

## Chapter Six

I needed to get out of the noisy, crowded bar. I couldn't think straight between the volume of the music, the babbling conversation, and the disjointed images piercing the darkness of my memory.

Sam suggested a walk on the beach.

I went to get my handbag and Sam came with me, still holding my hand. I told them, Matt, Mandy and Jackson, I was leaving, trying for a casual tone as if leaving with someone I just met in a bar was something I did all the time, nothing out of the ordinary.

Judging by the look Mandy gave me, I wasn't very convincing. Matt gave Sam a long look. Only Jackson said, "Goodnight." There was no judgement in his voice.

I did not glance towards the bar. I did not want to see Natalie.

Sam kept hold of my hand as we weaved through the crowd for the door. By the time we crossed the road to the beach, I had forgotten all about them. Sam had my total attention.

A storm was brewing on the horizon, flashes of lightning illuminating the mushrooming thunderheads. Sam studied the storm while I took my sandals off, hooking the straps on a finger. I could feel the warmth of the sun still in the sand beneath my toes. We turned northwards. The near full moon was directly overhead, creating a silver trail across the water.

Sam adjusted the length of his stride to suit mine and I smiled up at him. I barely came to his shoulder. He smiled back. His face was beyond handsome. He was gorgeous.

We walked for a while in silence. The fresh air and peaceful sound of the beach cleared my head but the feeling I knew him nagged at me. In vain, I tried to recapture the fragment of deep blue eyes holding mine in a pool of golden light that had flashed into my head for a fraction of a second on the dance floor.

“Do you live around here?” I finally asked.

“Yes, up in the hills.”

I guessed he was referring to the low ridge that overlooked the coastal plain.

“I moved here a couple of months ago,” I told him and he nodded as if he knew.

“Have we met, Sam?” I came straight out with it.

He didn't answer. Instead, he led me over to a huge piece of driftwood that had washed up against the dunes. He dusted the sand from the bleached remains of the tree trunk and we sat down. I could see his face clearly in the moonlight. His eyes were searching mine, as if he was looking for an answer to something. I saw the blueness had deepened to indigo.

"In another time," he finally answered.

Before I could ask what he meant, a deafening boom of thunder echoed across the water, like cannon fire, and forked lightning raced across the sky. The temperature dropped rapidly as a strong gust of wind blew in from the sea, streaming cloud across the moon, plunging us into darkness before the next gust ripped the cloud to shreds.

When the moonlight reappeared, I saw Sam's companion, the girl from the gallery, walking towards us along the water line, her long white dress swirling around her legs in the wind.

Was she looking for Sam?

Lightning streaked across the sky again and a volley of thunder clapped loudly, making me jump. The storm was racing towards us at speed.

“I’ll walk you to your car,” Sam said. He was on his feet, holding out his hand to help me up. Ridiculous as it was with the storm bearing down on the beach, I didn’t want to go. I wanted to stay. I wanted to understand. The lightning and thunder crackled menacingly. I’d never seen a storm roll in so quickly.

I gave in and took Sam’s hand.

I’d parked on the main street, a little way from The Shack. We barely made it to the car when the rain started. Sam took the key when I found it in my bag and opened the door. I was grateful to get out of the freezing rain.

Sam stood by the car door, his body shielding me. He bent down and took my hand, raising it to his lips. “It must be your decision, Tessa,” he said and his eyes were that amazing blue in my brief memory. Then, he closed the door.

The rain squall battered the car and I rubbed my hand over the foggy window. In the flashes of lightning, I saw him standing on the top of the dune, his face turned to the sky, uncaring the storm raged around him.

I sat there, not wanting to drive in the storm, not wanting to be parted from him. When the rain eased,

spent as fast as it had come, I opened the window.

There was no sign of him.

I got out of the car, crossing the road to where he had stood.

He was gone. Nor was there any sign of the girl.

## Chapter Seven

I barely slept. My dreams were strange. I was dreaming of dreams, slithers of images overlaying each other, a jumble of photos strewn across the ground. The one on the top was large and ornately framed. It was a photo of Sam. He was smiling, his eyes extraordinarily blue, his expression full of anticipation as if he was waiting. He was in a valley filled with vivid wild flowers.

In the pre-dawn light, I gave up on sleep and got out of bed. The sound of the waves breaking on the sand lured me into the garden just as the sky started to flush pink on the horizon. I headed for the bench seat at the edge of the dune, to watch the sunrise.

The sky changed quickly, impatiently banishing the remnants of night's grey. The pink burst into gold as the sun rose steadily over the water. It was only minutes until blue stained the sky.

I took a deep breath and decided to walk. Sitting still was not helping. My thoughts kept splintering until I was not sure what I was even thinking about. Break it down, I told myself as I walked on the deserted beach. One thought at a time.

Sam's eyes. The way their colour changed, from intense blue to indigo, reflecting his thoughts. That bizarre memory that flashed through my head on the dance floor, like a visual snapshot of the thought I'd had on the road weeks before when Natalie had driven me to where the accident had happened. The memory of an angel.

Sam's spicy smell, like no aftershave I'd ever encountered, had been unmistakably familiar when he'd held me on the dance floor. I thought I recognised his voice, too, especially when he said my name. Did he remind me of someone I knew?

No.

Everything about Sam was very distinct. It was as if we had met. What had he said when I'd asked? 'In another time.'

I thought about the photo in the dream. A photo of Sam in the Valley of Flowers. Waiting for someone. Me? I shivered, remembering the overwhelming sense that I had been in that valley.

I kept walking.

The tide had turned leaving a treasury of stranded shells on the wide expanse of wet sand. I picked one up, brushing the sand off it, just as a long tongue of an errant wave rushed around my ankles, catching me

unaware. I dug my toes into the sand and felt it eat away as the water rushed back to the sea.

I looked at the shell again. It was beautiful. Would my mother have added it to her collection in the large jar I kept on my bedside table? On closer inspection, I saw the creature inside still lived. I quickly threw it back into the water, setting it free.

The sun was well above the horizon and the swell was increasing with the strong south easterly. Surfers, clustered in their small communities, waited on their boards. I scanned them even though I had never seen my surfer amongst them. He seemed to prefer keeping to himself, possessive of his waves.

Suddenly, I was eager to see him. I hoped he would be there. Hoped he had not given up on me. With him, it had always been simple. He surfed, I watched. I talked, he listened.

As I neared the rocky outcrop, the old fisherman was in the water, casting his line. His boulder was stranded by the low tide. He started walking back up the sand towards it, letting his reel spin the line out behind him. Our paths crossed.

“Morning,” he said. His voice was ancient, though not frail, and his bright grey eyes held an expression I could not fathom as I slowed to a stop.



“Good morning,” I responded. In nearly a month, he had not spoken to me. I’d got used to his customary curt nod.

“Are the fish biting?” I asked politely since we were talking.

“No.”

“Beautiful morning, though,” I tried again.

“You’re early,” he told me curtly.

He was right. I was much earlier than my normal run. “I couldn’t sleep. I’m Tessa,” and I held out my hand to him.

For a moment, I thought he would scorn the custom but then he wiped his hand on his rolled up trousers. It was surprisingly soft, yet, his handshake was firmer than I would have guessed, considering his great age. Up close, I could see his face was creased and weathered, though I fancied there was also youthfulness in his pale grey eyes.

“They call me Davan,” he told me, scrutinising my face and then, as if remembering his line, he dropped my hand and started flicking the reel with an easy motion to draw it in.

“Hope you catch some soon,” I said.

“Righto,” he answered without looking at me, he was staring intently out to the horizon.

I reached the rocky outcrop and with the low tide, dared to go out to the sheer point and find my ledge. I realised it was only 24 hours since I had last sat there. It felt like a year. Was it only the day before that Natalie had come to stay? That I'd seen the photo of the valley? Seven hours since I'd met Sam?

Sam.

He had penetrated my reserve. He was in my thoughts, in my dreams, in the very air around me, even perched on the end of the sheer rocks. I could feel his warmth surrounding me. I closed my eyes remembering how he had taken my hands, the strange, pulsing awareness replaced by warmth at the contact between us.

I suddenly realised I was wrong. He wasn't surrounding me at all. His warmth was within me.

I opened my eyes to the bright sunlight and shook my head. What was I thinking, I chided. However, even as I tried to dismiss it, the fleeting memory of deep blue eyes flashed into my head again, though this time brilliant golden sunlight filled the backdrop. I remembered unbearable pain, too.

In three seconds the memory was gone, leaving me reeling with confusion. I took several slow, steadying breaths. My hands were shaking. Just bits of

memories messing with my head, I told myself. What was I remembering, though? What had happened to me?

'It must be your decision,' Sam had said. What did I have to decide?

Still no answers.

I looked for my surfer in earnest, needing his uncomplicated company and was relieved when I spotted a flash of orange. He was way, way out paddling with long, strong pulls of arms, his legs tucked under him, leaning forward and propelling the surfboard with speed over the water, using the power of the sea to add to his momentum. Finally, a wave built up and he quickly angled into position.

I stood to watch, to encourage him, as he rode the wave. It was short lived, the wave crashed over itself and I saw his head emerge in the calmer water behind it.

He was looking towards me. I realised just how worried I'd been that I might never see him again. Worried enough to make me brave. I raised my hand and waved.

When he did not wave back, I felt foolish. He was just a surfer who happened to like the spot.... I stopped rebuking myself when he pushed his board

towards the beach, propelling it across the water. Then he dived under the waves, surfacing in an easy freestyle and swam after it. He was coming to shore!

Without a second thought, I scrambled off the ledge, along the rocks, jumping down to the sand. I made it to the board, its fin beached in the sand, just as he reached the shallow water.

My heart was pounding with sudden uncertainty but it was too late to turn back. He was standing, scooping the water off his face, slicking back his hair. I stared as the water sluiced off him. His chest and shoulders were broad, muscle tapering to his waist and flat belly, and his skin was deeply tanned. I saw he wore a gold medallion on a thin gold chain. It gleamed brightly in the sun.

“You!” Disbelief cracked my voice.

“Good morning, Tessa,” he replied and there was deep contentment in his voice.

My skin balled with goose bumps as Sam waded out of the water and stopped in front of me. If I’d thought he was good looking last night, in the sunlight he was stunning! Nor was he in the least bit self-conscious that I was staring at him. I blushed, adding to my confusion.

“I don’t believe this,” I told him unevenly.

“I hope you do,” he said with an easy smile. “This is our destiny.” There was not a trace of doubt in his voice.

“Destiny?” I repeated incredulously.

Sam’s eyes deepened in colour, making me catch my breath. “Yes.”

I felt like I was the victim on one of those stupid candid camera skits. “Did you know last night that it was me watching you surf all this time?” I demanded.

“Oh, yes,” and he seemed a little amused at my annoyance.

“Then why didn’t you tell me!”

“You didn’t ask,” he said softly.

I thought about it. I’d asked if we’d *met*. “Sam, this is really weird.”

“We were intended to meet, Tessa,” he said, again with that total conviction.

“So, what happens now?” I asked. I had no idea.

He raised an eyebrow and his smile became a grin. “I can cook you breakfast. Have you eaten this morning?” he asked solicitously and bent to pick up his board, tucking it under his arm.

It was the last thing I expected him to say. “No,” I answered weakly.

“Neither have I. How does an omelette with all the trimmings sound? I’m a fantastic cook,” and my tummy grumbled at the thought of food.

I laughed, in spite of myself. “Looks like you’ve convinced my stomach,” I said.

“That’s a start,” he conceded. “I live about ten minutes from here. My car is just over the dunes,” and he pointed a little further along the beach.

He eased his stride to suit mine, as he had the night before, and after a minute he caught my hand in his, intertwining our fingers. My pulse jumped at his touch, the warmth of his hand over mine as electric as it had been on the dance floor. It didn’t feel awkward. It felt... right.

I peeked at him and quickly looked away when I saw he was looking at me, too. He laughed softly and raised my hand to his lips. “Tessa, this would not be happening if it wasn’t meant to be,” he told me.

The old fisherman, Davan, was still in his spot on the beach, his fishing line supported in a pole in the sand. As we drew closer, I saw he was watching us, a deep frown across his weathered brow. His eyes flicked to our joined hands before he looked unwaveringly at Sam.

Puzzled, I glanced up to see Sam's reaction to the obvious disapproval. Sam showed no animosity at the censure and nodded as we passed but the old fisherman turned his back on us.

"What did we do wrong?" I whispered.

Sam squeezed my fingers gently. "Something I did, Tessa. Don't let it worry you."

"You know him?"

Sam sighed. "Yes."

When we got to the car, Sam opened the door of his gold SUV so I could sit while he strapped his surfboard onto the roof rack. I suddenly thought of the beautiful girl from the gallery, the one who had remonstrated with him at the bar, the same girl who'd been walking on the beach in the height of the storm.

Was she his girl friend? Did the old fisherman know that? Is that why he had looked so disapproving?

Sam smiled at me when he got in and turned the key in the ignition. I looked into his amazing eyes. I could not believe they were capable of deception.