his bed.

Chapter Twenty Nine

The day dawned in spectacular glory as if it knew it was meant to be special.

I was on my favourite spot on the rocky outcrop, watching the sunrise. Sam was out on his board, waiting for a final wave before we had to go. He paddled his board around and blew me a kiss. I waved and blew him one back. Goofing about, he pretended the force knocked him off his board. I laughed.

A wave built up speed in the distance but Sam already knew, boosting himself easily onto his board and paddling strongly out to meet it. I stood up to see him better. I saw him choose the spot where he would wait for the swell.

I hoped the wave was worthy. It would be his last for a while.

We were going to the Valley of Flowers.

The swell rose and Sam timed it to perfection, standing on the board in a fluid motion, angling it across the face of the wave, riding it south before flipping around and running north, back towards me.

On the crest of the wave, I suddenly saw a sleek grey dolphin arc through the water, then another and

another, until I could count the entire pod racing along the wave with Sam, in perfect synchronisation.

I stepped lightly along the ridge of the rock and balanced right on the edge. I timed my dive with an outgoing wave, using its momentum to clear me from the rocks. I sliced through the water and started to swim strongly.

I didn't have to go far until the dam of the pod raced towards me, diving, and surfacing the other side of me, her dorsal fin within easy reach. I smiled at her and she clicked and whistled her greeting before towing me out to where Sam waited.

"Tessa, it's extremely dangerous to dive off rocks into the sea," Sam said as I let go of the dolphin and slowed to a smooth stop. He pulled me close.

"I wasn't in danger," I told him innocently. "And I promise not to recommend it to mere mortals." I was still testing the boundaries of being immortal. The freedom was amazing.

"Talking of danger, Natalie is going to kill me if I don't get back to the house soon. And you will be in even bigger trouble if she knows you've seen me this morning," I said and avoided his lips closing over mine.

He looked shocked at my coyness. "You're going to make me wait?" he said disbelievingly.

“Yes,” I said primly and he laughed.

“I’ll race you to the beach, a kiss my prize if you win,” he tempted, his voice persuasive.

“No, Sam, I’d have to cheat to have any chance against you, and with the entire pod of dolphins at my disposal, you know I’d win. My kisses don’t come that easily!”

We swam leisurely back to the beach, the dolphins coming into the shallows with us. Sam and I bowed our heads to them. They whistled and clicked, then pushed up on their tails skittling backwards, bowing their heads in return, before racing away.

We walked up the sand, holding hands.

“Sam, what if you are wrong?”

Sam stopped, staring down at me, a frown furrowing his forehead. “About what?” he asked, his voice very serious.

“We might have a son, instead of a daughter,” I said and his joy chased the worry from his face.

Sam raised my hand and kissed my fingers lingeringly before we parted.

Leiana was standing on the dune waiting for me when I jogged up the path. She raised her eyebrows at me. Natalie threw her hands in the air when she saw

me. They were the best bridesmaids a girl could have. The perfect balance, one serene, the other frenzied.

The garden grove at Sam's house was ideal for the small guest list. Just close friends and family. Sam's cousins blended in easily enough. When Jorin went downstairs, with Mirin and Rion, they turned all the women's heads with their handsome good looks. They'd greeted me earlier when they 'arrived' in the relative privacy of the house, taking my hands, solemnly wishing Sam and I joy.

Jorin had pulled me into a hug, scandalising his cousins.

Neia had arrived alone, serenely beautiful, emerging from Leiana's room. We shared a long look when she took my hands, remembering our last meeting, then she kissed my forehead, and smiled.

I thought Uncle Clive might change his mind about being married to his work when Neia was introduced to him.

Sam's father, and his brother and sisters, had declined to attend. It was too difficult for them to come into the world after eons of seclusion. Aian had sent an elegant replica of Sam's medallion for me as a wedding gift. Sam and I promised we would visit soon.

The ceremony was simple. Davan married us. I'd insisted. He'd gone and got a celebrant's license. Sam was impressed by my influence over his uncle. It was just that Davan understood marrying in my own custom, for the memory of my parents, was as important as a binding was significant to his family.

Uncle Clive gave me away. Jackson was Sam's best man and Matt, his groomsman. Zac was excited to be our pageboy. I tucked a small photo of my Mum and Dad inside the bodice of my wedding dress, next to my heart.

Ann and Mandy had organised the catering. They were talking about going into business together. Peter Black was happy to help, mostly doing the carrying and lifting. I noticed he never took his eyes off Mandy for a minute longer than was necessary. She appeared happy about that. I was pleased because Peter had just been appointed to teach my class in my absence. They were going to be seeing a lot of each other!

John Brennan rang. His wife had given birth to a boy at four o'clock in the morning. He hoped we'd accept his late apologies. We were delighted for them.

The day was perfect.

Leiana and Natalie helped me change out of the sheath of silk and lace I'd worn. I pulled on jeans with

a deep blue singlet and white over shirt. I found all the pins holding my hair, letting it fall about my shoulders.

“Who goes trekking in the Himalayas for their honeymoon?” Natalie complained. “Seriously, Tessa!”

Leiana smiled at me.

I looked in the mirror for a minute longer. Tessa Archer. Mrs Tessa Archer. I smiled. It fit very nicely.

Everyone was waiting when I went back downstairs. Natalie handed me my bouquet. I smiled at the riot of colour. There had been no other choice. Sam had picked them himself.

I tossed the bouquet over my shoulder and was as delighted as Mandy when she caught it. She looked at Peter Black with a smile.

Sam took my hand, raising it to his lips.

“Ready?”

His eyes were intensely blue with his need to have me finally to himself, in the everlasting fabric of time. The immense awareness of his love shivered through me.

I looked at the gathering of people. They were smiling at us, their faces radiant, reflecting our happiness. Our love was the magical divide.

Behind them, beyond the hills, the embers of the sun filled the sky with rays of gold, oranges, and reds.

“Yes. I’m ready.”

Epilogue

Dr McIntyre switched off the last of the equipment and the room fell into silence. Wearily he dropped his stethoscope around his neck and picked up the chart. It had been a very long night. At the door, he flicked off the bright overhead lights, then looked back at the bed in the sterile white room.

So young, so beautiful.

He thought about all the things she would never do; fall in love, be cherished by a partner, become a mother, be some-one's best friend. Nor would she have a career or grow old surrounded by the people she loved and who loved her.

Such a precious life lost.

He took a deep breath, holding it a moment before slowly releasing it.

Her family were waiting for him.

There were no words to begin to express the regret of his news.

As he shut the door, the movement briefly disturbed the air in the room and a tiny deep, deep blue flower, fluttered across the polished floor in the draft.

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