



Caesar (Danger Bluff #6)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: Caesar

A mysterious billionaire saved my life.

Now, I owe him.

My team's job: Save Isla from certain danger.

My goal: Convince her she's mine.

Isla

They can laugh at me all they want.

But treasure hunting is my passion.

Could I find the last piece of the puzzle at Danger Bluff?

If only my gorgeous scuba guide didn't ooze Daddy vibes.

Total Pages (Source): 22

Page 1

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Could a day get any better than this?

Caesar glanced over at the beautiful woman swimming effortlessly next to him as they explored the depths. She had chosen this spot for their scuba adventure today. He didn't know how she'd luckily pointed at such a great location on the map. He'd assured her they'd get to see so many different sea creatures on the dive.

He touched her arm to point out a patch of rocks to the left, silently suggesting that they go look there. Mindy immediately shook her head and pointed up ahead. As they moved forward, Caesar noticed that she checked her watch several times. Was she watching her oxygen level? Was it something else?

Caesar had been on several dates with Mindy. He'd met her when another scuba instructor had introduced them. So far, she'd been fun to hang out with, but as he watched her swimming with such intent toward an unknown destination, he wondered how well he really knew her.

His inner radar went off. With several years in the Coast Guard under his belt, he'd honed a fine-tuned radar. He'd also learned long ago to trust that warning voice when it talked to him. Caesar tested his theory. Scanning the area, he spotted what looked like a series of wooden ribs pointing up from the seabed. Again, he touched her arm and pointed before waving for her to come with him. Mindy again shook her head and continued her path. That refusal went directly against her avowed passion to explore the unusual on the seabed.

Following her, Caesar shifted to swim on her other side. She appeared to be zeroing in on a specific location. Mindy certainly had not chosen to share that she'd had a

target in mind. It explained why she'd insisted on selecting the area for today's explorations. He hadn't picked up on her intent as she'd giggled and seemed to ponder where to go.

He scanned the area, on full alert. Mindy stopped and immediately began waving her hands over the sand to disperse the particles. When the top of a box appeared, she motioned him over to help her dig it out. Her eyes gleamed with excitement even through the diving mask.

A shadow fell over the area where they worked, making Caesar look up. A large boat stopped just to the right of their location. Mindy hit his arm and dug furiously. A cold shiver ran down his spine. Something in the way they hovered over them alerted him that these weren't tourists. He wrapped one hand around Mindy's bicep and tried to pull her away. Perhaps they could make it back to the boat safely.

She shook her arm out of his hold and continued to work to free the box. Mindy obviously wasn't going to leave without the object she was trying to get. As a handle appeared, he watched her grab it and attempt to drag it from the sand. It moved only a fraction of an inch.

Splashes from above made them both look up to see five figures in black wetsuits dropping into the water. Mindy frantically signaled him to pull the container out. Caesar moved her out of the way and heaved on the handle. It shifted in the sand. Bracing himself as much as possible in the water, he tugged with all his strength.

The case popped out of its sandy lodging. The driving force behind it propelled Caesar and the box backward. Mindy swam after them, frantically motioning Caesar to haul it up to the boat. She grabbed the handle on the opposite side and struggled to carry the heavy load to the surface.

Gathering his feet underneath himself, Caesar kicked himself away from the bottom

and joined her efforts. Because the weight held them back, it felt like they were swimming against a strong current. A dive float would have saved this exertion, but without knowing Mindy had a recovery dive planned, Caesar had not brought one with them.

He glanced over his shoulder to see the divers getting closer. They could move ten times faster than he and Mindy with their burden. Pushing his body to its limit, he kicked quickly to propel himself forward.

Finally, Caesar's head breached the water's surface beside his boat. He dragged the mouthpiece from his lips. "What the fuck is going on?"

Before she could answer, a jolt of pain lanced through his thigh, drawing a shout from his lips. Caesar looked down to see blood streaming through the water. Damn it! They had shot him with a spear gun.

"I'll get on board and pull the case up," Mindy yelled and released her end of the case.

Dragged down by the weight and weakened by the pole spear now jutting through his thigh muscles, Caesar forced himself to use the last of his strength to drive his burden back to the surface. Mindy reached down from the deck of his boat for the handle his fingers were clamped around. Pulling over and over as he pushed, she heaved it out of the water.

Caesar reached for the deck to drag himself out of the water. Each time he hit the jutting spear, pain burst through his leg. The sound of the motor brought his head up as the deck vibrated under his hands.

"Help me up!" he yelled to Mindy.

She never turned her head. Throwing the boat into drive, she jetted forward, knocking Caesar away from the side of his boat and wrenching the metal bolt running through his leg. When he resurfaced, groaning with pain, he stared as the back of his boat roared away.

The black-clad divers surfaced around him. Three held spear guns at the ready while two removed their respirators to scoff at Caesar. The nearest one spoke, “Never trust a woman, especially one after treasure.”

Caesar stared into his vivid green eyes, trying to memorize everything about him. If he got out of here alive...

“What do we do with him?” the other asked.

“Bleeding like that, the sharks will take care of him,” the second man said.

Caesar looked toward where he knew the shore should be and couldn’t see it. Healthy, he might have maintained his energy level to reach the sand. In pain and bleeding more with each flutter of his feet to stay afloat, he didn’t have a chance.

“I run a boat service. I don’t know her,” Caesar said, trying to make himself sound totally used.

“You ran a boat...” A glug followed those words as one of two men without their breathing gear in place was suddenly jerked under the water.

Everyone looked down. A black substance blossomed through the water, shielding everyone’s view from the area under the surface. The thrashing under the water spread it quickly.

“What the hell?” the other diver who could talk asked.

A second later, the diver next to him disappeared, pulled abruptly under the water. A few seconds later, a gurgle of oxygen rose to the surface, suggesting that his oxygen line had been cut as the waves churned around them.

One of the three still remaining launched himself forward to swim back to the boat. He made it only a few strokes before he disappeared under the waves with a sudden jolt.

“That can’t be a shark!” the bare-mouthed man shouted. “We have to get out of this black stuff. You can’t see what’s coming.”

He turned to swim the opposite way. Two strokes away from reaching clear water, a visible hand reached up to drag the man under the water. Caesar heard two splashes and turned back to see the last two divers disappear into the murk.

His heart pounded so hard that Caesar could hear it. He remained where he was, trying not to move more than was necessary to keep his head above the water. He grabbed for his knife in his waistbelt and wrapped his fingers tightly around it as he prepared to fight for his life.

A man popped up in front of him, making him lurch backward and hold the knife out between them.

“Whoa, big guy. We’re not after you. These smugglers have a date with the authorities. I have this for you.”

He handed Caesar a gold coin with a swirl around the edges.

“What the fuck is this?”

“That’s your marker. It will be called in someday when it’s your turn to save

someone from danger. Keep it safe.”

Caesar understood immediately by the man’s carefully crafted words. “I’ll return the favor as you have today.”

“Oh, I repaid my marker a long time ago. Now, I’m here simply to help people on their worst days. Come on. Let’s get you on board before the sharks start circling your wound.”

An hour later, he was dropped off at the shore with a burner phone, a heavily bandaged leg, and a coin. No boat, no girl, no explanations. Calling for a ride, Caesar vowed he’d make sense of this mess.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:35 am

Chapter One

Caesar scanned the faces of the would-be scuba divers as they approached the Danger Bluff boat. It was too engrained in him to stop scrutinizing those who signed up to head out into the ocean with him. He'd been out on the sea with someone who'd had nefarious plans. He'd survived that incident only with Kingsley's help.

Today's group appeared to be nothing more than tourists taking a vacation excursion to go snorkeling or diving. He judged most to be inexperienced. Of course, he hadn't picked up on any clues that Mindy was something other than the fun-loving flirt she had appeared to be. Caesar hoped his ability to pick up on clues was better than it had been that fateful day.

A quick motion on the path grabbed his attention as he jumped off the boat to give the group orientation. Isla Callas. Dressed in a vivid pink shirt with khaki shorts and flip-flops, she would have caught his attention anyway. Having just seen her appear on Magnus's screens, Caesar watched her approach with a laser-like focus.

It was hard to take his eyes off her. Her thick brown hair was pulled back in a ponytail. She was petite but fit. Her eyes were dancing with excitement. Was she joining his dive?

His phone buzzed, and he looked down to see that his roster of the guests going out on the water with him had been updated to include Isla. A message from Sadie followed quickly.

Hey! Isla just appeared. She immediately booked your excursion, changed in the

restroom, and checked her luggage until a room is available.

He schooled his features not to give away his inner thoughts and plastered his best friendly dive-instructor smile on.

“Sorry to rush in at the last minute,” Isla said as she hesitated beside the boat.

“No problem. The desk just notified me you’re going out with the group. We’re gathering over there in the shade to get our gear on,” he said, pointing her in the right direction. “My assistant, Jack, will get you set up.”

Waving a hand to invite her to precede him, Caesar forced himself not to focus on her curvy body as they walked to the covered area. Having done this orientation a few hundred times already, he shifted easily into giving the pre-departure safety information to the group.

“Okay, now on to the fun stuff. Jack, here, is my assistant on this trip. He’s going to help me get everyone set up with a wet suit. We’re all going to have great fun getting them on, and then we can head out to see all we can enjoy under the water's surface.”

Several minutes later, everyone was suited up and ready to go. As usual, most looked excited, some nervous, and two were embarrassed by their wet suit, which wasn’t flattering. Isla had flown into her suit with the ease of someone who dived regularly.

“Looks like you’ve done this before,” he said after calling everyone back together.

“A few times. I love the water and try to explore it wherever I am,” Isla said.

“That’s a good goal to have,” Caesar said. “Have you dived in New Zealand?”

“No, never.”

“Mr. Caesar, are sharks going to eat us?” a precocious eight-year-old boy asked. He looked excited by the prospect while his mother was horrified.

“Bradley James! Stop trying to scare me,” she ordered.

“Oh, there are sharks out there,” Caesar admitted, trying not to grin at his mother’s use of his middle name to warn him to knock it off. “If we’re lucky, we’ll see several different kinds. They won’t bother us if we leave them alone.”

Looking directly at Bradley James, he stressed, “Bothering them would be bad.”

The young man swallowed hard and nodded.

“We’ll start out on the water’s surface with everyone using snorkels. You’ll get to see a lot of things. After that, some of you may choose to lounge around on the deck and relax in the sun. Those of you with scuba certification can join me below the water.”

“Can I go?” Bradley James asked, raising his hand.

“Not this time. You can take a scuba lesson with me in the cove later this week if you’d like to learn how to breathe with the tanks,” Caesar said easily and then watched Bradley immediately nudge his mother. There was no doubt he’d see Bradley again.

“Will there be other scuba divers out there?” Bradley asked.

“No. Danger Bluff guests are the only ones with access to scuba diving in this area. Boats can come into the bay for lunch, to swim or snorkel, but the diving and other amenities are only available to guests like you. That helps preserve the ecosystem and keep everyone safe,” Caesar explained.

After answering a few more questions, Caesar and Jack herded everyone to the boat. Each took a position on the side of the boat to help their passengers board. To Caesar's pleasure, he noted Isla in the line in front of him.

"Come aboard," he invited before holding his hand out to help her step onto the deck.

"Thanks." Pushing her oversized sunglasses up, she hurried to where the others had taken a seat. "Hi, everyone! Isn't this exciting?" she asked, greeting the other guests.

"This is our first time on a boat. I hope we don't get sick," Bradley's mom said. "I gave everyone a motion-sickness pill."

"That should help," Isla said with a supportive nod.

Caesar smiled at the group. "Let's start with that before we leave the dock. If you're feeling ill, there are barf bags alongside every seat. Even if you're only slightly queasy, grab one to be prepared before you need it. In the extremely unlikely case that we will need life jackets, they're in the lockers running down the middle of the boat."

He checked for questions again before moving to unfasten the mooring ropes and push away from the dock. "And we're off!" he announced as Jack started the engines and got underway.

They didn't head too far from shore—just out into the deeper water of the cove where Danger Bluff was located. He noted a number of the passengers taking pictures of the glorious coastline where the resort was located. It was lovely on the land, but by sea, the resort was spectacular.

Noting Isla standing by the railing all alone, he took a second to watch her and felt a flash of remembrance ignite his brain like a lightning bolt as she checked her phone,

which displayed a navigational map. He forced himself to approach her and seemingly joked, “Don’t tell me you’re looking for pirate loot?”

“Maybe. It would be disappointing to have the pirates be no more than smugglers,” she answered without any deceit. “I was hoping you might be available for private explorations while I was here, or perhaps you have recommendations for someone trustworthy I could hire.”

Cesar cringed inwardly. “How do you know I’m not a bad guy?”

“You aren’t, are you?” she asked, studying his face.

“No, I’m pure Daddy all the way through.” He hesitated just long enough to see the term register visibly in her shocked expression before excusing himself to move slightly away to prevent Bradley from leaning too far over the deck. “Keep your feet planted on the deck until we stop.”

“Bradley James, you come sit right next to me,” his mother called.

Thank goodness for responsive parents. She wrapped an arm around his shoulders and returned to her conversation with another woman. He knew the young boy wouldn’t get away from her again.

“You’re good at what you do. I haven’t seen you get annoyed yet from wrangling all the guests,” Isla said quietly next to him.

“Of course not. He’s going to be a diving fan for the rest of his life.”

“You can tell that already, huh?” she said with a smile.

“Of course.”

“Just like you know I’m Little?” Isla asked boldly. The faint blush on her cheeks gave away her bravado and made her even more endearing.

“Ninety-nine percent sure,” he answered easily.

“What gave me away?”

“Nothing that most people wouldn’t chalk up to something else. For a Daddy, it’s the small clues that made me think you could be so special. We’re not through talking about this. Unfortunately, we’ve reached our dive spot. You won’t run away?”

“Nope. We have things to talk about,” she told him with a smile.

“Why does that scare me, Little girl?”

When her smile widened into an enchanting grin, Caesar had to force himself away. Damn, she’s gotten to me already.

An hour later, he left Jack in charge of Bradley James and the other snorkelers. Those who weren’t scuba certified enjoyed a snack and a beverage on board while Caesar took five of the group under the water. Leading the group around, he watched the family of four, who were skilled in diving, explore the area while always keeping him in sight. Isla, to his delight, stayed next to him.

He enjoyed watching her body language as they spotted a number of fish species, including one blue shark, several dogfish, octopi, and a scattering of sea urchins. The family hurried back to their sides when a school of dolphins seemed to fall in love with Isla and wanted to play. The sweet mammals generously interacted with everyone.

Caesar could see the regret on their faces when he signaled that it was time to head

for the surface. The moment they reached the air, the family chattered happily about their experience. Isla hung back while they climbed back into the boat.

“Did you have fun?” he asked.

“The best time. I love diving. This one was magical.”

“I’m glad. It’s your turn. Head up. There are snacks and drinks waiting for you.”

Occupied with a dozen tasks he needed to take care of as they headed back to shore, Caesar’s gaze returned repeatedly to Isla, who now sat with the group. She and the family shared the wonder of what they had seen under the water. By the look on almost everyone’s faces, there would be more students than just Bradley James in his beginning scuba class. A few were happy but satisfied with their ocean experience. They’d probably show up next on Kestrel’s flight tour if they hadn’t been there yet.

That was the great thing about Danger Bluff. It allowed for a variety of activities, from lounging by the pool to pushing their muscles to the limit during rock climbing with Rocco. He smiled at the thought of how integrated they were with their new positions here at the resort.

None of his team of six had discussed what would happen when the last token was redeemed. Caesar shook his head at the thought of the team scattering to different parts of the world. He trusted these men like his brothers and cared about their Littles like a devoted uncle.

He shrugged off his worries and forced himself to focus on taking one day at a time. Caesar mentally reviewed the information he’d gathered from Kingsley’s files. He had a lot of questions for Isla when he could ask her privately.

“Is there any chance you have room in your next dive group?” Isla asked as they

approached the mainland. “My room isn’t ready until after three. I’d love to go back out.”

“Let me check.” Caesar pulled out his phone and checked the schedule. “Looks like there’s two spots. Want me to call the front desk and see if they can sneak you into it?”

“Would you?”

“Definitely.”

Caesar pulled up the front desk and celebrated inside when Sadie answered, “Hey, Sadie. Isla is here in my first dive group. She’s wondering if she can get in the afternoon session. Can I let you talk to her?”

Hearing the enthusiasm in her fast, “Yes,” Caesar handed his phone to Isla as he prepared the boat to dock. “Go sit down so you won’t get bumped off balance,” he instructed. “I’ll get my phone in a minute.”

As he and Jack helped everyone step back onto the dock, Isla carefully returned his phone.

“Did they have space for you?” he asked.

“They did. Sadie said she’d send lunch to me with yours and Jack’s so I don’t get hungry. I love it here. Everyone’s so nice.”

“That Sadie is a keeper. She’s awesome at her job. We usually eat under the shelter after everyone gets out of their wet suits.”

“Perfect. Thanks for letting me hang around.”

Caesar forced himself to nod instead of answering as he wished to. He could save his thoughts until they could speak privately.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:35 am

Chapter Two

By the time Caesar had said goodbye to all the guests from the first round, Isla had peeled off the top of her wet suit and made herself comfortable at one of the tables. She tried to pretend to herself that she was studying the ocean view, but her gaze kept returning to Caesar. Biting her lip, she wondered if she could ask to borrow his phone again to undo her flirty move.

As he strolled forward to join her, a uniformed employee showed up with a laden tray. Isla watched Caesar thank the man and then take it from him. When he reached her a few minutes later, he set the tray down with a thump.

“I think Sadie thinks one of us has a hollow leg,” Caesar joked as he peeled off the top of his wet suit.

“I am hungry,” Jack professed as he took a seat across the table from Isla, leaving the chairs on both sides of her empty.

“Me, too,” Isla agreed, trying to look anywhere but at Caesar’s powerful chest. “Thanks for letting me crash your break time. Feel free to leave me here and do anything you need to do. I’m just enjoying the view.”

She felt her face heat when her gaze immediately focused on Caesar’s muscles instead of the beautiful panorama in front of them.

“It is gorgeous here at Danger Bluff,” Caesar agreed, seeming not to notice her perusal. “Okay, there’s two sandwiches of three different varieties. That means each

of you has two to eat.”

“I’m good with anything,” Isla said quickly.

“I’m going to take a ham and a lamb if that’s okay...? I need to make some calls,” Jack told them as he stood and picked up his phone.

“Go for it, Jack,” Caesar said.

Hoping she didn’t look too eager for him to leave, Isla snagged one labeled as veggie. “I’ll claim this one.”

“Are you a vegetarian?” Caesar asked as Jack walked away.

“No, but I seriously doubt that you are,” she laughed, waving the sandwich to encompass his muscle mass.

“You’re right, but that doesn’t mean that I don’t like veggies. How about if we split these in half? Then we can try them all.”

She watched him carefully cut them all, knowing she’d never eat an entire sandwich, much less two. When he finished, she reached over and picked up one of the veggie halves.

“Brat,” he growled when she laughed at his expression. That only made her laugh harder.

With a gleam in his eye, he picked up the other half and took a big bite, foiling her plan to eat that one as well. As soon as he swallowed, Caesar growled, “Checkmate.”

When she was finally able to recover, she took a drink of the canned cola. “Thank

you for letting me join you.”

“Of course. I couldn’t keep that view to myself. Tell me what you want to do on your private dive.”

“Are you thinking about taking me?” she asked, leaning forward eagerly.

“That depends on what you plan.”

“I’m going to be truthful. I think I can trust you.”

“Because I’m a Daddy?” he suggested, raising one skeptical eyebrow.

“Well, that and because you’re you,” she confessed. Isla didn’t know why she felt so comfortable around him. She just did.

“As long as you don’t tell me you have some long-hidden map to a secret buried treasure, I’m sure I can take you out,” Caesar teased.

Caught off-guard, she knew her expression gave her away when that statement came seemingly from out of the blue. Quickly, she tried to cover up her blunder. “Right? A treasure map. Who would be that lucky to have one fall into their hands?”

“Where’d you get it?” he asked. Obviously, she had not fooled him.

“I found it in my grandfather’s possessions. Grandma gave me the ledger he kept all his dives in. He loved scuba diving, even way back before all the fancy equipment.”

“It seems like you inherited his love for the water,” Caesar suggested.

“Yes. I wish I’d had him longer. We would have had fun together,” she said. “I was

pleased to get his notes.”

“And in this ledger was a treasure map?”

“More like a drawing and a set of coordinates.”

When he looked skeptical, she added, “And a few notes about why he’d marked that for his next exploration.”

“Your grandfather marked down coordinates in New Zealand to explore?”

“He did. He had plans dating back to the seventies, but he passed away in a hurricane off the coast of Florida before he could follow through.”

“He planned to travel from Florida to New Zealand in the seventies? That was a long way to go back then,” Caesar pointed out.

“He was a pilot for one of the airlines. He traveled everywhere. Unfortunately, the airline sent him on a flight to Florida just before a hurricane hit. My grandmother never recovered. She didn’t go through his things for years. When she did, I got his dive ledger because I’m the only one who loves scuba.”

“And you flew here immediately?” Caesar sounded skeptical.

“I know it sounds crazy. I got the ledger three years ago. I didn’t even open it. I needed to get away for a while, and the thought struck me to recreate some of my grandfather’s explorations. That’s when I found the map. I asked around about it and got some pretty shady responses. I could tell they thought it was a fake and were only interested in taking my money. When no one else was interested, I decided to come see for myself. I needed a vacation anyway.”

“Now, that’s the best reason to come to Danger Bluff. How about you show me this map, and I’ll let you know what I think. If it’s near here, we could spend a good day diving, even if it’s totally fake.”

“Do I have your word you won’t try to explore where the map says the treasure is located without me?” she asked, studying his face closely.

“I’ve reached this point in my life without finding buried treasure. I’m looking for something even more precious,” he admitted.

“What’s that?”

“My Little girl,” Caesar told her softly.

“You’ve never found someone right for you?” she asked.

“I think I may have met her today.”

“You’re talking about me?” she squeaked.

“Is that horrifying?” Caesar said with a smile.

“No. I don’t know what to think. I didn’t come here to find a Daddy,” she said, her voice sounding a little breathless.

“Perhaps that could be an added bonus...?”

She considered his suggestion and nodded, “That would be just as exciting as a buried treasure.”

“That’s good because I seem to have a new entry in my contacts. Someone named

Little Girl...?” He raised an eyebrow.

She tried to think of something to say and could only come up with, “Oops.”

“You are not sorry at all, Little girl. Perhaps you need a spanking,” he told her firmly.

“That doesn’t really happen,” she said with a laugh.

When he nodded, Isla heard herself say, “Maybe I do then.” Appalled that she’d been so brazen, Isla felt her face heat and knew she was blushing bright red.

Caesar reached around her to cup the back of her neck and pulled her close before offering, “I could be convinced to let you off with a warning this time in exchange for a kiss.”

Pressing her lips to his, she kissed him softly and started to move away. Caesar drew her gently forward again and claimed another kiss. This one was tender but beguiling. She opened her lips under his, and the handsome man deepened the kiss, making her squirm to the edge of her chair as she tried to get closer to him.

“Boss, the next group just turned onto the path,” Jack warned.

Caesar lifted his mouth from hers, and she could read the reluctance on his face. Her lips curved slightly as she celebrated that he was as affected as she was. “Eat some more, Little girl. Let’s go back out and let you swim like a fish,” he said as he picked up another half a sandwich and moved away to greet his next group as they wandered down to the dock.

She chose another, carefully wrapped up the rest, and stowed them in the small refrigerator under the counter. Taking a big bite, she chewed happily as she debated whether she needed to use the restroom. It seemed like a big hassle to take off the wet

suit. Deciding that she'd be okay, Isla took another swig of her cola and settled back in her seat to wait for everyone to wander into the shady sitting area. To her surprise, she'd almost eaten a second half of a sandwich. She really had been hungry.

Popping the last bite into her mouth, she watched the handsome, self-proclaimed Daddy check everyone in. He spent a few minutes with everyone to welcome and put them at ease. He was a charmer. That made her nervous. Was he really all that she thought he was, or could he be hiding some secret?

Her grandfather's notes had warned that he would need to be careful when he finally decided to hunt down the treasure. He had not dared pursue it immediately. No one knew he'd found a document hidden under the toilet lid in the library. He'd almost turned it in to the woman behind the desk but had hesitated to admit he'd tried to fix the clogged toilet instead of just reporting it.

Her grandfather had noted that he sat down to decide what to do. The chair he'd chosen had been on the edge of a group gathering for a genealogy meeting near the restroom. Everyone had jumped a few minutes later at the sound of a huge ruckus in the men's room. It had sounded like someone had ripped a sink off the wall—or thrown the ceramic top of a toilet across the room. When others jumped up to check out what had happened, Isla's grandfather had suddenly decided to become very involved in the discussion concerning the best research materials for tracing his family tree.

He'd caught a quick glimpse of the man who'd run from the bathroom as others had hurried in. That very man had been waiting at the main exit of the library when he'd walked out with some of the people in the meeting. Isla's grandfather had noted there had been something in the vigilant man's eyes as he'd scanned everyone who left. With the weathered paper tucked inside his ledger, her grandfather had abandoned his plan to return to the library to finish his research into the next place he'd wanted to explore for several months.

She remembered shivering when she'd read his accounting of that day. Even now, every time she unfolded that map, a chill ran down her spine. Isla wrapped her arms around herself.

"Are you okay? Getting tired?" Caesar asked, wrapping his large hand around her shoulder.

"I'm good. Sorry. A sad memory."

"Go potty," he said quietly. "Splash some water on your face. You've had a long travel day. That suit gets hot when you're out of the water."

"I'm fine," she assured him.

"I'll make that call when we get out there." He held up his hand to stop her protests before they started. "I won't allow you to be unsafe. If you're okay, we'll dive together."

"Okay."

Standing, Isla made her way to the small bathroom and peeled herself out of her suit. When she'd finished and righted her clothing, Isla washed her hands and followed his instruction to splash water on her face. Instantly, she felt better, whether it was from cooling down from the hot material, the water, or just knowing he cared. As she left the restroom, she found him watching for her.

Chapter Three

When they reached the dock after the second trip, Isla was zapped. The exercise, sun, and fresh air had taken the last of her energy reserves. Caesar was surrounded by the group, who all had questions and wanted to thank him. Knowing that Caesar would have a lot to do after that group left to clean the wet suits and get everything sorted for the next day, she texted him that she was going to check into her room and shower.

Heading out, she retraced her steps to the front desk and greeted the same woman who had helped her earlier. Remembering the employee's name from their earlier interaction, she greeted her. "Hi, Sadie! I'm Isla Callas. I hope my room is ready now."

"Hi, Isla. It is. Let me grab everything for you. You're on the fourth floor. I already had the bellhops take your things up to your room. Here's your keycard," Sadie informed her as she handed over a small folder with the room number and keycard.

"Thanks. And thanks again for letting me get into the scuba excursions."

"Did you have fun?" Sadie asked.

"It was a blast. I saw so much. Oh, I need to pay you for lunch, or do you put that on my bill?"

"That was compliments of the Danger Bluff resort," Sadie informed her with a smile.

“Thank you. I appreciate all your help.”

“Let us know if you need anything. We’re here to make your stay amazing,” Sadie told her.

“It’s off to a great start,” Isla assured her before turning to walk to the elevator. She stopped in her tracks at the sight of Caesar jogging toward her, dressed in swim trunks and a Danger Bluff polo. She tried not to drool as she let her gaze roam down his frame. His hair was dark and thick, and he had a short beard that was probably the result of simply not shaving for a few days. When she lowered her gaze, she took in the tattoos on his arms and the powerful leg muscles that propelled him, noticing a vicious scar on the front of one thick thigh. It didn’t take away from his allure. He was dangerous for her blood pressure.

“Hey, Isla. You disappeared before I could invite you to dinner.”

“Hi, Caesar. I knew you’d be busy for a while. I didn’t want to hold you up from your work.” Isla tried to play it cool.

“I do have some work left before I’m free, getting everything put together for tomorrow’s guests. If you’ll join me at seven, I’d love to take you to dinner,” he offered with a smile that did something to her insides.

“I... I was going to take a nap.”

“That’s a good idea. Set your alarm for a couple of hours and join me. You don’t want to go to bed now. That will play havoc with adjusting to a new time zone,” he recommended.

“Okay. Seven o’clock. Casual or dressy?”

“It’s all casual here. We’ll go to the restaurant that overlooks the water. A sundress or shorts will be fine,” he told her.

“I can do that.”

“Go up and get some sleep, Little girl. I’ll see you here by the front desk at seven,” Caesar said before he pushed the elevator button for her to go upstairs.

“Thanks. See you at seven,” she responded as she got on the elevator. When the doors closed, she leaned against the cool metal wall. What was happening here? He couldn’t be her Daddy, could he? And would he help her with the map? Or should she be wary?

“Miss?” a guest said from outside the elevator.

Isla blinked at her in confusion before realizing the elevator hadn’t moved anywhere.

“Sorry. I forgot to push a button. Are you going upstairs?”

“Yes, please.” The woman stepped inside and stood against the other wall after pressing the button for the third floor. “What floor do you need?”

“Four, please. Jetlag has gotten me, I’m afraid,” Isla shared as the elevator began to rise. She felt like an idiot.

“It’s awful. You’ll feel better tomorrow. Get some sleep,” the guest said as the doors opened on the third floor and she walked out.

“Thank you. I will.”

In just a few seconds, Isla stepped out and consulted the small folder Sadie had given her. Dragging herself down the hallway, she located her room and opened the door.

Smiling at the beautiful furnishings, Isla stared longingly at the bed but forced herself into the bathroom for a shower.

A few minutes later, she wrapped a soft towel around her body and dried her hair with another as best she could. With a final exasperated look in the mirror at her disheveled appearance, Isla gave in to her exhaustion. She headed for her carry-on and found her charger and her childhood stuffie, Nado. When everything was set up, she set her phone's alarm and plugged it in to charge as she slept.

After abandoning the towel on the floor, she pulled back the covers and lay down. Isla didn't usually sleep naked, but she was too sleepy to search for her nightshirt. Turning onto her tummy to get comfortable, she pulled Nado close before allowing her drooping eyelids to shut.

Beep! Beep! Beep!

Groggy, Isla lifted her head to look around. The unfamiliar surroundings made her heart rate skyrocket, and she pushed herself up to sit. Finding herself naked, she panicked a bit more and grabbed a handful of the sheet to shield herself.

After a few breaths, everything clicked back into place. She was in New Zealand on vacation at Danger Bluff. Isla pushed her hair back out of her face and laughed. Leave it to her to be frightened by her own phone. Snagging it off the nightstand, she quickly turned off the alarm.

A glance at the time showed she had plenty of time to dress and put on makeup before meeting Caesar if she moved now. Pushing herself off the bed, she headed for the bathroom before throwing her suitcase on the bed and unzipping it. Isla searched for something not too wrinkled after her long journey and pulled out a dress made of a material that laughed at wrinkles.

“I love this dress,” she announced to the empty room and chuckled. “Now, I’m talking to myself.”

Catching sight of her stuffie, she laughed again. “I was speaking to you, wasn’t I, Nado? I’m glad you’re here.”

After pulling on fresh underwear and a bra, she slid the dress over her head and smoothed it into place. Isla couldn’t resist swaying back and forth to swirl the skirt around her legs. It came to just above her knees, making it cute but not “I want to jump your bones” cute. She didn’t want him to think that she was trying to seduce him.

Finding her cosmetic bag, she carried it into the bathroom and took a few minutes to erase the circles under her eyes. Darn the time change! By the time she finished, Isla felt a lot better.

Grabbing her purse, phone, and room key, she headed downstairs. She was a bit early but would look around before seven.

As the elevator doors opened, she stared at the handsome man who waited for her. “Caesar! I’m super early.”

“I was eager to see you.” He walked forward to place his hand on the small of her back to steer her away from the other guests.

When they were out of the traffic pattern, he leaned down to kiss her softly before commenting, “Mmm, sweet.”

“I don’t know what to say to that,” she whispered.

“Say, do it again,” he suggested.

“Do—” The rest of the words never made it out of her mouth as he pulled her closer to press against his hard body. Responding automatically to his skilled kiss, Isla completely forgot where she was. When he lifted his head, she blinked up at him as she tried to pull herself together.

“I love that look in your eyes. I will look forward to satisfying it.”

“I’m sorry. I don’t really even know you. I don’t know why I’m acting like this.”

“Like what? Like a woman who’s found a man that intrigues her and makes her want to spend time with him?”

“Yes. That’s it,” Isla seized on that less intimate answer when what her body and mind were urging her to do was suggest he carry her upstairs and make love to her.

“Hmm,” he hummed, and she knew he knew just what kind of effect he had on her.

Pulling herself together, she straightened and squared her shoulders. “Look, Caesar. I don’t know what’s going on here. If you’re a lothario who preys on single women, do us both a favor and leave me alone.”

Immediately, he looked concerned. “I don’t play games, Little girl. I respond to you as much as you react to me. I’m not looking for a vacation fling. I think you’re my Little girl, and I would never hurt you. I’m sorry I moved too fast.”

Her stiff posture deflated. “You didn’t...scare me, I mean. I scare me. I react to you like no one I’ve ever met. It’s... It’s discombobulating.”

“It’s discombobulating to me as well,” Caesar said with a smile.

“You’ve never used that word before in your life, have you?” she asked, smiling back

at him.

“Never. But it’s a good one. It fits the situation perfectly. Come on, Little girl. Let’s go have some dinner, and maybe we can figure this out a bit more,” he suggested, taking her hand.

She nodded and allowed him to guide her to the outdoor restaurant. Lit by overhead fairy lights and globe lights on poles, it welcomed guests and charmed them with the sound of water in the distance.

“I bet it’s beautiful here earlier in the day,” she said, looking around at the beautiful plants and décor.

“It is. It’s close to the water, which automatically makes it a fun place for our guests and people out on the water. Many people who don’t stay here at Danger Bluff stop here for a bite to eat.”

“The food must be good then.”

“It is. I haven’t had anything that I haven’t loved. The lobster mac and cheese is the cheesiest. It’s super filling if you’re hungry,” he suggested.

“I’ll definitely have that before I leave. I think I’ll have something lighter tonight as my body adjusts. What do you think of the red snapper?”

“Delicious. You’ll love it.”

“Done. I’ll have that,” she announced, closing her menu.

A young man appeared at her side. “Hi, I’m Terrence. I’ll be your server tonight. You look like you’ve already made up your mind.”

“I have,” Isla confided before looking over at Caesar. “Do you need more time?”

“Nope. I’m ready, too.”

With their orders recorded, Terrence hurried away to get their drinks.

“How are you feeling after your nap?” Caesar asked, smiling at her.

She liked that his expression was one of fondness. Is that possible already? Yes.

“I had a hard time dragging myself out of bed. It was a good thing I set an alarm.”

“You’ll crash again tonight, and then tomorrow, you’ll wake up feeling well rested,” Caesar predicted.

“I hope you’re right. That was definitely the longest flight I’ve ever been on. How did you end up working here?” she asked.

“The man who owns the resort saved me from a bad situation. When he asked me to come, I didn’t hesitate. I owed him,” Caesar admitted.

“What happened?” she asked, leaning forward. Would he tell her the truth?

“A woman I considered my girlfriend convinced me to take her scuba diving. What I thought was a random destination turned out to be a very specific site. While we struggled to free a box from the ocean floor, bad guys showed up. It turned out that they were after the same prize.”

“Oh, no! What happened?”

“I got injured helping Mindy back to my boat with the heavy case. As soon as it was

loaded on the boat, she took off, leaving me.”

“She left you with the bad guys?” Isla asked, aghast.

“With the bad guys and a spear running through my thigh. Until the good guys showed up. Now, I get to be a good guy,” Caesar said.

That explains the scar on his leg .

He reached for Isla’s hand twisting on the tabletop. “I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else.”

She couldn’t tear her gaze away from his. “I don’t understand this.”

“I know. It’s okay. Just let me take care of you.”

Nodding, Isla turned her hand to intertwine her fingers with his. “Okay.”

He squeezed her hand.

“Here are your drinks,” Terrence announced.

They both looked at him and then back at each other with a smile. They’d been so wrapped up in each other that neither had noticed the server approaching.

When Terrence left, Isla asked, “What happened to that lady and your boat?”

“She went to jail for a year. The box was recovered. I don’t know what was in it. I really don’t want to know. Recovering it wasn’t worth lives,” Caesar told her.

“No.”

Isla fell silent. Here she was coming to follow a treasure map that her grandfather had left. He had to see the similarity to this awful event in his life.

“Hey. I don’t judge you by Mindy’s greed. You’re a totally different person. I will admit it made me hesitate when I discovered you came here following a map. Searching for treasure is dangerous. There’s always someone evil willing to do anything to get what they hope is a pile of money.”

She nodded. “My grandfather was very blunt about the risk in going after whatever the map leads to. He waited for years, pretending as if he hadn’t found anything in the bathroom. Unfortunately, he never had a chance to look for it.”

“So, you’re here to finish his legacy. I have a feeling he would be pleased,” Caesar murmured.

“I do, too.” Isla blinked away the tears that threatened at the thought of making her grandfather’s dream come true.

“If you trust me, I’ll ask you to show me the map one day. I don’t want you going after it without me.”

“After all that happened to you, I’m surprised you’ll even consider helping me.”

“If it were anyone other than a small crew that I trust, that now includes you, I would try to find someone honest to explore with you. But you, Little girl, aren’t to attempt this without me. And then, I’m going to insist that you listen to me every step of the way. I’m not going to risk you getting hurt.”

Nodding without questioning his conditions, Isla thanked him and added, “I’m glad to have you on my side. After meeting you, I wouldn’t want to do this without you.”

“Then we do this together.”

After a moment of silence, Isla asked, “How long have you been diving?”

“Years. I was on a dive team for the Coast Guard for several years. After that, I knew I always wanted to be in the water, so I started giving lessons and taking experienced divers out. Now, I’m here running the dive program.”

She smiled. “Except for the incident with your ex-girlfriend, it sounds like you’ve had a pretty good life.”

“I definitely have. And it’s getting even better now.” With a squeeze of her fingers, Caesar sat back. “Here comes Terrence with our food. We’ll talk more about explorations another time. Tonight, let’s relax and get to know each other better.”

“I’d like that.”

Chapter Four

Waking up the next morning, Isla stretched. She was in the exact same position she always went to sleep in. Hugging her stuffie, she guessed she hadn't moved all night. "Did you sleep as well as I did?" she asked.

Nado looked back at her with coal-black eyes. He looked scary, but she knew he was a softie. She didn't tell anyone the truth. Nado had a reputation for frightening away all the monsters under her bed. He was super good at that.

After giving him one more squeeze and a kiss on his snout, Isla slid out of bed. Scurrying to the bathroom, she peed and washed her face before looking longingly at the shower. She usually showered before bed but feeling warm water pelting her body sounded amazing—totally worth delaying breakfast for a while.

Thirty minutes later, she stepped into the elevator in shorts and a T-shirt. When she reached the main floor, Isla hesitated. Did she want to go to the restaurant in the main building or back by the water? That decision was easy.

Soon, she sat by the railing and looked out over the beautiful bay. A Danger Bluff boat glided by, and she waved, hoping it was Caesar. To her delight, a large figure rushed to the railing to wave back. Smiling with happiness, she watched the boat move farther out.

"Hi, Miss!" A young woman said, approaching her. "You're right between breakfast and lunch. I can get in an order for either one. Do you have a preference?"

“Definitely lunch. Could I have a hamburger and fries?” she asked, not even waiting to look at the menu.

“Of course. What can I get you to drink?”

“I’d love a cup of coffee and some water.”

“You’ve got it. I’ll be right back with your coffee.”

Her phone buzzed with a message, and she grinned at the name identified. Daddy . She opened it and read:

Hey, Little girl. I hope you slept well. I’m missing you today. Will you have dinner with me tomorrow?

Yes.

I can’t wait.

How can I feel so strongly about him already? Isla set her phone down and scooted it away. She knew he was busy and needed to pay attention to the passengers. She wouldn’t distract him by messaging back again.

A short time later, the waiter returned with a cup of the hot beverage. Isla sat looking over the water as she sipped delicious, hot coffee that helped disperse the last of her sleepiness. This was a gorgeous place. Totally worth the long trip, even if the map turned out to be a wild goose chase.

“Hey...Isla, right?”

A friendly voice made her turn. Sadie, the front desk manager, stood by the table.

“Hi, Sadie.” On a whim, Isla asked, “Do you have time to join me for coffee?”

“Of course. Let me grab a cup.”

Sadie bustled off to grab a cup for herself and returned with the coffee carafe to fill her empty cup and Isla’s.

“Thanks,” Isla said with a smile.

“Of course. I have to take care of special people.”

After watching Sadie return the carafe to the server’s station and settle in a seat, Isla asked, “Special people?”

“Caesar was all smiles as he went to work this morning. He enjoyed your date last night.”

Blushing furiously, Isla rushed to say, “We didn’t sleep together.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to embarrass you. Caesar doesn’t sleep around, and I expect neither do you. He just looked happier than I’ve ever seen him this morning. I knew you were the reason.”

“Oh. That makes me happy. I enjoyed our date last night, too. He’s definitely different from any other man I’ve met,” Isla shared.

“Your burger, Miss,” the waiter said, setting a plate in front of Isla. “Want anything, Sadie?”

“I didn’t until I smelled that. Could I have the same thing?” Sadie asked with a smile.

“I’ll put your order in.”

When the server left, Sadie waved at Isla’s plate. “Please eat while it’s hot. Mine will be here fast.”

On a whim, Isla cut her burger in half. “Why don’t we split mine and then we can share yours?”

“Deal,” Sadie agreed and pulled over a bread plate to use as her plate. Helping herself to one half, she took a big bite. “Thank you. I missed breakfast. I was supposed to grab something after I got to work, but it was crazy this morning. Just don’t tell my Daddy.” Sadie’s mouth rounded in an O as she realized what she’d said. “Oh.”

“You have a Daddy?” Isla asked, knowing instinctively that Sadie wasn’t talking about her father.

“I shouldn’t have said that. Some people don’t understand,” Sadie whispered, dropping her hamburger onto the small plate.

“It’s all right. I’ve never met anyone who lives that lifestyle, but I’ve heard of it. Eat. Really, you’re fine.”

“You’ve met other people,” Sadie assured her, appearing to relax. “It’s more common than you think.” She picked up the burger half and took another bite.

“Truly?” Isla looked around at the families and couples who had streamed in after her for lunch.

“I don’t know about the guests. There are a few, I suspect, as they come to the front desk. There are definitely some Dominant/submissive couples.”

“I bet you see all sorts of things at the front desk,” Isla said quietly.

“I do. I love my job. There are a few unpleasant people, but I’ve met so many amazing ones.”

Isla leaned in to whisper, “Does your Daddy work here?”

“He does. Rocco is mine. He’s our rock-climbing instructor,” Sadie said with a soft smile.

“Rocco? And he’s the rock-climbing expert?”

“I know. He also leads the hikes around the grounds and takes people on picnics.”

“That’s great. I need to get a list of all the activities available. I love the water, but a hike around Danger Bluff sounds great. It’s so pretty here.”

“It is. I don’t ever want to leave,” Sadie said.

“I can understand that. It’s going to be tough to head back to the airport.”

“Who knows? Maybe you’ll stay here.” Sadie popped the last bite of the shared hamburger into her mouth as the waiter set a fresh one in front of her. “Here! Choose your half.”

“I probably only need a half,” Isla said as she followed directions.

“Next time, we’ll just split one and ask for extra fries,” Sadie suggested easily.

“Sounds good,” Isla said, wondering when that could even happen. The thought was nice. She liked knowing that Sadie enjoyed her company.

By the time they finished and each lady had signed their bills, Isla noticed the Danger Bluff boat returning to the dock. “There’s the boat.”

“Want to take the guys’ lunches down to them?” Sadie asked with a twinkle in her eye.

“Could I? I’d love that.”

“The kitchen delivers them to the front desk, and I send them down. Come with me, and you can take them.”

Ten minutes later, Isla held the sack of what she supposed were sandwiches. She impulsively hugged the sweet woman at the desk and was squeezed tightly in response. “Thank you so much, Sadie.”

“You’re welcome. Go chat with Caesar. Then, stop by and pick up a packet of excursions. His day off is the day after tomorrow. You’ll want something to do tomorrow while you wait to spend time with him.”

“Smart. See you in a few,” Isla said before heading out the door toward the dock.

Almost skipping with happiness down the path, the thought floated through her mind that it didn’t seem like she’d just met Caesar the previous day. A group of tourists passed her, chattering about all they’d seen and how fun it had been. She walked around a curve and saw the two men cleaning wetsuits. Both men had peeled themselves out of the tops of their protective gear. Caesar’s muscular back made her mouth water. He’s so hot.

“Anyone hungry?” she called, raising the bag to show them she came with goodies.

“Isla!” Caesar shouted before jogging toward her to sweep her up in his arms.

“Don’t squish the sandwiches,” she squeaked as her heart thumped hard at being in his arms.

“Fuck the sandwiches, Little girl,” he growled against her ear before relenting and setting her back on the dock.

Unable to stop her giggles, she slid her hand into his and tugged him back to where the other man still worked. “Hi, Jack! I ate lunch with Sadie, and she let me bring you all lunch. The morning dive group looked happy as I passed them.”

“Hi, Isla. Thanks for bringing sandwiches. Mind if I eat first and finish this in a few, boss?” Jack asked.

“It’s a good idea,” Caesar agreed.

When Jack disappeared with his choice, Isla said, “He’s not leaving because of me, is he?”

“No. He spends every lunch on the phone. Thanks for coming to keep me company. Are you still hungry?”

“No way. Eat. I know you are after being out on the water. Was it a good group?”

“Not as amazing as the one I had yesterday,” Caesar assured her. “I have a day off coming up. Want to spend it with me?”

“I’d love that. When can we look at the map? I don’t want to hijack your day off, but maybe we could check it out?” Isla proposed, watching his face to see how he reacted.

“That was exactly going to be my suggestion. Did you and Sadie have fun together?”

“We did. I like her a lot. She’s going to show me all the activities to choose from tomorrow while I’m waiting for you to have a day off.”

“So, you already investigated my schedule,” he said with a grin.

“I didn’t really investigate it. Sadie shared that you were off the day after tomorrow. I wouldn’t have suggested anything unless you said something,” Isla assured him.

“Little Fish. Every spare minute I have is yours.”

“Is that my nickname now?” she asked, tilting her head to look at him quizzically.

“You probably would rather I don’t call you, Little girl, in front of everyone,” he suggested.

“I like it. Water brought us together, so it seems appropriate. Can I be a fierce shark fish?”

“You can be anything you wish, Little girl,” he said fondly.

Caesar scooted back and scooped Isla from the bench she sat on. Plopping her on his lap, he held her securely with one arm wrapped around her waist. His free hand cupped her face and tilted it up as he leaned forward to kiss her.

Without even thinking about it, Isla wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed herself against his hard frame as she eagerly met his kiss. Instant heat flared between them as his lips explored hers. She loved how he tasted her as if she were the sweetest treat.

When he leaned away, Caesar shook his head. “You are addictive, Little girl.”

She grinned, happy he thought so. Isla decided to enjoy every moment with the powerful man. Her Daddy.

“I like whatever that thought was,” he said, watching her face.

“You would have, Daddy,” she said, trying that name out.

Scorching kisses and sweet words rewarded her. She clung to his body, enjoying every exciting exchange. Heat gathered inside her, making her want him more than anyone she’d ever desired.

The racket she suspected was deliberate before Jack reappeared, made Caesar set her back on her bench and pick up his sandwich as if they were only chatting. His assistant’s gaze danced with laughter as he got back to work. Isla didn’t feel a bit self-conscious. Being with Caesar felt right.

“I better get out of here and let you get back to work. Unless you want some help?” she offered.

“You’re here on vacation. Go have fun,” Caesar answered firmly.

“Okay, I’m going to lie by the pool and have one of those drinks with an umbrella.”

“Don’t have too much fun,” Caesar warned.

“I’ll try,” she teased as she left.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:35 am

Chapter Five

Following a text message, Isla waited at the elevator for Caesar, who'd said he'd come get her for dinner the following evening. When the doors opened, Caesar stepped out.

He gathered her in his arms to kiss her thoroughly. "I missed you."

"I missed you, too. Shall we go to dinner or look at the map first? I'd really like you to see it," Isla said eagerly.

"I share the fifth floor with my team. They're all at dinner right now. No one should be there," Caesar offered.

"How do we get there? The elevator only goes to four."

"It just takes a special touch."

He pressed a decorative button above the down arrow on the wall. When the elevator arrived and a couple stepped out, Caesar waved her inside. He pressed his hand to a panel, and the car began to rise.

"I thought that was just a fake button," Isla said, wide-eyed.

"It is for everyone whose prints aren't on record. Those living on that floor are the only people who can get upstairs."

“Is that for security reasons? Or is something bad going on up there?” Every scary movie popped into her head as the doors opened.

“You’re safe. The elevator here has a regular button. You can get downstairs easily,” Caesar assured her. “Come inside. You’ll see it’s all very normal.”

She followed him into a large gathering area with comfortable couches and a large TV. To her delight, a stuffed black cat sat on the couch. He was obviously well-loved.

“Are there kids here?” she asked.

“No. Just Littles. That’s Hades. What’s your stuffie’s name?”

“Nado,” she answered automatically as she looked around, ensuring this wasn’t an ax murderer’s workshop.

“Nado. Cute. What kind of stuffie is it?”

“Nado is a shark, of course. Haven’t you ever watched that movie with sharks that are thrown out of the ocean by a tornado?” she asked, turning to face him.

“I get it. Nado is short for tornado. That’s cute. I’ll look forward to meeting Nado soon. I also think you watch too many scary movies.”

“Oh, I’ve never seen them. I get nightmares just from the commercials on TV,” Isla said. “My imagination makes them terrifying.”

He grinned. “Note to self—no commercials. Want to look at the map out here, or should we spread it out on a table in my apartment?”

Isla looked around at the doors. All but one was decorated with a colored drawing. She surmised that the stuffie on the sofa went with the person who lived behind the door with the picture of the black cat. There was a kiwi she recognized from her research on New Zealand. A spider, swan, and penguin rounded out the pictures.

When Caesar led her to the blank door, her heart hurt for him. He didn't have someone who'd made him a drawing. She instantly wondered if there were crayons and paper in the gift shop.

"You need a picture," she said softly as he opened the door.

"You'll make one for me, Little girl," he responded with a smile.

"If you'd like."

"Thank you. Come inside. Let's put the map on the kitchen island. There's good light in there."

After leaving her sandals by his door, she hopped up on a bar stool. Isla pulled the map out of her bra and spread it out. When he looked at her strangely, she asked, "What? I don't have any pockets. Where else was I supposed to hide it?"

"I've never been more jealous of a map in my life." Caesar dispersed her embarrassment with a look that contained enough heat to make her wiggle on her stool.

"Come look at this." She pointed to a spot on the map. "I really struggled to figure out that those letters were an NZ for New Zealand. From different angles, that writing looks like different things. I thought the Z was a two for a while. Once I figured that out, I searched the coastline to find anything resembling the map. What do you think?"

“I think you’re right. It looks like our coastline here. There’s one way to find out for sure.”

“How’s that?”

“There’s a computer guy on my team. He could tell us quickly if our guesses are right.”

“Will he take our treasure?” she asked nervously.

“Goodness no, my Little Fish. Any treasure discovered belongs to New Zealand anyway. I’m just going to make sure you’re safe looking for it.”

“Thanks.”

Impulsively, Isla scooted to the edge of her stool and wrapped her arms around his neck. Pressing her mouth to his, she kissed him with all the heat that brewed inside her every time she spent time with this magnetic man. His groan in response made her smile, happy that he was as attracted to her as she was to him.

That grin disappeared as he took control of the kiss and deepened their exchange. He wrapped his arms around her waist and stood, lifting her from her seat as he seduced her with drugging kisses. She tightened her arms around his neck, but he held her securely with his strength.

When he sat down on the heavily cushioned couch, she registered it before Caesar pressed his mouth to the pulse on her throat. Shivers went through her body at the sensual touch and increased as he caressed her back before gliding his fingers under the bottom of her shirt. The feel of his warm hands on her bare skin built the heat low in her abdomen that seemed to always simmer when she was around him.

Isla ran her hands over his muscular torso, enjoying the feel of the scenery she'd gotten to see when visiting the dock. Needing to see him, she tugged at the T-shirt he wore. Without a single word, Caesar reached over his shoulder to grab a handful of the material and yanked it off in one fluid movement.

Daringly, Isla tugged her shirt over her head and threw it away. Immediately, he cupped her breasts in the wispy lace bra she wore. Isla knew he'd seen her body in a bikini as she'd tugged the wetsuit on and off. He'd been completely professional then. The expression on his face now was hungry.

"You about killed me with this on the dock. I should spank you for tempting me," he growled.

"I was just getting dressed like everyone else," she protested as she explored his muscles and washboard abs.

"You're not like anyone else. You're mine, Little girl."

The heat in his eyes made her nod. "I'm yours, Daddy."

"Are you ready for me to take you into my bedroom and finish unwrapping the best present I've ever gotten?"

Isla hesitated for a minute and saw his face as he worked to control his desire. "It's not that I don't want to. I just need to tell you that I'm not on anything. You know...birth control. I haven't been with anyone for a couple of years."

"Thank you, Isla. I needed to know that. I'll protect you with a condom. I was tested before coming here," Caesar told her as he caressed her skin.

Reassured that he didn't seem turned off by her honesty, Isla told him, "I was tested

after my last relationship ended.”

“Good girl. Is there anything else we need to discuss before I make love to you?”

“I’m really wet,” she whispered, needing him to know how turned-on she was.

“You’re going to kill me, Little Fish.” Caesar leaned forward and wrapped her in a bear hug before rising to his feet and heading down the hall.

Isla got a quick glimpse of a plain room with a large bed. Immediately, she wanted to make this more like a home for him. That thought was jolted out of her head as he set her gently on the mattress before kneeling in front of her. His hands coaxed the elastic waistband of her skirt over her hips. She rocked from side to side so he could pull it from underneath her and toss it away.

Then he moved between her legs and cupped her head to bring her lips to his. She responded eagerly, craving his taste. She didn’t understand what was happening. Her body and mind responded to him with a hunger that astonished her.

His hands trailed up her spine to the clasp of her bra. With a flick of his fingers, he released it and followed the imprint of her bra along her side to brush over the swell of the sides of her breasts. Delightful tingles shimmered through her as he teased her sensitive skin.

She eased back slightly from his body to allow him to glide one hand between their bodies. Isla gasped into his mouth as he cupped one small breast and rubbed his thumb over her beaded nipple. He kissed her with heat that made her toes curl before shifting back to look over her body.

“Damn, Isla. You’re so beautiful.” He caressed her as he stroked his free hand up her slim thigh to rub over her mound covered by the thin lace panties. “Bare?”

“Yes,” she said as her cheeks heated.

“Spread your legs.”

She moved her thighs slightly apart.

“More.”

Isla knew she was blushing furiously, but she followed his directions and parted her legs as far as the mattress would allow her. She watched him focus on the material pressed against her core. He reached out to trace a finger over the wetness that darkened the fabric.

“You’re so wet, Isla.” His voice was low and roughened with passion.

“Every time I’m with you,” she admitted.

Caesar shook his head as if trying to hold on to his control at that intimate knowledge. “I need to see you, Little girl. Take them off.”

“Me?” she squeaked.

“Yes. Take them off,” he repeated with heat in his voice.

Scooting to the edge of the bed, she didn’t have room to stand. She looped her fingers in the sides of her panties and wiggled around to slide the wisp of material over her hips. As soon as she reached mid-thigh, Caesar took over. Whisking them off, he held the fabric to his nose and inhaled.

It was such an animalistic gesture that it touched something deep inside her. “I need you, Daddy.”

Caesar rose to his feet, dropping the lacy garment to the floor. “Scoot back to the pillows,” he growled.

She could see his cock pressed against his slacks. Isla followed his directions but never looked away from his chiseled body. He dealt with his pants quickly and eased his boxer briefs away from his thick erection. As she watched him step out of his shoes and clothing, she remembered the jagged scar on his thigh. It did nothing to lessen his sex appeal. The battle wound only made him seem stronger and fiercer.

Free, he crawled up the bed to cage her with his body. Her hands rubbed over his form, tracing the muscled grooves of his broad chest and abdomen. Her mind marveled at the raw strength that his form contained. He lowered himself to her body, supporting most of his weight on his forearms. She loved the feeling of being pinned underneath him.

He kissed her hard before sizzling her skin by trailing more kisses down the line of her throat. Caesar paused in the hollow of her throat. She knew he could feel how fast her heart was beating. He bit her skin lightly as if staking his claim, and her body responded with a gush of arousal.

Automatically, she raised her pelvis to rub against him—needing more. He shifted his thigh between her legs, and she ground herself against him.

“Please,” slipped out of her mouth.

“No rushing Daddy,” he chided her.

“Daddy!”

His mouth closing around her nipple erased whatever she’d been about to say. The heat of his lips as he sucked the small tip into his mouth made her freeze in place,

hoping he'd never stop but wanting so much more. She threaded her fingers through his thick, dark hair to hold him to her breast. When he released that peak with a pop, she rolled slightly to offer him her other breast. He repeated his attention to that sensitive mound, dragging his day-old beard against her skin.

Isla loved the feel of his slightly rough hands. He had working hands that scrubbed the floor and hull. She'd watched his power in motion as he'd wrestled with rough ropes to tether the boat. Now, as his fingers caressed her, she loved the extra stimulation.

"Please, please, please," she begged as he continued to torture her with his mouth.

When he released her nipple, he gave a light chuckle and shook his head before kissing a path down her body, scooting lower with every nibble until he held her thighs parted widely and set his lips on her clit.

Isla cried out at the sensation, her eyes rolling back as he flicked his tongue rapidly over the sensitive nub. She was going to come, and she had never come this quickly before in her life. Nor had any man brought her to orgasm with his mouth on her pussy.

Caesar hummed against her swollen, sensitive folds, driving her arousal higher. A moment later, he thrust his tongue into her channel.

She grabbed his shoulders and cried out, "Oh, God!"

Her Daddy released her thigh with one hand and thrust two fingers into her as he resumed suckling her clit, and that was it. She couldn't control the orgasm that broke free, shaking her entire body with its power.

Panting and unable to form words, Isla stared at her Daddy as he lifted his head.

“You are so perfect, Little Fish.” After wiping his lips on the sheets, he crawled up her body and nestled his erection against her swollen folds.

She flattened her palms on his lower back and smoothed them up his muscular body. Damn, he was built. When she reached his shoulders, she gripped him and lifted her gaze. “You’re not moving.”

He smiled. “I’m admiring your expression. I want to memorize it.”

She squirmed beneath him. “Can you memorize it after you finish what you started?”

He chuckled. “So eager.”

“Yes.” She lifted her hips, trying to get more pressure. The orgasm he’d given her had been powerful, but she was by no means done. She craved him inside her even more than she had before.

Caesar pushed up onto his hands and knees, kissed her quickly, and then reached over to open a drawer on his nightstand. After snagging a foil packet, he straightened to kneel between her legs, watching her intently while he rolled the condom down his thick shaft.

Isla licked her lips. Part of her wanted to take his length into her mouth and make him writhe the way he had her, but she’d save that for another time. Right now, she was too desperate to have his impressive erection inside her pussy.

“Are you sure, Little Fish? I don’t want you to feel pressured to have sex with me the first time I bring you to my apartment.” He dropped down so his hands were at either side of her head, no part of him touching her.

She reached for his hips and tugged. “I’ve never wanted anything more. You’re

killing me.”

He smiled. “So, you’re saying you’d like me to take things slow?”

She shook her head and groaned. “No, I’m saying thrust into me before I lose my mind.”

Her Daddy dropped down over her, clasped her face with his hands, and did exactly what she’d requested, thrusting into her to the hilt without another moment of hesitation.

Isla cried out as she lost focus on him. He was huge, but it felt so good. She’d never been with a man as well-endowed as Caesar. He was the entire package—strong, funny, sexy, intelligent, and the best Daddy she could ever imagine.

“I love that sound, Little Fish,” he growled, setting his lips on her ear. He bit down playfully on her earlobe next. “Do it again.”

When he eased partway out and thrust back in even deeper, she gave him what he demanded. The sound of her own voice filling the room startled her. She’d never been the sort of person to make noises during sex, but then again, she’d never had sex this amazing before, either. Maybe she would have always been vocal if she’d been with the right man.

Caesar kept repeating the same motion—easing almost out and thrusting in deep again. Every time he did so, she fell a bit harder for him.

“Reach between us and play with your clit, Isla,” he encouraged.

She gasped.

“Do it, Little Fish. Make yourself come around my cock.”

“I...”

He paused, his erection entirely inside her as he met her gaze. “Don’t tell me you’ve never made yourself come before, Isla.”

She shook her head and licked her lips. “I have, but not with someone watching.”

“From now on, I want to be watching when you touch yourself.”

She gasped again. Was he serious? How would he ever know? And how long did he expect this fling to last? She had only planned on staying at Danger Bluff for a few weeks. She’d figured she could extend her stay a bit if she hadn’t yet found the treasure, but not indefinitely.

“Look at Daddy,” Caesar commanded.

She met his gaze.

“You were deep in your head. Come back to me.”

“Sorry, Daddy.” She wiggled her hips, arching to get more purchase.

He stroked her cheeks with his thumbs, not moving. “What were you thinking about that took you out of the moment, Little Fish? Does it bother you that I don’t want you to masturbate without me watching? Am I being too demanding?” His brow furrowed.

She quickly shook her head. “No, Daddy. It’s so sexy that it made me worry about how much I will miss you when I have to go back to my real life.”

He drew in a slow breath. “Maybe this could be your real life now, Little Fish,” he suggested softly.

Her breath hitched. “I... I don’t know. We’ve only known each other a few days.”

“I knew you were my Little girl in an instant as soon as I saw you rushing to join my tour group. You took my breath away and always will until the end of time. But we’ll discuss this more another time. Right now, I want to feel my girl come hard around my cock. Can you do that for me, Isla?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never come twice in a row.” Feeling bolder, she slid one hand down her body and between their torsos to find her clit. She shuddered the moment she stroked the greedy nub. “Maybe...” she murmured as her eyes rolled back.

“Good girl.” He slid almost out of her and eased back in at a slower pace.

When she looked at him, she found his brow furrowed from strain. She suspected he was on the edge of an orgasm and was waiting for her.

“That’s it, Little Fish. Make yourself feel good. Later, you can do it again while I watch.”

Her eyes widened.

“That’s right, Isla. I’m going to watch next time, so I’ll learn how you like to be touched.” He brought his lips to hers and kissed her slowly as he continued to glide in and out of her languidly.

She didn’t think he needed any lessons. He’d made her come just five minutes ago.

Her eyes fluttered shut as she found just the right pressure, location, and pace to get

herself off. Usually, she needed a vibrator, but not today. She doubted she would ever need a vibrator again as long as she was with Caesar.

Suddenly, she was at the edge, and she eased back on the pressure, trying to drag out that blissful precipice. She'd always wished she could freeze that moment and enjoy it longer before crashing over the other side. But in seconds, she was unable to hold back, and her body clenched down around his shaft as stars filled her vision.

Caesar joined her in seconds, crying out his own release, his voice mixing with hers to fill the room with the sounds of pleasure.

Page 7

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Chapter Six

“I haven’t asked what you do when you’re not vacationing in New Zealand, Little Fish,” Caesar said as he lifted a chicken nugget to her lips.

She snatched the nugget from his fingers so fast he was lucky she hadn’t nicked him with her teeth. She giggled as she chewed and swallowed. “Sorry. Sometimes, I take on some shark tendencies.”

He chuckled. “I see that.” He lifted his hand and examined his fingers, pretending to make sure he’d escaped unscathed. “I better use a fork to feed you from now on.”

She made that delightful giggling sound again. “I could feed myself, you know.” She pointed toward the plate of nuggets, fries, and apple wedges he had in front of him. He’d intentionally ordered one large serving from the kitchen so he could Daddy her all evening.

He pulled the plate dramatically farther from her. “Nope. Daddy’s job.”

She sighed, but she was grinning. “To answer your question, I’ve been working as a traveling nurse for five years. It’s very rewarding, and I get to see so much of the country. I didn’t renew my contract when it ended last week so that I could take this extended vacation to New Zealand and become a treasure hunter instead.”

Caesar was impressed. “A nurse. That’s a very tough job. What an amazing woman you are. Only very special people can take care of the sick.”

She shrugged. "I enjoy it. I like helping people." She pointed at the plate of food. "I burned off a lot of calories rock climbing with Rocco today. Are you going to feed me or what?"

He grinned as he lifted a fry to her mouth and then pulled it back before she could snatch it out of the air. "Depends. Are you going to bite me with those shark teeth?"

She shook her head and crossed her heart with her hand. "Promise." After chewing and swallowing the next bite, she added, "Unless you ask me to."

He lifted his brows. "I think my Little girl has a naughty side."

She shrugged. "Maybe. I don't know. I've never been Little with anyone before, but I had lunch with Sadie again today, and she told me there are five Littles living here at Danger Bluff and, together, they like to make mischief." Isla tapped her lips, obviously thinking before she continued. "Hey, there are five other apartments up here. The ones with the pictures on the doors. Are those the Littles Sadie was referring to?"

"Yep. There are six men on my team. All of them have found and claimed their Little girl since we moved here. I was the last man standing." He offered her an apple wedge.

She accepted it. After swallowing, she spoke again. "Sadie said Rocco rescued her from a dangerous situation."

It was time to fill her in on more of the details. "He did. We all did. And we continued to do so for the rest of the women who have joined our family. All six of my team members owed a marker to our benefactor, a man who saved all of us from a previous, desperate situation."

“Like the one where Mindy left you for dead with a spear through your leg,” Isla guessed.

“Yes. Now, we work for a man named Kingsley. He brought us all together here to return the favor and save others from perilous situations. After Sadie was Celeste, and then Zara, Juniper, Lyra, and now you.” He watched her closely as he gave her this information.

“Me?” She sat up straighter on the stool. The only thing she was wearing was the T-shirt he’d given her after they’d had sex. He hadn’t even let her have her panties back.

“Yes, Little Fish, you.”

“But I’m not in danger.”

He drew in a breath. “I believe you probably are. We just don’t know where it’s coming from yet.”

Her eyes were wide. “How could anyone know that?”

“Kingsley knows things none of us understand. Somehow, he knew you were in danger even before you arrived. That’s why I was assigned to protect you.”

Isla gasped. Suddenly, she jumped down from the stool and backed up. She kept moving until she hit the wall and plastered herself to it. Her eyes darted to the door and then down at her T-shirt. She wanted to bolt.

Fuck . Caesar stood. “Isla...”

She shook her head and then bolted for the bedroom.

He followed her and stood in the doorway, watching as she gathered her clothes from all over the floor. “Isla, listen to me.”

She turned around and glared at him. “You tricked me.”

“No, Little Fish. I swear.”

“I’m a job. You were hired to...to-to-to... I don’t even know what you were hired to do, but you lured me into your bed.”

He needed to remain calm and help her see that wasn’t the case. “Isla, I did not manipulate you. Yes, I was assigned to protect you from an unknown enemy, but that fact is irrelevant. You’re my Little girl. That just happened.”

She glanced around and then shuffled backward toward a door she likely suspected was the bathroom. In her confusion and frustration, she probably didn’t remember which door led to the master bath. “What about Sadie and the other women? How did they end up in relationships with your teammates? That’s not believable, Caesar.” Her voice shook.

“To be honest, none of us understand it any better than you do, Isla. Kingsley is some kind of all-knowing matchmaker. That’s our best guess.”

“That’s crazy. All of you are crazy.”

She hadn’t even met over half of his makeshift family, but he couldn’t blame her for what she was feeling. If he were in her shoes, he’d be just as skeptical—perhaps more so from being burned badly by Mindy. “Sit down and talk to me, please.”

She shook her head, her thick brown hair flying around. “I need to get out of here. I need space to think.” She turned around and yanked open the door behind her. It did

not lead to the bathroom.

Isla gasped and froze on the threshold. “What is this?” she asked, her voice trembling.

“It’s a playroom.”

She took a tentative step forward, keeping her clothes cradled in her arms. “Whose room is it?”

“Yours.”

She jerked her head around to shoot daggers at him. “Mine? It can’t be mine. We just met.”

“The furniture has been there since I moved into this apartment. All of my teammates are Daddies. We knew it. Kingsley knew it. He also knew we wouldn’t be satisfied in a vanilla relationship and that when we finally met our special Little girl, we would move her in and be glad we already had the basics of a room started.”

“Basics!” Her voice rose an octave. “This room is not basics, Caesar. It’s a Little girl’s underwater heaven.”

At least her words indicated she liked what he’d done. “I know. I started it right away when I met you.”

“That was three days ago. No one could have put up this under-the-sea wallpaper and arranged all these additional matching blue accessories in three days.”

“Sure, they could. I did.” He took a tentative step closer to her. “I ordered everything from town. Someone picked it up for me, and I hung the wallpaper after work last

night.”

“Did you sleep?” she asked in a shrill voice.

“Not much. I wanted it to be special when you saw it for the first time. I’m sorry it happened while you’re so upset.” He was truly sorry. This wasn’t how he’d intended for her to see the room. He knew she’d gotten confused, thinking this was the bathroom while she’d been so clouded with mistrust.

She took another tentative step farther into the room. It was a good sign. Also, her shoulders lowered an inch. “Why did you do this?” she murmured.

“Because I knew you were mine the moment I met you. It doesn’t matter that I was assigned to protect you, but it does make me feel even more fierce about ensuring your safety. It would kill me if anything happened to you, Isla.”

She had her back to him, but her grip on her clothes loosened. “I don’t know what to believe.”

Suddenly, an idea came to him. “Did someone in your past hurt you, Little Fish?”

She sniffled. Bingo .

He took another step toward her. Only a foot separated them now. “Remember how skeptical I felt when you told me about your treasure hunt? I was burned in the past, too. Mindy did a number on me. I haven’t trusted easily since then. But then I met you, and I knew I needed to suspend my mistrust of people and let you into my heart. I believe everything you’ve told me about your grandfather and the map you have. I’m going to help you look for it. Do you know why?”

She shook her head but didn’t turn around.

“Because you’re passionate about it. It doesn’t matter if we find anything or not. What matters is that we’re going to have fun looking. Together. We share a love of diving, and I bet we have dozens of other things in common. Plus, I bet you’ve been looking for a Daddy for many years, and I’ve been looking for my special Little girl. We found each other. Now, we have the rest of our lives in front of us, and I, for one, can’t imagine spending a single day of it without you.”

His speech was premature in their relationship, but the stakes were high. He couldn’t bear the thought of her walking out of his apartment. They’d had sex an hour ago, and he had no intention of sleeping alone tonight or any other night, for that matter.

“Do you want to tell me what happened in your past to make you so skittish, Isla?”

She sniffled again, and it took a while for her to respond. “His name was Alan. I met him at a club while I was working in Chicago. I thought he was so nice. He wined and dined me and said all the right things. I should’ve seen the signs, but I was blinded by the attention. The truth was he didn’t even have a job. He was using me. He always had some excuse not to go back to his place, and he frequently forgot his wallet, his credit card was stolen, or his bank wasn’t open. Always some line...”

“I’m so sorry that happened to you, Isla. I’ll always try to be an open book for you. This is my apartment. I have a good job here at the Bluff. I really do manage the scuba program. Behind the scenes, I also work with my team to keep our assignments safe. This time, the assignment is you, and I’d lay down my life for you. So would any of my teammates. I’m not rich, but I have savings. You’re welcome to look at my bank account anytime you want.” He meant every word. He would do everything in his power to make her feel safe.

Isla lowered herself to the floor and set her pile of clothes in front of her. Then she pulled her knees to her chest, wrapped her arms around her shins, and dropped her forehead to her knees. She started crying.

Caesar's chest seized as he dropped down to squat next to her and wrapped his arms around her. He kissed the top of her head. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner about my assignment. I should've taken the time to explain the situation."

"Don't ever do something like that again," Isla exclaimed in frustration.

"Never. I promise. Open book. I'll show you everything I got from Kingsley before you arrived. It's not much, which worries me."

"You're scaring me," she told her knees, still not looking at him. "I came here to have fun and maybe discover something in the process. Why would I be in danger?"

"I don't know, Little Fish." He rubbed her back, hoping to soothe her. "I'll call Kingsley tomorrow and see if he knows more. I would suspect that someone knows you have that map, and they've been waiting for you to do something with it. But it could also be that you have a disgruntled patient or family member of a patient who's displeased because their relative passed away."

She stiffened. "A lot of my patients have died. It's the nature of the job."

"I know, Little one. Can I lift you up so we can move to that rocking chair over there? I bet we'll both be more comfortable if you let Daddy rock you."

She sniffled, but she nodded.

Caesar tucked one hand under her knees, planted the other on her back, and lifted her into his arms. He easily carried her to the rocking chair. As soon as he was seated with her cradled in his arms, he grabbed the soft aqua blanket from the arm of the chair and wrapped it around her.

She was shivering. "Thank you," she whispered. "This room is so pretty."

“I’m glad you like it. I even got you some new stuffies.” He pointed toward the bookshelf. “I know you have a shark, but I thought you might like a dolphin, a stingray, and a whale.”

“Mmm.” She finally tipped her head back and met his gaze. “I’m not sure how Nado will feel about that. I’ll have to ask him.”

“We’ll wait and see what he says. I bet there’s room in his heart for more friends.”

“Maybe, but he’d also have to share me, and that might make him lash out and start biting. He has vicious teeth.”

Caesar hugged her closer and smiled. He was falling in love with this Little girl. “Maybe if the only stuffie who gets to sleep in our bed is Nado, he won’t feel so jealous.”

“Maybe...”

He rocked her for several more minutes in silence before speaking again. “It’s getting late. I know we were going to look more closely at your map, but how about if we do it in the morning? We can take it downstairs and have Magnus help us pinpoint the treasure's location. I have the entire day off. We can go out together for a dive or spend the day doing whatever you want.”

“Who’s Magnus? One of your teammates?”

“Yes. He’s our computer genius. In addition to this private fifth-floor living space, my team also has an enormous space in the resort's basement. Like the fifth floor, it’s not accessible to the public. It’s a workspace and the safest place you can be if you’re ever in danger. In the morning, I’ll take you down there to meet more people and get your thumbprint into the system so you can access this floor and the basement.”

“You would trust me that much?”

“Yes, Little Fish. You’re one of us now. I know that’s heavy, and it happened fast, but I promise you’re going to love my teammates and their Littles.”

Isla leaned into Caesar, letting him support more of her weight. It felt bigger than that. It wasn’t just the weight she gave him. She also gave him a bigger piece of her trust.

When she brought her thumb to her mouth and closed her eyes, his heart lurched in his chest.

Chapter Seven

Isla's eyes grew heavier by the moment as she was lulled by the rocking of the chair and the way her Daddy was rhythmically patting her bottom. She was exhausted from all the energy she'd expended when she'd doubted him and everything she'd learned since then. Her mind was overloaded, but the sweet sound of music drifting softly from somewhere helped soothe her as well.

He kissed her head and finally broke the silence. "Will you stay here with me, Little Fish? I can't stand the idea of sleeping without you."

She thought about it and nodded. There was no way she felt like putting her clothes back on and heading back to her own hotel room. Besides, it would be lonely, and she would miss him. "What about Nado? He's in my room."

"How about if you go potty, brush your teeth, and climb into bed while I run downstairs and get him? I even have a new toothbrush you can use."

"Will you get my phone charger, too?"

"I sure will. Anything else you need? How would you feel if I bring all your things up here and you can stay with me. I'll sleep easier knowing that you're safe."

"Do you really think I'm in trouble?"

"Maybe I'm just overprotective. Or I could just want you close to me," Caesar said.

“Mmm. Maybe that would be a good idea. I don’t have anything to wear in the morning.”

He nodded toward the dresser across the room. “It just so happens I have clothes for you, too, Little Fish.”

She gasped and twisted to look at him more directly. “You bought me clothes?”

“Yep, for when you feel like being Little. I bet you didn’t bring anything like that with you on vacation.”

She shook her head, dumbfounded. “No. I don’t even own clothes for being Little. I didn’t know people were Little in real life until I got here. What do Littles wear?”

“All sorts of things. Whatever makes them feel comfortable in their skin. Some Littles like to try different ages on different days. Some prefer a certain age range and stick with it.”

“Any age?” she asked, her expression incredulous.

“Yep. I took a guess and went for clothes an adult who prefers the age of about five might wear—in your size, of course.”

She turned to look at the dresser, her curiosity piqued. She’d been nearly asleep a few minutes ago. Now, she was wide awake. “Can I see them?”

“How about you explore the drawers tomorrow? It’s getting late, and you’re very tired.”

“I’m not so tired anymore,” she pointed out, still staring at the drawers.

He chuckled. "Would you like to sleep in Daddy's T-shirt? Or would you like Daddy to find you some jammies?"

"Mmm." She bit into her bottom lip as she thought about his question. On the one hand, she liked wearing his shirt. It was so soft, and it smelled like him. On the other hand, she really wanted to see what sort of jammies he'd purchased for her. "Jammies, I think."

Caesar lifted her to her feet, rose behind her, and took her hand. "Let's see what we can find." After leading her to the drawers, he opened the second one and pulled out a soft blue cotton set. The pale blue was covered with tiny fishes. There was a shirt and shorts.

When he held them up, she couldn't keep from clapping her hands together. "How fun. I love them!"

"I'm so glad. Let's see how they fit." He whisked his T-shirt over her head so fast she didn't have time to ponder her nudity before she stood before him, completely naked. He'd already seen every inch of her, tasted her, and been inside her... But this was different.

Isla felt very Little as he helped her step into the shorts before pulling the shirt over her head. He even pulled her hair out from the collar. "So pretty." She threw her arms around him. "Thank you, Daddy."

"You're so welcome, Little Fish." He lifted her off the floor, settled her on his hip, and carried her out of the playroom.

Isla looked over his shoulder. She kind of loved that room already. It was so soothing and inviting. She wished she could stay in it forever and ever.

Daddy carried her to the master bathroom and stood her on her feet. “Potty. Teeth. Bed. I’ll be back in a few minutes. Don’t leave the apartment, understood?”

She tipped her head back. “Why?” Her heart beat faster. Did he think she was in danger, even on the fifth floor?

He gave her a warm smile, tipped her chin back, and kissed her. “No need to panic. We Daddy types tend to be overprotective and implement a lot of rules. Right now, I simply don’t want you to wander out of the apartment because it’s bedtime.”

“Oh.” She stared at him, fighting hard not to squeeze her thighs together. She secretly liked the idea of following his rules. It made her feel warm and...cherished. “Okay, Daddy. You’ll come right back with Nado?”

“I sure will, as well as with the rest of your things. Is your keycard for your room in your shorts?”

“Yes.” She’d left her pile of clothes on the floor of the playroom.

“I’ll get it.” He pointed toward the sink, brows lifted. As he left the room, she hurried to use the toilet first. After washing her hands and brushing her teeth, she found his brush and worked through the tangles in her hair. She liked to brush out her hair before bed. She always closed her eyes and imagined someone else doing it for her. Maybe her new Daddy would brush her hair sometimes.

With her eyes closed, she continued brushing, pretending it was Daddy doing it. A sigh left her lips.

“Isla?” She jerked her gaze up to find Caesar standing in the doorway.

She quickly set the brush down. “Sorry, Daddy. I...”

“You’re not in trouble, Little Fish. You looked so happy and content that I couldn’t resist standing here watching you, and then you let out that little sigh. What were you thinking about?”

She shrugged, feeling her cheeks heat. She couldn’t tell him, could she? It was embarrassing. Besides, what if he had no interest in brushing her hair?

He stepped closer, wrapped his arms around her, and tipped her head back. “Tell Daddy,” he encouraged gently.

She drew in a breath and shrugged as if her thoughts were no big deal. “I always brush my hair at night and pretend someone else does it.”

“Ah. A Daddy?”

“Not really. I never pictured myself with an actual Daddy, so just a man. Someone nurturing, who liked to brush out my hair and lull me to sleep. It’s silly. Forget I said anything.”

“It’s not silly, Isla. It’s very sweet. I bet you had a lot of thoughts that involved someone nurturing you without realizing you were visualizing a Daddy. I’d love to brush your hair. I could do it for hours.” He reached back and grabbed the brush from the counter. “You’ve already done a great job for tonight, but how about if I run the brush through one more time just to be sure you got all the tangles out?”

She smiled broadly, so many huge feelings lodging in her chest. “I’d like that,” she whispered.

He stepped behind her and gently guided the brush down the back.

She immediately moaned softly. It felt so good—just like she’d visualized.

After several minutes, he returned the brush to the counter and leaned over to kiss her ear. “How was that, Little Fish?” he asked in a low, gravelly voice.

“So very nice, Daddy. Thank you.”

“I’ll do it every night and in the morning, too. I’d love nothing more than to fix your hair every day and work through the tangles at night.”

“Really?” She lifted her gaze to look at him in the mirror.

“Yep. It’s a Daddy’s job. Fixing hair is our specialty. We don’t graduate from Daddy school until we can fashion two perfect braids. I can even thread a ribbon through the braids,” he declared.

She gasped. “You’re teasing me.”

He grinned. “Only a little. I’m exaggerating about Daddy school, but remember, there are five Littles already living here. Believe me, there have been plenty of times when one of them needed her hair done, and her own Daddy wasn’t around. I consider myself a pro by now.”

Isla giggled as she pictured this big, manly, muscular man fixing everyone’s hair. “Will you fix mine in the morning before we go downstairs?”

“Absolutely.”

She turned to face him. “Will it be weird? Will I be Little sometimes in front of the others?”

“Definitely. Most of the time, when the six of you are not in public, you will be Little. Anytime you’re on the fifth floor, for sure. Often in the basement, too. Celeste

and Zara have a science lab in the basement where they work regular day jobs. They're usually pretty professional when they're working, but I've often seen them wearing pretty Little dresses under their lab coats, too. I suspect they consult each other and decide each day what they're going to wear the next day."

"That's so fun. I can't wait to meet everyone." She was also a bit nervous and scared. "What if they don't like me?"

"Oh, Little Fish. They will love you. I promise." He spun her around. "Now, stop stalling. Time for bed."

When she entered the bedroom, she spotted Nado propped up in the middle of the bed. Her charger was plugged in, and her phone was already attached to it on the nightstand. Her suitcase was propped against the wall. Her Daddy had thought of everything.

Was he too good to be true?

Shaking that worry from her mind, she hurried over and climbed under the covers. "Which side do you want me to sleep on?"

"The middle."

She giggled. "That's not a side, silly."

"Nope. It's the middle. That way, I can spoon you all night and not ever worry that you might fall off the edge."

She giggled harder. "I don't fall out of bed, Daddy. I haven't fallen out of bed since I was a toddler."

“I’m so glad to hear that. Let’s keep up that streak.” As he spoke, he removed everything, down to his boxers, turned out the lights, and climbed in beside her. True to his word, he hauled her close and manhandled her so that he could spoon her back.

She wanted to protest, but there was no way she would do any such thing. Not when it felt so good in his arms. Not when he kissed her shoulder and then nibbled a path to her ear. And certainly not when he whispered, “Go to sleep, Little Fish.” His breath tickled and made the fine hairs stand up on her arms. It also made her squirm.

She hugged Nado tightly and snuggled in closer to her Daddy. “I’ve never slept with anyone,” she murmured. “What if I snore or kick you? Maybe I’m restless.”

“Don’t you worry, Isla. I’m sure you’ll be fine. If you snore, I’ll get earplugs. If you’re restless, I’ll hold you tighter so you feel swaddled.”

She knew he couldn’t see her face, but she was smiling so big it almost hurt her cheeks. This entire thing was scary, though. It was happening so fast. Could it be real?

Part of her worried she would wake up tomorrow in her own bed in her own hotel room, alone and lonely. Maybe none of this had happened, and she was dreaming. That would make her very sad, and the negative thoughts turned her smile into a frown.

Caesar hugged her tighter. “Rest, Isla. Daddy’s got you. I’ll be right here when you wake up.”

It was as if he’d read her mind. She didn’t want to know if he could read minds, so she didn’t ask. Daddies were apparently very talented people, but that seemed over the top.

The thought made her smile again, though, and she took a few deep breaths and relaxed her body, letting sleep lure her under.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 4:35 am

Chapter Eight

Isla awoke with a start, blinking her eyes rapidly as she tried to figure out why she was so warm and why she seemed to be pinned to the bed.

Something rubbed her arm, and she looked down to see a big male hand stroking her skin. It took her another second to remember she was in Caesar's apartment, in his room, and in his bed.

"Good morning, Little Fish. Did you sleep well?"

"I don't think I even moved." She twisted around to look at him. "Did I? Did I snore? Did I kick you or anything?"

"Nope. No snoring and no kicking. I was perfectly safe." He grinned. "Are you ready to get up? We can get dressed and go to the basement. We'll order breakfast down there. Then we can look at the map with Magnus, and he can get your prints into the system so you'll have access to the elevators."

She gave him a slow smile, saying nothing.

"What?"

"Do you always wake up with a giant running list in your head?"

He smiled back. "Yes. Doesn't everyone?"

She shook her head. “No. I’m not thinking anything at all yet, except how sexy you look with your hair all messy and your brow furrowed with all these plans forming.”

His smile grew. “Excellent.”

She narrowed her gaze. “Why?”

“If you’re not a morning person, you won’t mind if I Daddy you to pieces while you slowly find your brain cells.”

She giggled. “You’re going to spoil me, and then I’ll be lost when I go back home. How will I ever fix my hair or manage to choose my clothes without you?”

He leaned closer to her and set his forehead against hers. “What if you don’t go back home and never have to fix your hair or dress yourself again?”

She gasped. He couldn’t be serious. At the same time, her heart rate picked up, and she felt restless. His words turned her on. She’d dated men. She’d had short relationships. No one had ever been so intense or given her any indication they wanted more than a fling.

Until Caesar. He was serious, and based on what she knew about his five teammates and the fact that they’d all rescued a woman and never let her go, she had to bet he was hoping for the same thing. It was much too soon to think like that, though.

Luckily, he spoke again, keeping her from having to respond. “Let’s take things one day at a time. I’ll woo you with my Daddy Dominance until you can’t imagine leaving.”

“I’m a nurse, Caesar. I love my work. I can’t easily get a job nursing in New Zealand. I’d have to get a work visa. And I can’t believe I’m even pondering this idea. We just

met.”

He leaned more fully over her, planting his elbows on either side of her head while settling a knee between hers under the covers.

Isla’s breath hitched. The temperature in the room went up ten degrees. There was a fire brewing under the blankets.

“I’m pondering this idea because you feel the connection just as strongly as I do, Little Fish. Believe me. I didn’t question the bond Rocco felt with Sadie the moment he met her, but I did grow suspicious after Hawking and Celeste met. With Kestrel and Zara, I thought surely we’d fallen into some weird alternate dimension. By the time Magnus and Phoenix met Juniper and Lyra, I’d resigned myself to assuming that whoever Kingsley assigned me to protect would undoubtedly be the perfect Little girl for me. The man is a magician. And I knew it deep in my soul as soon as I saw you.”

Isla pursed her lips. She couldn’t disagree with him. She’d felt the same connection almost as fast, but was it reasonable?

He cupped the side of her head. “Your brain knows you’re mine even though it’s not logical.” He slid his hand down to her chest. “In here, your heart knows I’m right.” He moved that hand lower and cupped her pussy over her jammies. “And this heat tells me the connection is both mental and physical. Are you wet for me, Little Fish?”

She swallowed and nodded.

He tucked his fingers under the edge of her shorts and stroked through her soaked folds, making her moan. A second later, he removed his hand, slid off the bed, and hauled her to the edge.

She yelped, disoriented from the sudden change and the fact that it would take very

little to make her come. “Daddy!” she cried out defiantly.

He dropped his hands down on either side of her hips and grinned wide. “That’s a sound I want to hear every day for the rest of my life.”

“Daddy?” she asked, even more confused. Didn’t he understand that she couldn’t process his cryptic comments this early in the morning?

“Mmm-hmm, but with that tone. The one you’ll use when you feel like defying or arguing with me. That naughty voice that will land you over my lap more often than you can imagine.”

She grabbed his forearms and scooted herself so that her legs dangled off the side of the bed. “You mean the tone I’ll use when you tease my pussy and then leave me hanging?”

“Yep. That’s the one.” His smile was filled with satisfaction.

“That’s not fair, meanie.”

He chuckled. “It keeps you on your toes.” He lifted her by the hips and set her on her feet.

She swayed a bit from the sudden movement. “Seriously, Daddy,” she complained, “I don’t move this fast when I first wake up.”

“I’ve got you.” He guided her toward the bathroom.

She was still thinking about how warm the bed had been and how she hadn’t had enough coffee for all this cheerfulness and attention when he squatted in front of her and pulled her shorts down.

She gasped as she looked down at him. “What are you doing?”

He lifted her by the hips and set her on the toilet. “Go potty.”

Eyes wide, she shook her head. “Not while you’re watching, Daddy.”

She said those words, but inside, her tummy was flipping around because the visual of him squatting in front of her, his hands on her parted knees and his face level with her pussy made a rush of wetness leak out of her. It was so intimate and so naughty. Could she pee while he watched?

Daddy stroked his hands up her thighs and then slowly lifted her shirt up her body. “Arms up, Little Fish.”

She whimpered as she obeyed him.

“No secrets from Daddy.” His hands came back to her thighs.

She shuddered from the embarrassment of sitting naked on the potty while he waited. It was obvious he had all the patience in the world and would wait her out. Plus, she really needed to pee.

When his thumbs stroked her inner thighs, she lost it and let her bladder go, shivering at the intimacy.

“That’s a good girl,” he crooned, making her nipples even harder and the flutters increase. He stood, pulled off a row of toilet paper, and reached between her legs to wipe her so fast she didn’t have time to argue.

A second later, she was back on her feet, being guided to the sink where her Daddy turned on the water, pushed a pump of soap in his palm, and washed their combined

hands.

Still pinning her to the sink, he put toothpaste on her brush and handed it to her before grabbing his own.

She felt totally out of body as she brushed her teeth while watching the two of them in the mirror. Her Daddy surrounded her, his feet planted outside of hers. She was naked, and he was wearing boxers. He treated this mundane task like it was totally normal, and she got the feeling he was setting a precedent and intended to repeat this exact routine every day.

After he leaned over her to rinse and spit, he filled the cup with water and handed it to her. She bent over the sink to do the same before setting the cup on the vanity.

Caesar took one step back, but he picked up the brush from last night at the same time and started working on her morning hair.

“Can I have clothes, Daddy?” she asked in a very Little voice.

“After I do your hair, Little Fish. I like you slightly off-kilter. It’s cute.”

“But I’m naked,” she pointed out unnecessarily.

“You were naked last night when I ate your pussy, too,” he teased.

She shuddered and grabbed the edge of the vanity to keep her balance. Was he going to do that again? Because now, it was all she could think about. The visual of him pressing her thighs open and burying his face between her legs was powerful. Her heart rate picked up again, and her cheeks heated.

He smiled while he parted her hair, slid one side over her shoulder, and divided the

other side into sections as if he was totally unaffected by her nudity or her submission.

She wanted to look at the front of his boxers, but she couldn't see that low in the mirror, and it would be too obvious if she blatantly twisted her head to look. So, she bit her lip and tried to control her breathing while he expertly braided her hair.

After adding a hairband to one side, he did the other, then set his hands on her shoulders and lifted his gaze to hers in the mirror. "What do you think? Did I do a good job?"

She drew in a deep breath. "It's perfect. Can I have clothes now?"

"Yep." With his hands on her shoulders, he guided her through the bedroom and into the attached playroom.

She looked around through a new lens this morning. Her clothes from yesterday that had been on the floor were gone. He must have put them in the hamper when he'd gotten her room key.

Everything about the room was soothing. She felt like she was underwater, scuba diving among the fishes, and when Daddy released her to head for the dresser, she turned in a slow circle and took everything in again. "So pretty." It was like a dream room.

"I'm so glad you like it." He pointed at one corner of the room as he returned. "Maybe we can add a treasure chest over there."

"Maybe... Let's see if we find a treasure first."

"Good idea." He squatted in front of her and helped her into a pair of aqua cotton

panties.

She held his shoulders while she stared down at them. “These are going to be wet before we leave this room,” she murmured.

“Didn’t you go potty just a few minutes ago, Little Fish?” he said with an eyebrow raised.

She cocked her head, met his gaze, and shot him what she knew was a sassy glare. “Not that kind of wet, Daddy.”

“Ah. So what you’re saying is that they make you feel sexy.”

She sighed. “That’s pretty weird, isn’t it?”

“Nope. It’s normal.” He headed for the closet next, making her gasp when she saw it was filled with clothes.

She wandered closer and reached out to touch them. “That’s a lot of dresses.”

“I want my girl to have every sort of outfit available. You never know when you might feel like wearing play clothes to paint in or a party dress to have tea with the other Littles.”

She giggled. “What do I wear to meet everyone and look at the treasure map?”

He took down a hanger and held it up. “How about this? It’s comfortable, but you’ll still feel Little in it.” It was a navy cotton dress with short sleeves.

“Okay.”

He took it off the hanger. “Bra or no bra?”

She tapped her lips. “Do the other Littles wear bras?”

“Sometimes, yes. Sometimes, no. Depends on how they’re feeling and what headspace they’re in. Sometimes, it depends on who they might see. Usually, when you’re only going to go between the fifth floor and the basement, you’ll feel safe being however Little you want. On days we plan to go out to a restaurant or do an outdoor activity, you might want to wear more adult clothes.”

He made sense. “Okay.” She was slightly nervous about this adventure, but she trusted him.

“Arms up.”

She lifted her arms and let him slide the dress down her body. It fit perfectly and reached mid-thigh.

“You look very pretty. I bet I have matching ribbons to go with that dress. I’ll go find them.” Her Daddy headed out of the playroom, leaving her to twirl and absorb what was happening. It was surreal, and she was in a state of shock.

“Here we go,” Daddy declared as he returned, holding up two navy ribbons. He tied a bow at the end of each braid and then grabbed her sandals from yesterday from the closet floor. “Will these be okay for today? We can always order more shoes. I wasn’t certain of your size.”

She nodded.

He pointed toward the daybed. “Sit. I’ll put them on you.”

She had never felt so pampered. Everything he did added to the flutter in her stomach.

As soon as her sandals were strapped on, Daddy stood. “I’m going to take a quick shower and get dressed. You can explore your playroom. Don’t leave the apartment, understood?”

“Yes, Sir.” The Sir slid out easily.

He smiled. “Good girl.”

As he left the room, she wondered if he had any idea how incredibly turned-on she was. For one thing, settling into this Little space ever since she’d woken up made her feel horny, but she’d had the added bonus of watching him wander around in nothing but his boxers so far. His body was fine. Better than fine.

Jerking her gaze to the bookshelf, she headed straight for the stuffies. It was time to meet the dolphin, stingray, and whale. After all, if she was going to spend a lot of time here, she needed to ensure the three stuffies were going to be kind and polite when they met Nado.

Chapter Nine

Isla was nervous as she stepped off the elevator and into the basement. She had a death grip on her Daddy's hand. So many concerns were going through her mind.

For one thing, she had only met Sadie so far. Four other women lived as Littles in what was apparently a family unit she was now a part of. She'd met a few of the Daddies in passing but hadn't spent much time with them yet.

"Yay, you're here!" Sadie exclaimed as she jumped up from where she'd been sitting on the biggest sectional Isla had ever seen. Four other women were with her, and they all stood, too.

Isla hadn't expected to meet all of them at once this morning, but apparently, they'd gathered to meet her.

Sadie skipped toward Isla and pulled her into a hug. "Good news. I don't have to work until ten, so I can join you for breakfast."

"Oh, that would be nice. Thank you."

Caesar cleared his throat as he set his hands on Isla's shoulders. "You better not be planning world domination Little-style."

Sadie giggled. "Of course not. World domination? Little-style? What does that even mean?" She twirled a finger around a lock of hair from one of her pigtails and swayed back and forth.

Two men approached from a bank of computer monitors.

One was Rocco, the rock-climbing instructor Isla had already met. She knew he was Sadie's Daddy. "Sadie..." he warned, "Isla just got here. Maybe you could let her at least meet everyone and settle in before you plan something naughty."

Isla found their banter curious and oddly refreshing. She also felt more relaxed now that she saw that Sadie and the other four women were all dressed similarly to her.

The second man held out a hand. "I'm Magnus. I'm the team's computer geek."

"He was the team's computer geek," one of the women stated as she joined them. "Now he's half of the team's geek," she declared proudly. She held out a hand next. "I'm Juniper. Magnus is my Daddy, and he might be the boss of me outside of work, but I try to challenge him daily with my hacking skills."

Isla chuckled. Yes, their banter was so much fun.

Each of the rest of the women introduced themselves, and Isla remembered that Celeste and Zara worked in the lab. Lyra, the last one to speak, was apparently a cellist. Isla couldn't wait to hear her perform.

"It's so nice to meet all of you," Isla said, trying not to feel overwhelmed. They all made her feel welcome, but there were so many of them.

The elevator pinged, and three more men stepped out. She was afraid she wouldn't remember all their names and who belonged with whom, so she repeated their names in her head several times as each wrapped their arms around one of the women and introduced themselves.

I've got this. Rocco and Sadie. Hawking and Celeste. Kestrel and Zara. Magnus and

Juniper. Phoenix and Lyra . She said the names several times in her head.

Kestrel was the first to break away after everyone had met Isla. “I have a helicopter tour in half an hour. I’ll see you again at dinner tonight, Isla.” He kissed Zara on the top of her head. “Be good. Cure cancer. I’ll see you tonight.” He jogged toward the elevator.

One by one, they all broke off. Lyra said she was going to practice her cello on the fifth floor, Celeste and Zara disappeared into the lab, and their Daddies went off to do their various jobs.

That left Magnus, Juniper, and Sadie, with Isla and her Daddy, who was pulling out the map and spreading it on the table.

Isla was excited and wanted to lean over it and start exploring, but her Daddy stopped her. “Breakfast first.”

She groaned. “I’ll be fine without breakfast.” She was eager to have Magnus look at the map.

Magnus had on a ballcap that nearly covered his eyes, and he grunted. “Why do Little girls always think they can skip meals?” He pointed toward a table in one corner of the room. “I thought this might happen. I already ordered a selection from the restaurant. You three go eat before we start playing treasure hunters.”

Isla sighed as she let Juniper and Sadie guide her toward the table. The truth was that as soon as Sadie lifted the lid off the covered dishes, Isla’s stomach growled. She could get used to this. Not having to cook? Ordering food from the restaurant all the time? Yum!

Isla stared at Magnus while he stared at the map. She prayed that, between him and

Caesar, they could figure out approximately where the treasure was supposedly buried.

It was just the three of them at the huge table. Sadie had gone to get ready for work, and Juniper sat across the room, manning the computers.

Finally, Magnus adjusted his ballcap and rose from his hunched-over position. He set his hands on his hips and looked at Caesar. “I think your guess is correct.”

“Your guess?” Isla asked, glancing back and forth between the men.

Caesar set a hand on her back and rubbed. “I told Magnus my suspicions while you were having breakfast. There’s a tunnel system that runs under this resort. It’s been there for over a hundred years. The tunnels connect to the caves that are all over these mountains. One of those caves exits out to a small cove inside the bay area where Danger Bluff is located.”

“A cove? Where? Is it close?”

“Very close. See that small indentation there?” he said, pointing at the map. “And there’s been a lot of action in that cave lately. When Juniper came to visit, she had a bank robber on her heels—Edmund Rivers. He’d just been released from a twenty-year prison sentence and believed his money had been hidden here at the resort. It turned out he was right. The money had been in the tunnels near that particular cave. Edmund and his brother, Eric, used the cave to come into the tunnels in search of the money. They were caught and arrested.”

“Did anyone do any exploring in there, do you think?” Isla asked, more excited now.

“I doubt many people have been in there in the past few decades. The cave is only accessible by land when the tide is low. It’s completely underwater when the tide is

high. In fact, the men who stashed the money there both drowned because they didn't get out on time."

Isla cringed. "That's so sad."

Caesar ran a hand over his face. "Yeah, even criminals don't deserve to die from drowning. There was a small explosion near that area. That may make finding the treasure more difficult or easier."

"Can we go down there?" she asked Caesar softly, half expecting him to tell her it was too dangerous.

"Yeah, we can." He sighed.

She sat up straighter. "Really? You'll take me?"

He grabbed the back of her neck and tipped her head back. "Only because you're an experienced diver, and I've been down there when the tide was high. And, Isla..."

"What?" Her heart started racing with excitement. He was going to take her. He was really going to let her go.

"You will follow my rules at all times, understood?"

She nodded rapidly.

"I mean it, Little girl. I just found you. You're mine. If you defy me and put yourself in danger over something like a buried treasure that probably isn't even there, I will spank your bottom so hard you won't be able to sit for a week."

She squirmed on her seat. "I promise, Daddy. I will do everything you say." She

stared at him, hating the look in his eyes. She knew he was recalling Mindy, the woman who had turned on him and left him for dead—a woman he'd trusted.

Isla slid off her seat and approached him, wrapping her arms around him. She hugged his neck tight. "I'm not Mindy," she whispered. "I will obey you. I promise." She would never defy anyone who was in charge of a dive. Not anyone. Certainly not her own Daddy. She set her lips on his ear to whisper so Magnus couldn't hear, "I kind of like the idea of you spanking me, though. Could we maybe do that afterward?"

Caesar leaned back so he could meet her gaze. His eyes were wide, and his mouth was hitched up on one corner.

Isla blushed as he stared at her until she finally looked down and leaned into him closer, embarrassed.

Her Daddy rubbed her back. "That can be arranged," he whispered, but she noticed Magnus had left them to wander back to his wall of computers where Juniper was working.

She smiled, feeling suddenly shy. She couldn't believe she'd asked him to spank her.

"Here's what we'll do," he said. "We'll dive down there this afternoon while the tide is high. I'll show you what the entrance to the cave looks like, and we can explore the area a bit. We'll need to assess if that area was affected by the explosion. We won't enter the cave. You need special certification for that kind of dive. We can go back into the cave from the tunnels later when the tide is low and look around some more on the inside."

She grinned, excitement making her bounce on her feet.

"You know the chances there's a buried treasure in or around that cave are slim to

none. Even if it had been put there all those years ago, it could've washed out to sea at any time. The tide is very disruptive to the sand and rocks. It could have easily been dislodged and floated away."

Isla sighed. "Yeah." She knew he was right. "I don't really care. I came here to explore because my grandfather never got to. I had no idea I would meet someone like you on the first day of my trip. I'm so excited to dive with you because we share a love of scuba, and I know we'll have fun seeing if anything on that map could possibly be real, but it's all in good fun. If we don't find a single thing, I already consider this vacation the best decision of my life."

Caesar grabbed her by the hips and hauled her onto his lap. "I'm so damn glad you came to Danger Bluff, too." He cupped her face and kissed her until she grew dizzy from lust and lack of oxygen.

Magnus cleared his throat, causing Isla to flinch as the two of them broke the kiss. "Sorry," he muttered, "but I just want to point something out before you two head down to the boat."

"What's that?" Caesar asked as he rose and stood Isla on her feet.

Magnus's brow was furrowed. It was hard to tell with the ballcap covering his forehead, but Isla was short enough to see up under it. He narrowed his gaze. "Kingsley didn't arrange for you to protect Isla from a fake treasure hunt."

Caesar winced. "You're right."

Isla cringed. "Maybe, this time, he's just a really good matchmaker, and he thought the two of us would be perfect for each other."

"I have no doubt he's an excellent matchmaker. The man is omniscient," Magnus

said, “but after what we’ve been through with the other five women, I’m not buying that some kind of danger isn’t lurking.”

Caesar nodded as he threaded his fingers with Isla’s. “He’s right. We need to stay aware of our surroundings at all times. Kingsley doesn’t play matchmaker without a reason. He may not have any idea what sort of danger you’re in, but somehow, he knows you are absolutely facing something ominous. Perhaps it has nothing to do with your map. Maybe there’s a disgruntled family member who’s pissed because their loved one died in your care.”

Isla flinched. Caesar was right. That occasionally happened to nurses and doctors. She couldn’t recall any particular patient who’d died during her shift and left behind a furious relative, but it was possible.

Magnus nodded. “Well, go enjoy your day. I’ll keep a close eye on every camera both inside the tunnels and around the dock. I don’t have eyes out on the water or around that cave, of course, but I’m glad we put some in the tunnels.”

“You and me both,” Caesar agreed. He looked down at Isla. “Ready to go diving?”

Some of the wind had died down around her mental sails, but she pulled her shoulders back and nodded. Diving always made her feel alive. She couldn’t wait to get under the water.

Chapter Ten

“Ready?” Caesar asked Isla two hours later when they’d dropped anchor near the cave.

She nodded and held up a thumb.

Caesar could tell she was excited to get in the water. Sure, it was partly because she had the treasure-hunting bug, but she also had incredible joy for diving. He’d seen that in her on both of their dives the day he’d met her. She hadn’t been looking for a treasure that day.

Jack stood by the anchor. He would stay on the boat while the two of them explored. It was much safer having another staff member with them. “You two have fun. The water looks calm and clear. I bet you’ll see some amazing fish down there today, and hey, if you happened to find a buried treasure while you’re down there—bonus.” He chuckled.

Caesar had told Jack the basics—that Isla had a map from her grandfather that had led her on this adventure, but he didn’t mention a treasure. To be fair, Caesar thought it was a long shot anyway.

The map certainly looked legit, and Caesar was inclined to believe that there might very well have been a treasure at one point, but by now, it was surely long gone.

After putting his regulator in, Caesar signaled Isla, and the two of them jumped into the water. He’d been in this location before, looking for this very cave entrance when

the team had been charged with protecting Juniper, but today, the water was clearer, just as Jack had said.

The exhilaration Caesar got every time filled him with joy, and it doubled when he glanced over to see Isla's eyes lit up with the same excitement behind her face mask. She was still wearing the braids he'd put in, and they looked so cute floating around her.

He also knew that under the wetsuit was the sexiest skimpy bikini he'd ever seen, and he was already looking forward to removing it later after this dive.

Isla pointed toward a school of fish as they floated by, which calmed him considerably. Even though Caesar was certain she was his Little girl, it was impossible not to experience flashes of the last time he'd taken a woman down to look for a buried treasure.

He kept reminding himself this was entirely different. Mindy hadn't even told him she'd been looking for a treasure when she'd suggested a dive in the particular area where he'd taken her, whereas Isla had been upfront from the start. She hadn't lied about anything. She'd told him straight out about her grandfather's ambitions and the map. She'd even shared it with him.

Isla reached over and stroked his arm, and when he met her gaze, he saw everything in her expression. She was reassuring him with her eyes.

He smiled around the mouthpiece and pointed toward the entrance to the cave. He would take her down a few yards to the opening but wouldn't risk going in too far. They could do that on foot from the inside later when the tide was low.

The two of them explored around the entrance, enjoying the fish and the rock formations until Caesar heard the clanking of metal above him. It was a signal from

Jack that they needed to come back up.

Caesar looked at his watch and his gauge. They had plenty of time and oxygen left, so there must have been another reason Jack was luring them back to the surface.

Caesar would never in a million years ignore the advice of his assistant, so he waved a hand to get Isla's attention before pointing toward the surface. When her brows furrowed in question, he shrugged, hoping she would understand.

She nodded and proceeded him toward the sunshine.

They hadn't been so deep that they needed to take their time and decompress, so they were able to pop up out of the water's surface quickly.

"I'm sorry, boss," Jack said as he leaned over the side of the boat. "I've been watching another boat go by us several times, and I don't like how they're watching me."

All the hairs on Caesar's body would have stood on end if they hadn't been trapped by the wetsuit. He was grateful Isla took Jack's warning just as seriously and used her fins to hurry toward the back of the boat.

Jack reached down to take Isla's fins from her. She unclipped her BCD—buoyancy control device—so that Jack could pick up the tank and haul it out of the water.

In less than a minute, they were both back onboard and pulling off masks.

Isla looked around nervously. "Do you really think someone is watching us?"

The usually jovial and fun-loving Jack had a deeply furrowed brow. "Can't say for sure. I just don't like it when I see someone watching me through binoculars. And I

really don't like it when they swing back by and do it two more times."

Caesar didn't like it either. Not one bit. His danger antennae came all the way out.

Jack held out his phone. "I got a few pictures of the boat. Maybe that will help."

Caesar enlarged the pictures. "Let's get back to the dock. I'll call Magnus and see if he's seen anything."

Isla took a seat next to Caesar and grabbed his hand. "I met with a few experts about the map before I left the States. They all acted like I was wasting my time. Do you suppose one of them lied to me and is following me? It's spooky to think they would."

When she leaned her head against his bicep, he wrapped an arm around her and rubbed her shoulder. "Let's try not to panic, Little Fish." He didn't even hide his nickname for her from Jack. He really didn't care if Jack found out she was Little. He would eventually. No way could they keep that part of their relationship a secret from the man Caesar dove with most days.

Jack handed Caesar his cell phone from the glove compartment, and Caesar dialed Magnus.

His teammate picked up on the first ring. "Why do I think I'm not going to like the fact that you're calling me when you should be mid-dive?"

Caesar sighed. "You're not. Jack noticed a boat pass several times. It has a distinctive graphic of a treasure chest on the side. They were staring at him through binoculars. It could be nothing. Maybe they just enjoy this section of the shoreline, but we came back up anyway. We're heading to the dock."

“Good. I’ll see if we got them on any camera around the dock.”

Caesar glanced around. “We’re almost back now.”

“Perfect.”

Caesar ended the call and turned his attention back to Isla. Her eyes were wide with fear, and tears were trailing down her cheeks. She hiccupped as she tried to speak. “I swear I didn’t know this would happen, Daddy.” She was trembling all over, and she stared at him with pleading eyes.

He pulled her in close and kissed her forehead. “I know you didn’t, Little Fish.”

She swiped at her tears and sobbed harder. “You must think I set you up.”

“I don’t, Isla. I promise.” He hated that she was hurting and scared, and there was very little he could do to reassure her except love her to pieces and remind her often how important she was to him.

If he hadn’t ever told her about Mindy, Isla wouldn’t be in such a panic. He was sure the majority of her panic and fears had to do with knowing he couldn’t avoid comparing the last time a woman had led him on a treasure hunt to this time.

But Caesar wasn’t doing any such thing. He knew in his heart Isla was it for him. She was his girl. His everything. She would never deceive him. She wouldn’t deceive anyone. It wasn’t in her blood. Her profession was one that involved saving lives, not putting them in danger.

Jack angled them perfectly into their spot along the dock and tied the boat off. All business, he turned around and scanned the area, holding up his binoculars as he slowly turned in a half circle.

“See anything?” Caesar asked as he lifted Isla out onto the dock.

“No, boss. Nothing. I feel bad for probably overreacting, but you said if anything at all made my hackles rise...”

“And I meant it, Jack. You did good. Thank you for listening to your instincts. I’m going to take Isla back to the resort. Can you call Magnus and give him a more thorough description of what you saw so he can be on the lookout?”

“Yes, boss. I’ll do so right now.”

“Thank you, Jack.” After Caesar stepped off the boat, he turned back to look at his employee. “I mean it, Jack. You did the right thing.”

Jack nodded, but he still looked concerned.

Caesar took Isla’s hand and led her toward the meeting area where he’d met her the first day she’d arrived. He helped her get her wetsuit off, and as sexy as she was in the string bikini, he immediately wrapped her in a huge fluffy towel and rubbed her biceps to help with the trembling.

It wasn’t enough. His Little girl was spooked. She needed a hot bath and a nap, in that order. Caesar would tend to his Little girl first. As soon as he got her calmed down and asleep, he would get in touch with Magnus and see what, if anything, his teammate might have seen on the cameras.

Caesar removed his own wetsuit, draped both suits across the table for Jack to take care of, and bent to put Isla’s flip-flops on her feet.

After pulling a T-shirt over his head and putting on his own shoes, he grabbed her shoulders and tipped her head back. “You’re safe with me, Isla.”

She nodded but said nothing.

“Let’s get you back to the apartment and into the bath. A soak in warm water will help you stop shaking.”

He hoped.

When her breathing evened out, Caesar continued to hold her close on the large bed. She hadn’t wanted to nap in her playroom but needed to be beside him. He held his breath as she turned over on her tummy to nestle into the pillow with Nado tucked under her chin. After a few more minutes passed, he rolled slowly over to ease himself to standing.

Looking over his shoulder as he tiptoed out of the room, Caesar expected Isla to ask where he was going at every slight sound. The sight of her cute bare bottom peeking from under the T-shirt he had dressed her in after her bath made him smile. Forcing himself forward, he reached the door and stepped through it to shut it quietly without waking her.

Caesar pulled his phone from his pocket as he stalked to the far side of the apartment and called Kingsley.

The elusive man picked up after the first ring. “Caesar. How’s Isla?”

“Freaked out. We did some diving today, where her map indicated. Nothing jumped out at us labeled with the word treasure , but we did have some observers. My assistant, Jack, signaled us to come up early. Two men on a boat were watching us with binoculars.”

“That’s concerning,” Kingsley murmured.

“Can you tell me what alerted you? Why did you think Isla was in danger?”

“Years ago, a very particular map was stolen from the family of an explorer. That map was sold for an exorbitant amount and disappeared before the new owner could take possession of it. It wasn’t seen again until a young woman showed it to someone. Her picture was broadcast as a joke over a treasure hunters’ group online.”

“Isla.” Caesar’s chest felt tight as he struggled to breathe. “So, they’ve been watching her since then.”

“Yes. Whoever ‘they’ are. I’m sure had she not come to New Zealand, someone would have stolen that map somehow,” Kingsley said. “I had others safe-guarding her in the States before she flew to you.”

“Another Daddy?” Caesar couldn’t stop the words that growled from his mouth.

“No.”

That single word deflated his anger. “Sorry.”

“Completely understandable. Is she yours?” Kingsley asked.

“Yes.”

“Protect her. Things will get worse.”

The phone clicked, and Caesar knew Kingsley was no longer on the line. He shook his head. Talking to Kingsley was like talking to someone from the future who always knew what lurked around the next corner. Caesar couldn’t help but wonder if they would ever know more than they knew about Kingsley now. If Magnus hadn’t been able to find everything out about him, no one could. His mind boggled at the

expertise and financial resources Kingsley had employed to disguise himself so thoroughly in the present. To have concealed a lifetime of facts and events from everyone was impossible to believe.

Shaking his thoughts about Kingsley from his mind, Caesar focused on Isla. How could he keep her safe? Refusing to help her with the map wouldn't work. She'd find a way to explore without him. That could lead to disastrous events. He needed to keep her with him where she would be safe.

He returned to the bedroom to find her still curled in the same position. Caesar silently set his computer on the nightstand before easing himself back into place.

As he wrapped his arm back around her, Isla whispered, "What did Kingsley say?"

He smiled. Of course, she knew exactly what was going on. Caesar patted that tempting cute bottom before answering, "That I need to keep you safe."

"I'll do what you say, Daddy. I want you to be safe, too."

"Thank you, Little girl. How about if we both nap a bit longer?"

"You'll stay here this time?" she double-checked.

"I won't move without you," he promised.

Chapter Eleven

“Daddy? Someone just knocked on the door.”

“Let me go see what’s happening,” Caesar mumbled as he pulled himself from sleep.

She watched him roll onto his feet. He rubbed a hand over his face and seemed to magically erase his grogginess. As he walked out of the bedroom, Isla kind of missed the sleepy look that had softened the hard lines of his face. This side that he didn’t show the rest of the world made her feel more connected to him. He let her in closer than anyone else. When she heard Sadie’s voice, Isla rushed to join him at the door, tugging his oversized T-shirt down to cover her body.

“Hi!” she said, peeking around his massive form.

“Hi, Isla.” Sadie returned the greeting with a smile. “We’re going down to dinner. Want to ride with us?”

“I’m starving,” Isla admitted.

“Give us a minute to put on a few things, and we’ll join you,” Caesar said.

“Okay! Yay!” Sadie said and turned to rejoin her Daddy, who stood a short distance from their door.

Not wanting her friend to wait, Isla ran down the hall to grab her shoes and something to wear beside his large shirt.

“No running, Little girl.”

His strict tone immediately made her slow down. “Sorry.”

“I don’t want you to get hurt, Isla. Let me help you with your clothes and shoes,” he said as he followed. His long legs ate up the distance in a few steps.

“I can do it.”

“I know you can, but it’s more fun for Daddy to help.”

“More fun for me or you?” she asked, pushing back.

“Both of us, I hope.”

“I want to put my own shoes on,” she protested crankily. She didn’t know why she was being so obstinate.

“That’s one, Little girl. Don’t talk to your Daddy like that. You can definitely put on your own shoes. However, if you’re rude or speak in a mean tone two more times, I will spank your bottom, and it will be vastly different from a good-girl spanking.”

“Sure. Like you’ll ever spank me. I think that’s just part of the Daddy vocabulary.”

“That’s two. Want to go for three?” he said, looking at her with a steely gaze.

“Why not? I don’t think you’ll do it.”

“Excuse me, Isla. I’ll be right back.”

Caesar walked to the door and called to Rocco. “I need to take care of something.

You two go on. We'll be there in a few minutes."

Returning to the room, Caesar took her hand and led her to the bed. He sat on the mattress and looked at her. "What's going on, Isla? Have you decided you don't want a Daddy, or are you pushing me to see how far you can push my limits?"

"I'm a grown woman. I get to choose what I do and what I don't do," Isla told him, trying not to be swayed by the solemn look on his face.

"You are very definitely an adult, Isla. I think there's also someone very special inside you."

"A Little girl?" she asked flippantly.

"Never make fun of your inner desires or anyone else's. Little girls are brave and fierce. They have admitted to themselves that they need more than just a boyfriend or a husband. They need something special and rare."

He lifted one hand and smoothed her hair from her cheek, tucking it behind her ear. "They need someone who cares about them so much they love their adult side and their inner needs."

"You love me?" she asked, feeling her eyes widen in disbelief. Isla knew he cared about her, but...

"I love you, Little Fish. I understand that you're struggling to adjust. Let's put a pause on any talk about spanking. We haven't talked about rules and consequences. Nor have we discussed any special circumstances you might have which are important for me to know."

"Like what?"

“If you need alternatives to spanking or standing in the corner.”

“I don’t like those.”

“Consequences are not things you’re supposed to like. They’re deterrents to behaviors continuing. If used correctly, they make you think about and make safer choices,” he explained.

“What do you get out of them?” she challenged.

“Daddies care for their Littles. If they put themselves at risk or need their attitude changed, Daddies are there to help them make wiser decisions. Do you ever feel like your mind is going so fast you can’t even think?”

“Yes,” she admitted slowly.

“Sometimes, a Daddy can help you work through a challenge. Sometimes, you just need to stop thinking.” He paused and let her consider that.

Overwhelmed and unsure of what to do, Isla felt a tear course down her cheek. She looked down at her bare feet, trying to pull in her emotions. When Caesar drew her closer to stand between his legs, she walked forward in tiny baby steps to give him time to decide she wasn’t worth it.

He wrapped his arms around her and guided Isla to take a seat on one of his thighs. She leaned against him and hid her face in the nook of his shoulder.

“What’s going on, Isla? You can tell me anything,” Caesar said.

She took three big breaths and whispered, “I don’t want to be hurt.”

“From a spanking?”

“No, not physically, like in a spanking. I don’t want to let my guard down completely and have you show me how wonderful being your Little is. If you walked away now, I’d be devastated. If I let you be my Daddy completely and you decided I wasn’t the one you wanted, I’m scared I’d never recover.” A sob broke through her control as soon as she forced her confession out.

“Leaving you would tear my heart out, Isla. It’s not going to happen. You’re my Little girl. I love you today, tomorrow, and for as long as my heart beats,” he reassured her as he stroked her hair and shoulders.

“That’s hard to believe.”

“Why, Isla? What has made you not believe I’m telling you the truth?”

“Other people wouldn’t understand...”

“To hell with other people,” he interrupted, speaking firmly.

He gripped her shoulders to angle Isla away from his body. He tenderly wiped away her tears with the bottom of his shirt before meeting her gaze. Caesar said, “What goes on in our private life is only important to us. Don’t bring anyone else into our bedroom.”

She blinked at him as she digested that answer. He was right. No one needed to know what happened between the two of them. She’d never even considered what happened between the couples she knew back home.

Isla nodded. “I feel foolish.”

“You shouldn’t. We needed to talk. I never want you to panic like that. We need to discuss what’s bothering you when something starts—not when it festers.”

“You love me,” she repeated.

“I do.”

“I…”

“Tell me later when you’ve had time to think about everything. Saying I love you is too important to just use it as a response.”

“Okay.” She paused for a minute, then rushed to tell him, “I don’t have any kind of trauma in my life that makes spanking bad.”

“Good. Is there anything else we need to discuss before going to dinner?”

“Oh! They’re all waiting for me,” she said, appalled.

“They’ll eat without us if they need to,” he assured her.

“Are they going to think you spanked me?”

“Probably. Remember that there are five other Littles at the table. At least one of them is sitting on a hot bottom. They’re not going to judge you. If you don’t have consequences and are out of control, they’ll consider it my failing as a Daddy,” he shared.

“Oh! I don’t want them to think you’re a bad Daddy.”

“Are you planning on being out of control?” he asked.

“No.”

“Then they won’t worry about me. Or you. Come on, let’s wash your face and hands.”

He lifted her to stand next to him before rising from the mattress. Taking her hand, Caesar led Isla to the bathroom. There, he turned on the water to warm as he retrieved two washcloths. After wetting one, he smoothed the soft fabric over her face to erase the tear marks before drying it with the other one.

Caesar leaned in to press a soft kiss to her lips. “Remember, Little girl, you can tell me anything—anytime.”

“I’ll remember.”

“Good girl. Let’s get you dressed and go eat dinner.”

“Will you help me?” she asked, studying his face. Would he step back into his Daddy role, or had she ruined everything?

“Of course. Let’s go pick out something from the playroom.”

A few minutes later, they stepped out of the elevator to find everyone just settling in at the table. Caesar guided her to two empty chairs. Everyone called their hellos and smiled at her. To Isla’s relief, no one looked at her funny. They just looked happy to see her.

“Sushi tonight, Isla. Do you like it?” Sadie asked.

“I like the kind without raw fish,” Isla answered hesitantly.

“Me, too. Wait until you see how pretty it will be. The restaurant brings in a sushi team for a special treat every once in a while,” Zara said as Kestrel pushed the cart close to the table. “Watch!”

With a flourish, Kestrel lifted the cover off the first platter. While everyone oohed and aahed over the beautiful arrangement of the delicacies, he handed the large dish to Rocco to place in the center of the table. Soon, all the empty space on the table was filled with gorgeous displays.

“It’s so pretty I don’t even want to touch anything,” Juniper said, clicking her chopsticks together.

“I have the talking spoon here. Who wants to start tonight?” Celeste asked, picking up the fancy utensil and waving it.

“I’ll start,” Phoenix volunteered when no one else spoke up.

“Perfect!” Lyra said, clicking her chopsticks in the air as if applauding.

The other women joined Lyra’s celebration. Tentatively, Isla picked hers up and quickly fit them into place in her hand. She clicked with the other women. Their grins, when she took part in their fun, made her lips curve upward in response.

As everyone helped themselves to a variety of sushi, Caesar filled Isla’s plate with her favorites—California, cucumber, and avocado rolls. Several people popped bites into their mouths to enjoy when Phoenix started talking. Isla noticed he held the spoon in his hand.

“What’s going on?” Isla whispered.

“This is our tradition. Whoever is holding the talking spoon talks about their day and

alerts everyone to any problems,” Caesar answered quietly.

“Do I have to talk?” she whispered, alarmed.

“If it makes you uncomfortable, no. But it’s fun being part of the group.”

Tuning back to the conversation, she heard Phoenix finish.

“So, we need to consider adding an additional parking lot and boat docks.” Phoenix passed the spoon to Lyra.

“I’ve got it on the list,” Magnus said.

Lyra cleared her throat before announcing, “I have a new piece of music I’m working on. Remember, if the screeching of wrong notes causes you pain, I can go elsewhere to practice.” She looked meaningfully at Isla.

“That was you I heard playing last night?” Isla asked in awe as she connected the dots between the soothing music she’d heard upstairs. “You’re amazing.”

“The cello has something to do with it, but yes, that was me. Please, let me know if it disturbs you,” Lyra requested with a gentle smile. “Sadie, it’s your turn.”

Isla loved how Lyra handled the end of the conversation. That made her role so much easier. She didn’t have to respond. If she’d had a chance to pick more interesting women to connect with through this team of men, Isla knew she would never have chosen so well.

After a few more people talked briefly, Magnus handed her the spoon. She felt nervous and didn’t understand why this felt important.

“Hi! Thank you for welcoming me. I could have never imagined that I would travel across the globe to get to New Zealand on a quest and find more than I ever dreamed. I’m super discombobulated by finding Caesar...” She cleared her throat and corrected herself, “Daddy. Thanks for all your support.”

Sadie stood and rushed over to hug Isla. The other Littles followed right behind her. Awkwardly, Isla stood to hug each one back. By the time she sat back down, she felt so much better. “Thank you for your friendship,” she whispered before passing the spoon on to Caesar.

He poured soy sauce into the small dish in front of her. Somehow, she’d forgotten to take care of that herself.

“Thanks,” she said.

“I’ve got you. Can I tell them?” he asked softly.

“Please.”

Turning to the group, Caesar announced, “We had our first diving exploration today and drew an observer. That boat’s actions concerned Jack to the extent that he recalled Isla and me to the surface early. It was definitely not idle interest in people diving. With that in mind, I spoke to Kingsley today. According to our leader, who seems to know everything, there’s a buzz about a map Isla inherited from her grandfather. She consulted a few divers back home, and one decided to post the information on a treasure hunters’ site. He suggested someone has been watching her ever since.”

“And that someone followed her here to Danger Bluff?” Sadie asked.

“At this point, we don’t think anyone from the resort is involved, but everyone should

keep their eyes open,” Caesar suggested.

“Do you have a backup copy of the map?” Magnus asked.

“I didn’t let anyone take a picture of it and kept it shielded when I showed it to others,” Isla reported.

“Sounds like you thought ahead of time. I might suggest that you let me scan it. My computer system is secure,” the computer expert stated.

“Do you think it would give us some more information?” Isla asked, leaning forward eagerly.

“I do. I can chart the current to see where it might have swept something over time. Are you thinking it’s a chest?” Magnus asked.

Shaking her head, Isla admitted, “I have no idea.”

“Then, I’ll search for different weights, and we’ll see what comes up,” Magnus suggested.

“Thank you. You’ve all been wonderful,” Isla said, looking at the faces around the table.

“Help yourself to seconds and thirds, everyone,” Caesar encouraged. “There’s plenty still on the platters.”

Conversation flowed easily around the table as everyone discussed the topics of the day. Obviously, most revolved around the treasure map. That topic was too fascinating to ignore.

“Where did your grandfather get the map?” Juniper asked.

“He had a wild story in his log about finding it in the bathroom and then knowing who was really supposed to find it from the reaction of the next guy who walked out,” Isla said. “It was so obvious that that guy was dangerous that my grandpa just blended in with a random group meeting in the library.”

“That was so smart. That’s why no one was looking earlier. The map disappeared,” Celeste chimed in.

“Are there any clues about what the treasure could be?” Kestrel asked.

“None. It’s just a map. The initials NZ are on it, but in a strange, scripty font. I didn’t know which way was up for a while.”

“That sends shivers down my spine. What a mystery!” Sadie chimed in as she shifted onto her Daddy’s lap.

Isla glanced up at Caesar when she felt his hand wrap around her thigh. She leaned over to bump her shoulder against his. It was such a strange feeling. She hadn’t known him for that long, but already Isla felt more connected to him than anyone else she’d ever known. Whatever happened, she’d remember this moment in time when she’d found her Daddy.

Chapter Twelve

When Juniper suggested they go to the art table to chat after dinner, Isla guessed they had questions for her. To her surprise, they didn't want to talk about the treasure.

"So... You and Caesar? How are things going?" Sadie asked casually after they had each chosen a picture to color.

"I've never felt like this before," Isla admitted.

"You sound scared," Celeste said with a concerned look.

"That's not what I'm afraid of," Isla whispered.

"Are you afraid of being vulnerable?" Zara asked.

"Yes. That's exactly it. Did you all feel that way when you found your Daddies?" Isla wondered.

"Of course. None of us had been in this kind of relationship," Sadie shared.

"And all of us had something threatening happening. I know it was in my mind that I was worried I was just hiding behind a powerful man for protection. But it wasn't like that. I think the danger pushed the relationship deeper faster, but once I met Kestrel, I was a goner," Zara confessed.

"Me, too," Juniper chimed in, and the others nodded.

“It’s like being scared when you learned how to drive or came to Danger Bluff,” Sadie pointed out. “Having the courage to take those risks opened a whole new world for each of us.”

“For me, it was a fantasy to find a guy who loved and wanted to take care of me. It’s hard-wired inside me,” Lyra shared. “Phoenix didn’t change me. He woke up a part of me I’d hidden.”

“I really like being all of me,” Celeste added.

The rest of the Littles agreed with her as Isla remained silent. She looked around the group as they concentrated on coloring. Could she be as brave as them to live her life so completely?

Taking a deep breath, she admitted, “I freaked out before dinner about consequences and being spanked.”

“Oooh. That is a big step. Giving someone that much control,” Zara agreed.

“I’ve been wiggling on a sore bottom all night. I forgot to go to lunch today, and Daddy found out,” Lyra shared.

“That’s not healthy,” Zara scolded.

“I know. Time just got away from me. Daddy set an alarm on my watch. It will drive me crazy to stop in the middle of a piece, but I need to get up and move around. Hours go past when I play, and I lose track of time,” she confessed.

“I may be weird, but I feel better after being punished. It makes all those little voices in my brain turn off for a while,” Celeste shared.

Isla watched everyone else nod in agreement. “Doesn’t it hurt?”

“Yes, but Daddies somehow know how much you need and don’t go past that line,” Juniper added.

“So, the only way I can be unafraid of a spanking is to get one?” Isla asked.

“Yep,” Sadie answered matter-of-factly before she changed the subject completely. Pointing at Isla’s artwork, she added, “You should show that to your Daddy when you finish. He’s going to love it.”

Isla took her time, adding a few embellishments like seaweed and shells. When she knew she needed to stop, Isla put her crayons away. As she folded the flap back into the box, she looked around the group. “Thank you.”

“You don’t need to thank us. We have to band together to survive all that hunkiness,” Juniper told her, nodding toward the guys gathered around Magnus’s computer area.

Giggles burst from Lyra’s mouth, and that set everyone off. As they watched, the men turned to look at them with raised eyebrows. That made the merriment skyrocket—especially when the guys all stood and approached.

“Bedtime, Juniper,” Magnus declared.

“Oh!” the Little girl bemoaned, but Isla noticed Juniper immediately putting her things away.

“I finished my shark. Can we put it on the door?” Isla asked, looking up at Caesar.

“That’s an amazing picture. I love all the details. Of course, we need to put this up. Let’s go do that now. My door has been blank for too long.” A slow grin spread

across Caesar's face, making him even more handsome.

"I'd like that." Isla stood and picked up her picture carefully so she wouldn't rumple it. "Bye, everyone!"

"We'll ride upstairs with you," Magnus said, and Juniper jumped up to put her hand in her Daddy's.

Caesar guided Isla to the elevator with a hand on her lower back. She loved that he touched her so often. It made her feel like he wanted to be in contact with her as much as possible. She settled against the side of the elevator, and Magnus held the door for the other couple.

As the car rose, Caesar settled next to her. His arm curled around her waist to hold her close. His warm strength ebbed into her body. The Littles were right. She should enjoy every minute with her Daddy.

A few minutes later, she taped the shark carefully to the plain white door guarding Caesar's apartment. Isla looked around at all the other doors with satisfaction. Theirs matched now.

"Thank you, Little girl, for creating something special for me."

"I had fun coloring it."

"I'm glad. Come on in. It's time for bed."

"Do we have time to talk?" Isla asked.

Caesar looked at his watch and back at her. "You're not going to sleep well if we don't...?"

“No,” she admitted.

“Then we make time. Let’s go sit at the kitchen table.”

When she was settled in a seat, Caesar grabbed a pad of paper and took a chair next to her. “Let’s set up some guidelines. Your health and safety are the most important things to me. I would like you to get eight hours of sleep.”

“I’m grumpy if I don’t get enough sleep,” Isla agreed. “You need sleep, too.”

“I agree. I’ll put it on the list. I also need to know that you will listen and obey me. I promise you that I’m not a jerk dictator. I won’t order you around unless something important is happening. Your reaction in an emergency has to be automatic. That’s why we practice in small ways.”

“Like when you tell me to go take a nap?”

“Exactly. There’s a reason I’m sending you to nap. I know it’s hard to give up control. I don’t ever want you to feel like I am simply jerking you around.”

“Can I ask for an explanation?” Isla asked.

“If your safety is not in danger, yes.”

“What punishments will you use if I don’t do what you say?”

“Let’s discuss them. Do you have anything that is a negative trigger for these items... Spanking? Standing in the corner? Writing lines? Wearing a reminder in your bottom? Orgasm denial?”

Isla squirmed at the thought of Daddy putting a plug in her bottom as she focused on

the last thing he'd said. "What's that last one? You won't make love to me?" she asked.

"I'll make love to you, but you won't be allowed to orgasm in that form of punishment."

"That doesn't seem fair. You get to come."

"I'm not being punished," he answered.

"Do I get to punish you?" she pushed back.

"No. With the responsibility of being your Daddy comes certain powers. The ability to reward or punish you is one."

She had to admit that he was taking on a lot by working to keep her safe. Isla decided not to argue with that but chose to ask, "Rewards?"

"Definitely. You'll have to decide what rewards mean the most to you. Going diving? Fun with the Littles? Date night?"

"Just the two of us?" she seized on that last one. The other two he'd mentioned were no-brainers.

"Just the two of us," he promised.

"I'd like that."

"I would, too."

Isla looked down at the mostly blank page and back up at Caesar. "There's really

nothing to write down, is there?"

"The important piece is us discussing things and you asking questions when you have them," Caesar added. "Let's get ready for bed. You can think about this, and we'll talk about it whenever you wish."

Her mind whirled. Isla squeezed her thighs together. She was so wet just talking about him being in control. Distracted, she missed seeing him lean forward and squeaked with surprise as he scooped her out of her chair, carried her to the couch, and settled her on his lap. Melting against his hard chest, Isla laid her head on his shoulder. She realized she hadn't thought about the men in the boat who'd been watching them dive or the map since dinner. He'd taken that worry away for her. Isla had no doubt that he would put himself in harm's way to keep her safe. No one had ever cared about her that much.

"You're thinking so hard, Little girl. Try to quiet your thoughts so you'll be ready to sleep. Would a warm bath help?"

Celeste's words that being spanked quieted her brain popped back into Isla's mind. "I think a spanking would help."

"Most likely," he agreed. "Do you think you're ready now for that?"

She leaned away from his body to meet his gaze. "Yes."

Caesar didn't ask any questions. He simply lifted her to stand between his legs. He skimmed his hands up her thighs to reach the waistband of her leggings. Pulling them down to her ankles, he requested, "Put your hand on my shoulder for balance, and lift your left foot."

Her mind whirling, Isla mistakenly lifted her right foot. Caesar eased off her shoe and

removed the material. Halfway through, she realized her mistake. “Sorry.”

“It’s all good, Little Fish. Both feet work.”

Isla realized he hadn’t called her his pet name for a while. Subconsciously, she’d missed it. Being his Little Fish was important to her.

When he lifted her and stretched her body over his hard thighs, her thoughts ricocheted back to the space around them. Isla reached for the carpet under his feet and found that neither her tiptoes nor fingers could touch. She jumped as his large hand rubbed softly over her bottom.

“This won’t be a bad-girl spanking but a good-girl one, Isla. If you need me to stop, tell me. Do you need a safeword?”

“No, Daddy. I’ll just say stop.”

“Perfect.”

She felt the touch of his hand disappear. Her body stiffened, and he smacked her bottom, leaving a stinging sensation. Before she could digest it totally, another landed and another. Caesar peppered her bottom, making her wiggle and squirm. Heat built on her skin.

“Spread your legs, Little girl.”

She froze and turned to look at him.

“Thighs apart, Isla. You don’t hide anything from your Daddy.”

Slowly, she moved her legs. She buried her head against his leg, knowing he could

see everything. Isla knew her inner thighs were wet with arousal. She got wetter with every single spank.

“Beautiful.” He stroked a hand over her bottom and traced the cleft of her sex. “So wet.”

She held her breath. Would he touch her? The slap that landed directly on her pussy made her rear her head back. The throbbing between her thighs skyrocketed. Isla could smell her arousal perfuming the air as the tension inside her coiled.

The second swat made her bite her lower lip. She was so close.

The next spank landed on the rounded curve of her bottom, not where she needed it. Isla turned to look at Caesar in disbelief.

“I’m in charge, Little Fish. I’ll let you come in a while, but not yet. You don’t want it enough.”

“But I...I do,” she stammered.

“Daddy’s in charge,” he repeated as he spanked her bottom.

The heat built in her skin. She felt tears prickle on the edges of her eyelashes before tumbling down her cheeks. Isla gasped when he swatted the crease between her thighs and bottom. It was so sensitive. Overwhelmed, she drooped over his lap.

“Good girl,” he praised and rewarded her with his fingers between her thighs.

The sensations built to a critical point and stopped. Isla began to beg without realizing what words tumbled from her mouth. “Please. Please. Please, Daddy. I’ll be good.”

“You’re always good, Little Fish.”

His fingers returned to caress her. This time, when she hovered on the edge, he thrust two fingers into her. Isla arched her back as she screamed her pleasure into the room. He extended her pleasure with strokes and touches until she thought she’d lose consciousness.

When he finally removed his fingers and allowed her to descend from the bliss he’d lavished on her, she was vaguely aware of Caesar gathering her into his arms. He rocked her slowly as he spoke softly to her. Isla couldn’t concentrate on his words, but the cadence and tone nourished her soul.

She was barely awake when he stood. The rock of his slow steps lulled her. His movement to tug the comforter from the bed jostled Isla from her drowsy state. “Nooo,” she protested.

“Sit here for a minute, and I’ll tuck you in.” Caesar tugged her shirt over her head, leaving her naked. “Scoot under the covers, Isla.”

She heard herself mumbling but didn’t know what she was saying. Sinking into the mattress, she let out a deep sigh and closed her eyes. The soft sheet and comforter molded themselves around her, and she felt the brush of his hands as he smoothed them around her. The last things she remembered were a light kiss on her hair and a pat on her hot bottom.

Chapter Thirteen

When she finally blinked her eyelids open, Isla couldn't believe how late it was. She remembered Caesar cuddling her against his body all night and a light kiss on her forehead before he slid quietly out of bed earlier. Smiling, she gathered the covers under her chin and wiggled happily in the big bed.

Her elbow touched something plush and soft. Automatically, she lifted the covers to search for the culprit. "Nado! What are you doing under the covers?"

Hugging the stuffie to her chest, Isla felt like her heart couldn't get any fuller. Her Daddy loved her and had showed her that she didn't need to worry about spankings. They hurt, but it had been so worth it. And now, she understood what the others said about it quieting their minds. She'd never slept so well.

After replaying the night in her mind, Isla forced herself to sit up and swing her legs over the side. "You stay here, Nado. I'll come back to nap with you later," she promised.

After a shower and brushing her teeth, Isla dashed into the playroom to dress and grab the map she had stuffed in her suitcase. Tucking it back into her bra for safekeeping, she left the apartment and took the elevator back to the main floor. She caught Sadie's eye and gave her a thumbs up. To her delight, her friend applauded silently.

Laughing, Isla headed for the restaurant to have breakfast. She'd talk to Magnus afterward. Then, they could look at the map together.

Isla had planned to eat inside today but caught a glimpse of the gorgeous water and changed plans. Heading to the open-air restaurant, she sweet-talked the waiter to seat her next to the railing. Unable to keep her lips from curling into a delighted smile as she looked out, Isla searched for Caesar, hoping to see the boat out in the water.

She spotted a stranger's boat over on the side of the bay where they had searched yesterday. A Danger Bluff security boat was headed in that direction. Wondering why, she watched the action, ordering without thinking when the waiter appeared.

"I wondered when they were going to chase them away," a sun-kissed man said from the table next to hers.

"Chase them?" Isla echoed.

"Yes. Boats are welcome to visit Danger Bluff. You can come to the restaurant like my wife and I have." He gestured to indicate his lovely companion.

Isla nodded at the woman before asking, "You can swim here?"

"Of course. It's a lovely cove that's protected from the big waves. We swim, kayak, and even paddleboard here. The only thing that's forbidden is scuba diving unless you're with the Danger Bluff staff. If you're interested, Caesar leads the excursions. He's a blast," the woman commented.

Seeing Isla's smile, she added, "Why do I think you already know Caesar?"

"He is fun. I've done a couple of dives with him," Isla admitted before turning back to watch the action on the water. The security boat slowed as it approached the other boat. She watched a large man lift a bullhorn to his lips. Hawking.

"They're telling the man on the boat to signal the divers to surface," the chatty man

related.

Sure enough, in a few minutes, she could see heads pop up. Hawking continued to talk to them as he maintained partial cover under the awning. From the waving arms, the interlopers were excusing their trespassing.

“Idiots. They know there’s no scuba diving here. That’s a hired boat from the next town over. They must’ve paid that boat owner a ton to get him to risk arrest to come here.”

“It looks like they’re leaving,” Isla said.

“I’d think so. Jerks. Those types will get the rest of us banned from this beautiful place,” the woman jumped in again. She signaled for the server. “We might as well have another cup of coffee. I’m not going out there until all the commotion is finished.”

“Coffee?” the server asked as he set a cup in front of Isla.

“Yes, please.”

Isla’s phone buzzed with a message, and she peeked at the screen. Caesar.

“Where are you?”

Quickly, she typed.

“I’m at breakfast watching Hawking be all badass as he chases people away.”

“I am not telling him that. He’ll have a T-shirt made with that emblazoned on it. I’m glad you’re at the resort. Stay close to the main building today.”

“I was going to visit Magnus.”

“Good girl.”

Setting her phone down with a click, she picked up her coffee cup and took a sip to disguise the grin that last bit of praise had brought to her lips. She remembered hearing that last night.

“I see that smile,” Juniper’s voice came from beside her. “Can I join you?”

“Please,” Isla waved her into a seat. “Are you out taking photos today?”

“Yes. It’s a beautiful day. Here, look through the lens,” Juniper said, passing over her camera.

Isla lifted it to her eye, and instantly, the action on the two boats came into focus as if she were swimming in the water in front of them. She looked first for Hawking to ensure he was okay before glancing over at the rogue boat. Her gaze landed on a familiar icon painted on the hull. That had to be the same boat. How many would have a treasure chest logo?

She dropped the camera slightly to stare at Juniper, who nodded and then nodded slightly at the couple next to them as if warning her not to react.

“Smile,” Isla called and took a picture of Juniper before handing the camera back to her. She might have happened to capture an image of the boat in the background as well. “I bet you never get any pictures taken of you. You’re always behind the camera.”

Juniper laughed and nodded. “You’ve got that right.”

“They’re out of here. Good riddance,” the man announced and stood. “Looks like we can get out of here now, too.”

“Enjoy your day,” Isla said, wishing them well and waiting for them to walk away. “What’s going on?”

“Magnus was watching for them. They showed up super early and played it cool for a while to see if they’d get chased away. Hawking’s been waiting at the dock to swoop in. Get it? Hawking...swoops?”

“You,” Isla said, smiling back as she shook her head at the bad joke. “What will happen now?”

“Hawking will pay a visit to that boat owner to explain the fine that will be levied on him for any future diving excursions. I would bet he’ll suggest highly that their boats don’t visit this bay for a while.”

“Here’s your food, ladies,” the server announced as he placed two plates and another cup of coffee in front of them.

“How did they get your order?” Isla asked after he disappeared.

“Some sweetheart at the computers sent it in for me.”

“That’s convenient.”

“You have no idea what skills that man has,” Juniper whispered.

Slapping her hands over her ears, Isla shook her head to fend off that thought. She’d never be able to look at Magnus again.

Juniper simply buttered her toast.

The conversation that night over dinner was interesting. Isla finally understood the importance of the talking spoon. As each person spoke, she learned more information. By the time the spoon made its way around the table, everyone knew all the important events of the day.

“Sadie, I want you to send me the names of people signing up for Caesar’s excursions,” Magnus said. “I’ll run them through a preliminary search to screen who’s headed out into the bay.”

“What’s to keep people from just swimming in? Or coming in at night?” Isla asked.

“There are some sensors, and the distance is daunting. Someone could try it, but I think we’d pick up some clue that unwanted visitors had arrived,” Magnus said, partially reassuring her.

“When’s your next day off to dive with Isla?” Phoenix asked.

“I’ve got tours scheduled tomorrow. We can go out the following day.”

“I did some work on the map that Isla let me scan. After dinner, let’s look at what I played around with,” Magnus said.

“I’m finished,” Isla blurted.

Magnus looked at Juniper to make sure she’d eaten her fill. When she nodded, he set his fork down and said, “Let’s go look.”

To Isla’s surprise, everyone clustered around the bank of monitors to see. It made sense. Treasure hunting fascinated many people. “You all want to see this, too?”

“Of course. New Zealand’s history is filled with dangerous and valiant tales of explorers. You can see monuments all over the coast,” Celeste said, smiling.

“That makes sense. It is an island. It’s so pretty here. If I were an explorer, I’d give up the sea life and stay here,” Zara confessed.

“Me, too,” Sadie chimed in.

“You get seasick on the dock,” Rocco said wryly.

“Well. There is that reason, too,” Sadie admitted with a laugh.

“So, getting back to the treasure...” Magnus drew everyone’s attention back to the map. “Given the tides, if the chest was placed in the caves and has remained safe and secure there throughout the years, this is the path it most likely would’ve taken.”

He touched a button, and a colored swath appeared on the screen from the scanned version of Isla’s map. “It could be anywhere along this line. Hurricanes have hit the coastline throughout history. If one hit this area while the treasure was on the ocean floor, it’s possible that the course has changed slightly.”

Another color appeared on the map, overlapping the first one but further south. “There are also other possible factors that have affected it.”

“Where are you going to start?” Rocco asked. “It’s possible we could use the tunnel system under the resort to reach the caves in that area to make sure it isn’t still there. I have the day off. Sadie and I were going to the beach to swim. We could do some exploring.”

“Can I come?” Isla asked eagerly.

“Of course. It’s your treasure map. But you both have to promise you’ll do exactly what I say,” Rocco warned.

“I can do that,” Isla said eagerly. She’d liked rock climbing with Rocco. He was really good at what he did.

“Me, too,” said Sadie.

“Can I come? The caves are my childhood playground,” Juniper stated.

“No.” Magnus nixed that idea. “This isn’t a sight-seeing mission. We don’t know what Rocco will find down there, and he doesn’t need more Littles to keep safe.”

Juniper sighed but nodded. “You’re right. You’ll take me exploring sometime…?”

“I will, Little girl,” her Daddy promised.

“If you find the treasure, you’ll signal us?” Celeste asked.

“Of course. We all need to celebrate if it’s sitting there waiting for us,” Rocco assured her.

Chapter Fourteen

Waking up in her Daddy's arms was the best way to start the day, Isla decided. Lifting her head from his chest, she studied the handsome man who'd become so important to her in such a short time. She started to lean in to kiss him awake but stopped. He needs his sleep.

As she straightened, his full lips parted to say, "What's wrong? Do I have a black hair sprouting on top of my nose?"

Automatically, she looked at the top of his nose. "No. Does that happen often?" she asked.

Opening his eyes, Caesar confessed, "The only arguments I've ever heard between my parents are when she'd chase him down to wax the top of his nose. It started when he was sixty. I thought I should warn you in case that's a hard no on your list."

"Am I going to know you when you're sixty?"

"Definitely." He pulled his hand out from under the covers and rubbed the top of his nose. "Whew! I'm safe today."

She couldn't help but giggle. "You're planning on having a hairy nose when you're sixty?"

"You can't foil heredity. But no, my nose will be gorgeous because you'll chase me down to wax it."

Isla stared at him with wonder. “You’re not joking, are you?”

“I’m not. I waited a long time to find you. I’m keeping you.”

He reached up to wrap his hand around the back of her head and draw her lips to his. Instant heat burst inside her. She’d never experienced anything like this before. Opening her mouth to welcome his exploration, Isla responded fully. His mouth moved on hers, tasting and teasing.

When she raised her head to look down at him, they both breathed heavily. She looked directly into his eyes and said, “I love you.”

With a roar, he wrapped his arms around her and rolled their bodies so he was on top. “Say that again.”

“I love you, Caesar...Daddy.”

“I love you, my Little Fish.”

He captured her lips in a hard kiss that made Isla wrap her arms around his neck to squeeze him tightly. The desire that always seemed to lurk when he was around flared into bloom. She threaded her fingers into his hair, holding him close.

“You’re wearing too many clothes,” he growled, reaching a hand down to pull her nightie up.

Eagerly, Isla helped him drag it over her head. Once free, her gaze landed on his broad chest. She pressed her hands to his lightly furred skin and caressed his chiseled body as she leaned forward to kiss his neck. His groan encouraged her, and she explored his honed body.

“Wait!” she protested as he captured her hands and lifted them over her head. She struggled against his control, wanting to touch him.

“Who’s in charge, Little girl?”

She snorted, then allowed, “Daddy.”

“Good girl. Keep your hands right here.”

Immediately, she wondered where he was going that he couldn’t hold her in place. Isla didn’t want him to know she liked having him hold her. However, she hesitated a bit too long.

“Hmm. Let’s make a little change,” he said, rising to sit on his knees next to her.

“Whoa!” Isla scrambled to hold on to the covers as he lifted her body effortlessly and spun her onto her tummy.

He pressed a large hand between her shoulder blades, pinning her to the bed. “On your knees, Isla. Put that cute butt into the air.”

Unsure, she shifted her knees forward, feeling self-conscious with every inch her derriere rose into the air. He waited patiently until she was in the position he wanted before smoothing his free hand over her back and the curve of her bottom.

“Gorgeous.” He stroked his hand over her ribcage and around her body to cup one suspended breast. He caressed the tender flesh, making her freeze in place.

Holding her breath, she waited to see what he would do next. He pinched her nipple and tugged it slightly before releasing it to trail his fingers along her stomach to her bare mound. Just as she thought he’d caress her intimately, those fingers disappeared.

“Daddy!” burst from her lips as she turned her head to glare at him.

“Was there something you wanted, Little Fish?” he asked, settling behind her.

She opened her mouth to tell him exactly what she wanted but squealed as he lifted the hand pinning her to the mattress and wrapped both hands around her waist to lift her pussy to his lips. Licking her from the top of her cleft to her drenched opening, Caesar dived in. His lips closed around her clit and sucked.

When he lifted his mouth, Caesar asked, “More?”

“Don’t stop,” she begged.

“Never.”

He lowered his mouth to tantalize her more. After tracing her opening with his tongue, Caesar thrust his tongue deep inside, over and over. His hums of delight sent vibrations through her sensitive tissues, making her moan.

“I’m going to come,” she wailed.

Lifting his mouth from her body, he ordered, “Not yet, Isla. You’re going to come around my cock.”

She nodded in response to the command in his voice. When his mouth teased her again, she grabbed the comforter under her hands and squeezed it as she tried to fend off the approaching pleasure. “Please,” she begged, feeling her entire body shake.

With one last kiss, he lowered her knees back to the bed, and she watched as he leaned over to the nightstand, returning a moment later with a condom in his hand. In seconds, he had it rolled on and was lined up with her entrance. He grabbed her hips

and surged forward in one move to fill her completely.

He seemed to push the oxygen from her lungs as his pelvis slammed into her. Before she could recover, he'd withdrawn and thrust inside again. This time, his angle was slightly different, and she gasped at the sensations that flooded through her.

"Right here?" he teased.

"Yes!" she urged before screaming her pleasure into the room when his next stroke ignited her climax.

Isla could only hold on to the covers as he pounded into her hard and fast. She buried her mouth into the padding below her to muffle her next shout of completion. When she didn't think she could take any more, he withdrew completely.

She turned her head to protest and found herself spun around again to land on her back. Releasing the material above her, Isla looked at him through the tumble of her hair. To her astonishment, Caesar wrapped his hand around his cock and pulled it firmly toward her. She watched him repeat the process.

"Touch yourself, Isla. Come one more time for Daddy," he urged as he continued to pull roughly against his thick erection.

Mesmerized by the show in front of her, Isla didn't hesitate. She stroked one hand down her abdomen and over her bare mound. Dipping into her pink folds, she brushed her fingers over her clit and shivered. Nothing could be as erotic as this. She tried to memorize the desire and arousal carved into his face as he revealed everything to her.

"Now, Little girl. Come, now!"

Her orgasm hit fast and hard as his come spurted from the tip of his cock to splatter over her stomach and breasts. Moving instinctively, she slid one hand up to rub the liquid into her skin.

“Damn, Isla. You’re going to kill me,” he rasped, tugging at his erection to milk the last of his come onto her skin.

“Never, Daddy. I love you.”

“I love you, too, Little Fish.”

After dragging his hand down his staff one last time, Caesar moved forward to kiss her hard before collapsing on his side next to her. His hand wrapped over hers as she rubbed it slowly over her tummy.

“Will it always be this good?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“No questions in your mind?”

“None. That was a good time to tell me you love me,” he said before cupping her face and kissing her again.

“I do.”

“I’m glad. Let’s take a warm shower and grab some breakfast. You need fuel before you climb around those caves with Rocco.”

“A shower before exercise sounds silly,” she observed, cuddling against his chest.

“But necessary unless you want everyone to know exactly what we’ve been doing in here.” He inhaled deeply as she watched. “I can smell me all over you.”

“Oh! I didn’t think of that. Let’s go shower.”

“One more kiss, and then we’ll go.”

“Okay. The keyword today is safety. Follow the way I go if we run into any tricky areas. No improvising,” Rocco warned.

“Got it,” Isla said, acknowledging his rules.

“And you, Little girl?” he said, looking at Sadie.

“Oh, I’m going to do just what you say,” she answered, rubbing her bottom with one hand.

“Good idea. Turn on your headlamps, and let’s go,” Rocco directed.

Immediately, the two women powered up the bright lights attached by a stretchy elastic band. Blinding each other by inadvertently shining the beacon of brightness toward one another, they gasped and turned their heads away from each other.

“Ugh!” Isla said. “Now, I can’t see anything.”

“It’s getting better,” Sadie told her before she started giggling at their mistake. That, of course, set off Isla’s merriment as well.

“Only Littles,” Rocco said. “All right, time to go. Concentrate on where I’m moving.”

Isla was careful not to look at him so she didn't blind him as well. She really didn't need to. His warm tone told her he was amused and not annoyed. She forced her mouth to relax from the wide grin as she pulled her focus back to the task at hand.

Once they got out of the main area of the tunnels where the lights had been strung years ago, the beams from their headlamps were the only thing illuminating their way. When they reached a section that had not been traveled frequently, Isla followed Rocco's directions exactly as the smell of the seawater grew with every step they took.

This is so fun! Isla loved exploring the caves and could imagine all different types of people had trod on the same stones and touched the walls for stability as they'd walked. Pirates, smugglers, kidnapped damsels, daring teenagers. Who knew how many people had trampled through these passages?

"Hold up," Rocco said, his voice crisp.

Isla leaned to the side to look around his broad shoulders and whacked her head on a hanging rock. "Oof," popped out of her mouth.

"You okay, Isla?" Sadie said quickly.

"Yes. I just banged my head. Thank goodness it's as hard as a rock," she joked.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Rocco asked.

"Yes. Keep going," Isla urged.

"We've reached the sea. Come and look," Rocco invited and stepped forward into a wide section. He consulted the compass he had used to guide them to this point.

There was muted sunlight filtering through the water. It wasn't enough to see clearly, but it was a relief after the stark darkness they had emerged from. The air was heavy with moisture, and the walls had lines indicating the water depth at high tide.

"So, someone could've brought a treasure chest in here when the tide was low," Isla said as she looked around.

"Let's spread out a bit and see what we can find. I want to leave before the tide starts coming in," Rocco told them.

Isla chose to go to the left. Her head hurt a bit from the whack she had given herself, but she pushed the discomfort away as she concentrated on looking for a clue. Unfortunately, it wasn't like the movies. No wicked-looking saber was stuck into the wall like an arrow pointing the way—just seaweed and the faint smell of decaying sea life.

"I'm not seeing anything obvious over here," she reported. "Any clue what I should be looking for?"

"Same. I haven't found anything here, either," Sadie reported.

"Come look at this," Rocco called.

The two women moved eagerly to join him, and Sadie asked, "What did you find, Daddy?"

"There's a stain here on the wall. It looks like something metal was pushed against it for a long time. If you follow its path, the mark gets lighter, as if it didn't stay there for as long as it did at the original site. It disappears under the water line," Rocco said, pointing.

“There could’ve been something with a metal band here. It would’ve taken years for the iron to mark the wall,” Isla said.

“Definitely, but the walls are wet. Anything made of old metal would’ve rusted. Something had to be dragged along this side to make a straight line,” Rocco noted.

“Magnus was right. It looks like, over time, the water moved the treasure,” Sadie said.

“So, searching in the water is the only thing to do. We’ll have to use the projected paths Magnus came up with to help narrow down where to look. Even then, it’s doubtful we’ll just happen to run across it. We’d have to get really lucky,” Isla said, feeling the futility of the search.

“Don’t get discouraged. Whatever is in that chest must be amazing. That other diver wants it bad,” Sadie pointed out.

“Whatever it is, I’m just going to remember that I love scuba diving anyway. If we find it, great,” Isla said, putting her thumbs up in a positive gesture.

“Okay. We’ve done all we can do. Let’s head back to the resort,” Rocco urged.

Chapter Fifteen

“Finally,” Caesar said, breathing a sigh of relief when a message popped in.

Home safe. No treasure.

Quickly, he texted back a heart before turning to watch the group approaching in the distance for their water adventure. His shoulders settled back into place, and he felt the tension he hadn’t realized he’d been carrying slowly disperse.

“Good news, boss?” Jack asked.

“Yes. Are you available to go with us tomorrow to man the boat while we dive?” Caesar asked.

“You and Isla?”

“Yes.”

“After that last time, you may want me and another of those big guys you hang out with at the resort so frequently,” Jack suggested.

“You know, that’s not a bad idea. We could fill the boat, just like it was a scheduled excursion. Some people could snorkel while Isla and I dive.”

“That might give you some cover while you look for whatever’s down there,” Jack mentioned casually.

Caesar turned to look at him with narrowed eyes. “Who says we’re looking for something?”

“Come on, boss. You had a specific location that we navigated to. It wasn’t in any of the hand-selected spots we choose for resort guests to see the best displays underwater. There has to be something you’re looking for. Captain Cook’s treasure?” he guessed, raising his eyebrows.

“You’ve got quite an imagination, Jack,” Caesar said, forcing himself to grin as if that were the best joke.

“Okay, don’t tell me. I don’t blame you. But count me in. I want to see what you haul up.”

“I’ll be glad to have you there, Jack.”

After glancing up to see if he had time before the next group arrived on the dock, Caesar texted his team to ask who could be off the next day and shared his idea. Stowing his phone in the locked box where he kept his personal things, Caesar switched his attention to the individuals on his next tour. He knew Sadie would take care of finding a time when a few of the men could be available.

As they set out, Caesar noted that there were a few rented boats out in the bay. None of them bore the treasure chest graphic on the side. Hawking had driven out to visit that particular company and had a discussion with the owner. They’d promised to screen passengers requesting to spend their day near Danger Bluff. It appeared to be working.

When they returned to the dock after the last excursion and the crowd dispersed, he reclaimed his things and checked for messages. Caesar felt his mouth curve in a delighted grin. Isla had sent him a single red heart every hour they had been apart.

Damn, I love that woman.

There was definitely a spring in his step as he walked back to the main building. As he turned the curve in the path, he saw a familiar figure. Isla had stretched out on a chaise lounge beside the pool. Her body was clad in a familiar bikini, and her hair was piled in a messy bun on top of her head. Totally enchanting.

The chair next to hers was empty. Caesar pulled his Danger Bluff polo off over his head and dropped it on the bottom of the lounge. Then he stepped out of his shoes and sat down. Isla didn't move. She was involved in reading, completely wrapped up in the story.

He leaned a bit closer to spy on her choice of reading material. His shadow fell over her e-reader, and she glanced up nervously.

"Daddy! You scared me."

"Sorry, Little Fish. Let me see that." He held his hand out for the device she held in her hand.

She attempted to distract him by asking, "How did your groups do today?"

"They were great. I'm waiting," he told her, still holding his hand out for her e-reader.

"It's embarrassing," she whispered.

"Now, Isla," he stressed.

Without saying another word, she passed him the tablet. He watched her bite her lower lip and knew she was worried. Angling the device so he could read clearly,

several words popped out at him. No wonder she hadn't paid attention to someone approaching. He scrolled back a page to reach the beginning of the scene and then another when he still seemed to be in the middle of the action.

"Daddy!" she hissed.

"Don't disturb me, Little girl."

Sitting back against the comfortable seat, he read. Looking over the device, he met her gaze several times as she watched him. He could feel her anxiety drifting toward him in waves. When he finished the last of that scene, Caesar scrolled back to the spot she'd been at before handing the tablet back.

"We can recreate that," he assured her.

"No, Daddy," she whispered.

"Anything that turns both of us on needs to be explored. Keep reading. It gets even better."

Gasping, she looked back at the tablet, obviously wanting to see what he was talking about. Caesar closed his eyes and relaxed. When he peeked a few seconds later, she was lost in the story. When she reached the end of the chapter, her gaze raced to meet his.

"We are not doing that," she denied, shaking her head to emphasize her words.

"Oh, yeah, we are. I think I need to read more of these naughty books you have. They have some good ideas. Have you had a good day?" he asked to change the subject.

She grabbed for the opportunity to discuss something else. "I did. When we got back,

I swam and relaxed here in the sun.”

He was glad she didn’t talk about the exploration quest they had gone on. Caesar didn’t think anyone was listening to the two of them talking quietly in the secluded spot, but he’d get the details later.

Following her lead in discussing other things, he traced the edge of her shoulder strap. “There’s almost material sewn into this scrap of a bathing suit you’re wearing.”

“I’m sorry. I have others. This is just my favorite,” she told him, reaching for the extra towel next to her.

His hand curled around hers, stopping her motion. “It’s my favorite, too. At least, it is today. Maybe I need a fashion show to determine which of your bathing suits is my favorite.”

“Right. That’s never going to happen.” She blew off his suggestion.

“I’ll just wait to see them paraded around the pool or to a dive location. Have you had enough sun today? I think there’s just enough time to grab a shower and check in with Magnus about the dive tomorrow.”

“Let’s go,” she said, swinging her legs off the chaise lounge and gathering her things.

“I’ll hold these while you put on your cover-up,” he suggested, glaring at a couple of men watching her way too closely.

“I’ll set them here,” she said. “You have to put your shirt back on. Sadie said you walked through the lobby once with your shirt slung over your shoulder. She had to add excursions for the next week because so many women asked to be included in your activities.”

“Funny, she didn’t tell me, but I remember that week. I was packed with excursions.”

She pulled on an oversized T-shirt that fell to her knees and watched as he drew the Danger Bluff polo over his head. He picked up her things and placed his hand on the small of her back, claiming her as his own to the other resort guests.

“You could just lick me to make sure no one else wants me,” she suggested, obviously reading into his actions.

“Oh, I’m going to lick you. That will happen, but others will always be attracted to your sweetness.”

She grinned at him and promised, “I’ll try to be sour.”

“You be yourself, Isla. You’re who I love.”

“I love you, Daddy,” she whispered as they entered the main building to head to the elevators.

“Dinner at seven tonight,” Sadie called from the front desk. “I flexed the schedule a bit.”

“Thanks! We’ll see you there,” Caesar assured her, understanding her message that she’d added tours for some of his team to free up people to accompany them tomorrow.

“I may starve until seven,” Isla commented, rubbing her tummy.

“I have snacks upstairs if we need them. I’ll show you where they are. Feel free to explore our apartment. Hopefully, we won’t need popcorn or something else.”

“I’m pretty hungry.”

“We’ll see. My plan is to distract you,” Caesar assured her. He shot her a wink as they got into the elevator.

When they reached the top floor, Caesar ushered her into their apartment. “Shower, Little girl.”

He aimed her toward the bathroom and stripped off her T-shirt and bathing suit, tracing her new tan lines. “You need to be careful in the New Zealand sun. It gets fierce here. Always wear lots of sunscreen.” He opened a door to show her a variety of supplies, from bandages to toilet paper to bottles of sunscreen. “Help yourself.”

“Thank you. I’ll be careful. What are those?” she asked, appearing to forget the other contents of the closet as she concentrated on the black plastic devices he held in his hand.

“These are shower restraints. To keep Little girls’ hands out of the way as their Daddies get them clean. Wrist,” he requested firmly as he extended a hand.

Slowly, she moved her hand toward him and stopped a few inches shy. “I could just stand really still.”

He moved his hand to capture hers, bringing it closer to fit the device around her wrist. “You’re not going to be able to stand still.”

“Really?” she asked, automatically offering him her left hand.

“Really.”

With her hands secured, he drew her into the large shower stall. Lifting her hands, he

looped the center of the restraints over a hook. While she tried out her new position, he turned the showerhead to the side so she wouldn't get wet and switched on the water to warm.

After giving her a hard kiss, Caesar stepped out of the stall to strip off his clothes as she watched him with what he interpreted as hungry eyes. Returning to her side, he checked to ensure the spray was a suitable temperature before he adjusted the angle to spray over her body.

Rubbing liquid soap on his hands, he spread the slippery substance over her shoulders and worked his way down to cup her breasts in his hands. Caesar loved her breathy gasp as he molded the soft mounds. Unable to resist the appeal of her taut nipples, he rolled them between his thumbs and forefingers.

"Daddy? I need you. Can you let me go?"

"I'm right here. Trust Daddy. I'll make it better."

He leaned forward to capture her mouth as he caressed her and allowed his hands to stroke down the center of her torso to her pussy. Caesar explored her intimately, searching for all the spots that brought her the most pleasure. When her breath caught in her throat, he stepped back and turned the front of her body toward the spray. His hands smoothed over her to rinse the soap suds from her skin before turning his attention to her back.

She squirmed as he washed her bottom just as thoroughly as he had her front. He loved her slight squeal of protest as his finger circled and pressed against that tight, muscled ring hidden between her buttocks.

"How big was the plug in that book?" he asked as he dipped into her tight entrance, knowing the soap burned the sensitive area slightly.

“Too big!” she answered quickly.

“Good point. We’ll have to work you up to that. Hold that thought.”

After turning her body so the water rinsed off her backside, he grabbed a towel hanging on the rack and wrapped it around his waist before darting to her playroom to grab the set of dilators he’d purchased in preparation. Returning to the bathroom, he opened the set on the vanity and chose the smallest. With lubricant slathered all over it, he returned to the shower.

Her eyes widened at the sight of what he held in his hand. “No.”

“Yes.”

Caesar shifted her bottom from the spray and quickly inserted the plug. It wasn’t too much of a challenge. He made a mental note to advance a size or two next time. As for now, just having something in her bottom had affected her breathing.

Moving in front of her, he lowered himself to kneel on the tiled floor and pressed his mouth to her rounded mound. “I think I promised to claim you with a lick.”

To his delight, she nodded eagerly.

Caesar nudged her knees. “Spread your legs for me, Isla.”

Isla wrapped her hands around the nylon that extended from her wrists to the ceiling to brace herself as she parted her feet. She had enough slack, but her body stretched out tighter, which made her breasts rise higher and her pussy gush with fluids.

“That’s my good girl,” Caesar murmured against her folds. His breath made her arch toward him. “So eager…”

She was way past eager, and he knew it.

Caesar reached his arms around to palm her bottom, gripping her to hold her steady. He pressed one finger against the plug, making her more aware of its presence.

He wanted her focused on her bottom and the feel of his hands when he suddenly leaned forward and sucked her pussy.

“Daddy!” she cried out.

He moaned, knowing the vibrations would run through her body.

Pulling her even tighter against him with one hand, he used the other to spin the plug, causing her to clench her tight hole.

Isla rose up onto her toes as she came. She gripped the restraints tighter as her body pulsed against his mouth.

As the waves of her release slowed, Caesar slid up her body. He paused to suckle both of her nipples before gliding his hands up her arms and finally releasing her.

It was a good thing he caught her with both arms because she might have slid to the tile floor if he hadn't. She was so sated she couldn't hold herself up.

After kissing her, he turned off the water. “I think we both need a nap before dinner.” He patted her body dry before drying himself. She was already drifting off as he tucked both of them into bed naked. Caesar pulled her close and felt the corners of his lips tilt up as she wrapped an arm around his neck.

Chapter Sixteen

Caesar was having the best dream ever. At the edge of his consciousness, he knew he'd worked a long day and had climbed under the covers with his Little girl to nap. He had no interest in waking up because, in the dream, Isla was leaning over him, stroking his cock and licking the head. It felt so good he prayed he wouldn't wake up prematurely.

But then his smoking hot Little sucked him deep into her mouth, which yanked Caesar awake. For a split second, he was frustrated and disappointed, but in the next instant, she sucked again.

Caesar jerked his gaze down to find thick brown hair spread across his abdomen and thighs. Isla was on her knees next to him, one hand wrapped around the base of his cock, the other flat on his abs. And holy heaven... She was bobbing up and down, sucking him so perfectly he was already close to orgasm.

Caesar groaned as he threaded his fingers in her hair. "Little Fish..."

She moaned against his dick, making him squeeze his butt cheeks together and lift them partway off the bed. Damn... Her mouth...

"Isla..." he warned a minute later. "Daddy's going to come. If you don't want to swallow, you need to release me."

She took him deeper, sucking him damn near to the back of her throat. That was the last straw. He couldn't hold back any longer. One of the most powerful orgasms of

his life erupted from him to squirt down her throat. With every pulse of his release, she swallowed, causing the next one to come even harder.

He was panting and grinning from ear to ear when she finally released his cock.

“Did I do it right, Daddy?”

He chuckled as he pulled her over his body so that she was sprawled on top of him. He cupped the back of her head and brought her lips down for a long, hot kiss. When he finally released her, he said, “I’ve never experienced anything that perfect, Little Fish.”

“Good. I liked it.” She braced herself and kissed him again. “I loved the fact that I could focus all my attention on you and watch your responses.” She grinned wide. “I can’t think of anything but myself when you have your mouth on me.”

He chuckled. “That’s always my plan.” He ran his hands up and down her sexy body as he glanced at the clock. “We better get to dinner.”

“Yeah. I feel much better after that nap.”

He winked. “Me, too. Or maybe I feel better because of the way I woke up from the nap.” He grabbed her around the waist, flipped her onto her back, and hovered over her. When he pressed a knee between her legs and against her pussy, he found her soaked. “I do believe my Little girl enjoyed sucking my cock.”

She groaned as he rubbed her clit with his thigh. Yeah, she was soaked. Her arousal increased against his leg, making it easy to slide over her swollen folds.

Watching her face, he saw the exact moment her eyes rolled back. At the same time, she grabbed his biceps. “Daddy...”

“Come on my leg, Little Fish.”

She flushed adorably. “How...” She licked her lips, her next words lower. “How did I get so horny?”

“Apparently, when you find the right person to spend your life with, you can’t keep your hands to yourself.” He kissed her. “Or your mouth.”

She groaned. “Or your leg...”

He chuckled as he drove her body forward and backward with every stroke of his thigh.

“The plug...” She whimpered.

Not only was her pussy pressed against his leg, but her position pressed the thick plug deeper into her bottom. He grabbed her knee and pushed that leg up and out, forcing her pussy to be more exposed. “That’s my good girl. Ride Daddy’s leg.” Her breasts jiggled with every brush of his thigh.

He understood what she’d meant when she’d said she’d enjoyed watching him come because he felt the same way every time he gave her his full attention. She was mesmerizing when she totally let loose.

“Daddy...” She lifted her hips off the bed, getting better traction against his thigh. “Oh...” And then her entire body stiffened, and she stopped breathing as she hovered in that blissful place he now recognized came right before her orgasm.

The smile that spread across her mouth when she came was so brilliant it lit up the entire room.

Caesar kissed her again, lingering even though he knew they should get up and get dressed for dinner. Everyone would understand if they were a few minutes late. All of his teammates had been late for dinner more than once when they'd first met their Littles.

Finally, he released her lips. "Now, we should get dressed."

"Will you take that thing out of my bottom, Daddy?"

He rolled her to her side, reached back, and spun the small plug around several times. "This?"

"Daddy..." she groaned.

"Yes. I'll take it out but only because I want you to wear a bigger one this evening. This one is too small."

She gasped, eyes wide. "Daddy."

"Mmm?"

She rolled her eyes. "I'll never be able to sit through dinner with that in my bottom."

"You can stand if you want."

She swatted at his shoulder playfully. "Be serious, Daddy."

He chuckled. "You can sit on my lap. I'll feed you. I'll even put a short dress on you so I can reach under it and remind you about the plug every once in a while."

Her eyes widened. "You wouldn't. You can't do that in front of everyone. What if

they knew?”

“Little Fish, they’ve probably all had to endure something similar at one time or another. I seriously doubt you’ll be the only Little girl at dinner with a plug in her pretty bottom. I also suspect at least one or two will show up with red bottoms that make them wince. You want to add a spanking to your plight?”

She shook her head. “No, Sir.”

“I didn’t think so.”

Chapter Seventeen

Caesar was the last to hold the talking spoon near the end of dinner. “So, the plan is to go out tomorrow at high tide. If we have the entire team, minus Magnus on the boat, plus most of the Littles, we will easily look like a regular excursion. If anyone stalks us from another boat or the shore, they won’t know some of us are actually under the water looking for any hint of the treasure.”

Magnus nodded. “I’ll stay here in the basement with Juniper, watching all the cameras. Two sets of eyes are better than one.”

Sadie wiggled on her Daddy’s lap. “I got someone to replace me at the front desk for several hours.”

Rocco gripped her thigh, silently reminding her to sit still. This made Caesar suspect she either had a sore bottom, a plug, or both. Caesar knew, from the way Isla had glanced at Sadie several times, that she was wondering the same thing.

“How many of us are scuba certified?” Celeste asked. “I’m certainly not. I’ve never been willing to stick more than my face in the water. Anything deeper makes me freak out.”

Hawking kissed her cheek. “Phoenix and I have both gotten certified since we started working here. So has Zara.”

Kestrel nodded. “I’ll stay at the surface, snorkeling with Celeste, Lyra, and Sadie.”

Rocco nodded. “I will stay on the boat with Jack and watch for any possible threats.”

It was rare, but Caesar felt kind of choked up. “Thank you. All of you.”

Rocco leaned forward, keeping one arm tight around Sadie. “No need to thank us. We’re a team. We’ve all been there for each other, and we will all see this threat through to the end.”

All Caesar could do was nod as Isla wrapped her arms tight around his neck and leaned her head against his shoulder.

Phoenix lifted Lyra out of her chair and pulled her onto his lap. It seemed all of them were feeling possessive and a bit emotional. Every face was somber, and the room was rather quiet.

Phoenix cleared his throat. “I know something big is going to happen. I can feel it in the air. We all know Kingsley doesn’t assign anyone the task of protecting a Little without a serious threat following on her heels. All we can do, for now, is do this dive tomorrow and see what we can find. We all know the danger is real. We will all be cautious and observant at all times. We’ll take our time, be meticulous, and scour the ocean floor.”

“What if we don’t find a single thing?” Zara asked.

Hawking sighed. “That’s the most likely outcome, unfortunately, and I don’t know what happens next. As long as there are people out there who believe there’s a treasure buried in that cove, there will be boats in the Danger Bluff waters, scouring the sea floor, even if they have to do so in the dark of night. Treasure hunters can be ruthless.”

Caesar patted Isla’s bottom and drew in a deep breath. “Which is why it’s crucial that

we find something. It's the only way we can put a stop to the nonsense. Otherwise, we'll be out there looking again every few days until we do."

"What if there's nothing to find?" Isla asked, her voice cracking. She rubbed her temples. "I feel so bad about this. If I hadn't dug around in my grandfather's belongings and decided to follow in his footsteps, none of this would've happened. No one would have ever known who took that map out of a toilet tank all those years ago."

Caesar hugged her tighter. "Little Fish, if you hadn't found that map and headed out on this adventure, I wouldn't have met you, and that possibility is unimaginable. You're my life. I'll never understand how you got put in my path or how Kingsley could possibly know to send you to me, but you're here now, and I'm so damn glad. I'll never regret a thing. We will resolve this matter and live happily ever after. There are no other options."

The remaining Littles who'd been sitting next to their Daddies climbed up on their laps so that all twelve of them were snuggled in with their loved ones.

After a few minutes of silence, Rocco said, "Am I the only one wondering what happens to us after we solve this problem? What happens to the twelve of us? I consider you my family now. I can't fathom a world in which we all go our separate ways." He shuddered.

"Me neither," Hawking agreed.

Kestrel nodded. "I think that goes for all of us."

"Definitely," Magnus muttered. His ball cap helped him hide his expression, but Caesar knew he was feeling emotional.

Phoenix smiled at everyone. “So, it’s settled. We stay together. We’ll talk to Kingsley and tell him we want to continue working here at Danger Bluff. Hopefully, he won’t evict us.”

Caesar shuddered. The idea of Kingsley sending them all back to their previous lives made bile rise in his throat. For many of them, there was no previous life. They’d been merely existing between the time Kingsley had sent a team to rescue each of them and when he’d called in their markers.

Return? To what? Caesar’s life was here. He and Isla hadn’t discussed her willingness to stay in New Zealand again since the first time he’d suggested she find a nursing job here, but they would soon, and he knew she would not want to part from him or her new family. He could tell by the way she was gripping his neck as though if she let loose, she might be ripped from him and float away.

Isla cleared her throat. “I know I’m the newest member of the family, and I’ve only been here a few short days, but I feel like I belong. Like I’m home.” She let out a sob and wiped tears from her face.

All the Littles nodded their agreement, murmuring words of acceptance and agreement. It warmed Caesar’s heart. So, that was settled. Now, they just needed to solve this unknown crime and arrange a meeting with Kingsley.

Rocco set Sadie on her feet and rose to stand. “Enough with the long faces. Let’s have a movie night.”

Sadie clapped her hands together. “Something scary?”

“Hell no.” Caesar couldn’t even be certain who, besides him, blurted that out. It had to have been several of the Daddies all at once.

Rocco took Sadie's hand and headed for the giant sectional to pick up the remote. "I'll look for something light. Maybe a rom-com. Something the Littles will enjoy that will make us all laugh."

Hawking leaned to one side and pulled his phone out of his pocket. "I'll see if the restaurant can make us a huge batch of popcorn."

Celeste grinned. "Can we have soda, too?"

Kestrel groaned. "Lemon-lime. No caffeine."

Zara pushed out her bottom lip. "Then can we at least get candy, too? Maybe some chocolate?"

Magnus shook his head. "Oh boy. If we start adding soda and candy, the Littles will end up conspiring against us."

Juniper giggled. "You love it when we conspire, though. Admit it. It makes your palms twitch."

Phoenix flexed his hand. "Guess we better start stretching our fingers and wrists. I say we Daddies place bets on what percentage of the movie we're able to watch before bottoms end up in the air."

Lyra swatted at his flailing hand. "Don't be ridiculous. We can watch an entire movie without getting into trouble."

Caesar's face hurt from smiling. Yeah, bottoms were going to get spanked. Fun was going to be had. And he wouldn't have it any other way. These men were his brothers. These women were their perfect Littles. If they didn't find a way to get into trouble, life would be boring.

Isla set her lips on his ear and whispered. “I’m going to fit in just fine. I feel some seriously naughty behavior bubbling up inside me.”

Caesar rubbed her back as he continued to grin. He kissed her cheek and nibbled on her ear. “I hope so because I’m looking forward to spanking your bottom with that plug inside you. After all, that’s what happened in the book you were reading.” He leaned back and lifted a brow.

Damn, she was cute when her cheeks turned pink and she couldn’t meet his gaze. “I’m never sharing my books with you again.”

“You will, Little Fish. You will,” he promised.

Chapter Eighteen

Isla truly felt like a member of this giant family, especially when all the Littles piled up on the floor in the middle of the U of the sectional. They brought down dozens of pillows and blankets and snuggled up with popcorn and sippy cups of lemon-lime soda.

The Daddies had not consented to candy in the end because they'd been worried about everyone getting enough sleep tonight before the big dive tomorrow.

They had all seen the rom-com before, which made it easier to glance at each other and whisper among themselves. They played a repeating game of telephone where one would think of something and whisper it to the next, and so on until it got back around. Usually, it was slightly altered, which caused them to stifle their giggles.

In the end, they agreed that they would all wake up more refreshed and ready to tackle the day tomorrow if they slept hard tonight, and the best way to ensure a full night's sleep would be if it followed a good hard spanking.

With ten minutes left in the movie, Sadie started the shenanigans. She yanked a large blanket off the top of them, which caused squeals and was followed by everyone grabbing a pillow, jumping to their feet, and having a pillow fight.

In Isla's entire life, she'd never once been involved in an actual pillow fight. She knew people talked about them happening at sleepovers. She'd read about them. She'd seen them on TV. But she'd never been a participant.

And this pillow fight among six full-grown women in short dresses with far more than enough pillows was epic. Isla was laughing so hard within five minutes that she feared she might pee herself.

At first, the Daddies simply stayed in their seats and watched, only mildly shocked. After a bit, one of the pillows got a hole in it, and then stuffing started coming out, filling the room. When that happened, the men moved away from the sectional to stand behind it.

Isla glanced at them several times to see what their reactions were, especially Caesar's. This was her first full-on naughty experience, and though she knew from the other Littles and her own Daddy that this sort of thing was common practice among the women, she still held on to a slight hesitation, wondering if anyone would truly get angry.

All of them were simply smirking while they picked fluff out of their hair, beards, and clothes.

Eventually, a second pillow developed a hole, and then white cloudy fluff was flying around like crazy. Isla loved this so much. She'd never felt so free and uninhibited in her life. The entire experience was bonding and made her feel like part of the family even more.

As if on cue, all the Daddies jumped into the fray to snag each of their Littles from the bedlam, lifting them right off the floor with arms around their waists.

The women protested lamely, squirming and fighting to free themselves so they could continue the pillow fight. But it was over, and Isla knew it. Without a word, they were escorted toward the elevator.

Isla found herself tossed over Caesar's shoulder, and she swung her head around to

find two other women were in a similar position. Three couples got into the elevator and disappeared, leaving Isla, Juniper, and Lyra still wiggling to free themselves.

When the elevator returned, the last six of them entered. Well, six feet were on the floor and six were in the air. Lyra was being held up with her back to Phoenix's front. She was too short to do anything but struggle. Juniper was being cradled by Magnus who was so built and strong she had no hope of escaping.

Isla let her body go limp over her Daddy's shoulder, mostly because she was worn out from the pillow fight. It had been the most fun ever, but now, she was exhausted, and she knew she was about to get a lot more tired from a spanking.

She was a smart girl. This spanking wasn't going to be like the last one. This one would be more intense and probably not end in an orgasm. Curiosity had led her to this point, though, and she was intrigued.

As soon as they were inside their apartment, Daddy went straight through to the bedroom and lowered her to the bed. He pushed her onto her back, planted his hands on either side of her, and leaned over to meet her gaze.

He was grinning. "Little Fish, I've never been so happy in my life."

She giggled. "I don't think I've ever had more fun, Daddy."

"Good. I want you to be carefree and enjoy yourself. That's half the fun of being Little."

She grabbed his waist, thinking to pull him down for a kiss, but he didn't budge. Finally, she sighed. "But you're still going to spank me."

"Yep. You know why?"

She shrugged.

“Because that’s the other half of the fun of being Little.” He rose up a few inches and tickled her tummy just long enough to surprise her and make her buckle forward.

“Daddy…”

He grabbed her hands and pulled her to stand before lifting her dress over her head and leaving her in nothing but her panties. Squatting in front of her, he quickly removed those, too. Patting the bed, he said, “On your tummy.”

“On the bed?” she asked. She’d expected him to take her over his knees like he had last time.

“Yep. Sometimes, I’ll spank you in other places besides my lap. Maybe over the back of the couch or a chair. Sometimes, you’ll bend over and hold on to your feet or another object. Consider yourself lucky that tonight you get to lie on your tummy.”

Isla scrambled up to lie down where he’d indicated.

“Lift your hips, Little Fish.”

Confused, she did as she was told, understanding much better when he slid a pillow under her belly. “Good girl. Part your legs for me.”

Isla gasped at the vulnerability she felt from that simple action.

“That’s my good girl,” her Daddy said in a much softer tone as he set a hand on her bottom and patted her several times over the plug.

She whimpered.

“You read the chapter in the book. You know what Daddy is going to do next.”

She had read it, and the thought that he was going to emulate that scene made her pussy drip onto the bed. “Yes, Sir,” she whispered.

He twisted the plug several times, making her hyper-aware of every nerve ending in her bottom. Next, he pressed against it, pushing it in a fraction deeper before pulling on it just slightly until she lifted her head off the mattress, unbelievably aroused from the pressure against the tight ring of muscles. He held the plug just right so she felt every bit of the resistance without pulling hard enough to dislodge it.

Isla wasn't surprised. After all, this was exactly what the Daddy had done in the book. Caesar had obviously read the scene closely.

She finally took a full breath and lowered her head onto her forearms when he let go of the plug.

“I'm going to swat your bottom now, gently, at first, and then harder. I want you to focus on how the plug feels inside your bottom with every swat. Ignore the sting of my palm and pay attention to the fact that Daddy wants you to be aware of what it feels like to submit so deeply that even the inside of your bottom is mine.”

She licked her lips. “Yes, Sir.” Everything he said was laced with sex and promise. Was he going to end this scene without letting her come? He'd told her before that only good-girl spankings ended in orgasm. Was this spanking a naughty-girl spanking?

Isla thought back on that section of the book and remembered that the Daddy had fingered the Little girl to orgasm in the end. Maybe Caesar would do the same for her...? Or maybe when he'd said he would imitate the scene, he'd only been talking about the spanking part.

The first swat took her by surprise, landing right over the top of the plug. It vibrated inside her, making her tense.

“Relax your bottom, Little Fish.”

She tried not to clench her butt cheeks, but it was hard. The next spank landed more on one cheek than the other, but he still included the plug, and she moaned.

It was difficult to focus on the inside of her rectum instead of the sting of his palm, but she did it because he'd told her to. As he continued to swat her, his palm moving around her heated skin, her body relaxed into the rhythm. Her breathing evened out as she let her mind wander to her submission and how good it felt to turn herself over to her Daddy.

When he paused to check on her, his palm pressed against the base of the plug while his lips came close to her ear. “You doing okay, Isla?”

“Yes, Daddy,” she whispered.

“How does it feel?”

“So good,” she admitted. “I’m kind of floating.”

“That’s normal, Little Fish. It’s called subspace. It’s euphoric. A lot of submissives experience it during some form of impact play. Relax deeper into the mattress.”

She obeyed him, feeling like she was literally sinking through the bed. She was so relaxed that his next slaps nearly brought her to orgasm. How was it possible that she might come from a spanking? She knew the answer. It was because her Daddy was controlling how she felt. He'd done so with the power of suggestion by ordering her to focus on the inside walls of her bottom.

Suddenly, he increased the pace, raining a volley of swats right over the plug.

Isla lifted her head, cried out, and came so fast she didn't have time to tell him or stop it. She prayed he wouldn't be mad at her for coming during a spanking without permission.

Panting and unable to move, all Isla could focus on, as the waves of pleasure waned, was how her Daddy was rubbing her bottom and whispering sweet words in her ear. "Such a good girl. So proud of you. Take what you need, Little Fish."

She was limp against the bed, eyes closed, lips parted, still breathing heavily as her Daddy gently removed the plug. She didn't resist him. Instead, she relaxed the tight ring of muscles.

"Gorgeous," he praised. "Don't move." He disappeared for a minute, probably to wash the plug, and then he was back. After gently rolling her over, he lifted her into his arms.

She whimpered. "Too tired, Daddy."

He kissed her temple. "You need to potty and brush your teeth, and then you can sleep."

She pushed her lower lip out because she didn't want to do either of those things. She just wanted to sleep.

Her Daddy made it easy, though. He held her steady while she peed, wiped her, washed her hands, and then brushed her teeth for her. By the time he tucked her under the covers with Nado, she was smiling.

"Daddies really do take care of everything," she murmured.

He kissed her cheek. “They sure do.”

As she closed her eyes, he disappeared for a minute. All she heard was the sound of light switches, and the next time she opened her eyes, all the lights were out, and he was climbing in beside her, wearing nothing.

She rolled onto her side and pressed her back to his front, wiggling her ass a bit, hoping he might take the hint and fill her up. Even though she was exhausted, she would never be too tired to take him into her body. Her orgasm had been amazing, but it couldn't compare to the feeling of his erection filling her.

Daddy stilled her with a hand on her hip. “Sleep, Little Fish. I need you to be well-rested before you swim with the fishies tomorrow.”

She whimpered but gave up the fight and let sleep drag her under in seconds.

Chapter Nineteen

“Listen up, everyone,” Caesar said the following day as Jack anchored the boat over the spot they thought was most likely to reveal a treasure if there was one.

He handed Hawking, Phoenix, Zara, and Isla underwater metal detectors. They were all suited up and ready to enter the water.

“I want the rest of you to stay close to the boat. You can snorkel and enjoy the amazing, colorful fish, but stay aware of your surroundings at all times and don’t stray away from the boat more than a few feet just in case you need to get back in quickly.”

Kestrel, Celeste, Lyra, and Sadie nodded. They each had their snorkels and masks ready.

Caesar turned to the divers. “I attached a bolt to a D-ring next to your tanks. If anyone is in distress or finds something promising, reach back and tap the bolt against the tank. It will get everyone else’s attention.”

Caesar glanced at Kestrel and then the divers. “Kestrel has a storm whistle. Rocco and Jack will be in the boat watching for problems. If they see any sign of danger, they will alert Kestrel, and he will blow the whistle underwater. It’s a very distinct sound that will tell us we need to get back up to the surface immediately. There is no way we could confuse it with the pinging sound we’ll hear from each other. We didn’t have this in place last time because Isla and I were together at all times.”

He watched as the divers palmed their bolts and Kestrel held up his whistle.

“We will take no chances with anyone’s safety for any reason. If Kestrel blows the whistle, we all get out of the water.”

Rocco nodded. “Jack and I will be ready to pull you out as quickly as possible, two at a time.”

All twelve faces held serious expressions when Caesar scanned them. He knew the divers were anxious to get down there. None of them had ever used an underwater metal detector, and they were curious. He had to agree with them. Even if all they found was some kind of trash that had washed up close to the cave entrance and lodged in the sea floor, it would be fun finding it.

“Any questions?” Caesar asked.

No one responded as they glanced at each other.

“Then I say let’s do this.” At his signal, the divers entered the water first. He followed behind them and made eye contact with Isla, giving her a thumbs-up and a smile before they all descended into the beautiful water.

After thirty seconds, he was aware of the movement above them as the snorkelers got in, and then he turned his entire attention to the ocean floor below them.

His adrenaline was pumping because, no matter what, this was exciting. They might not find the treasure that specifically went with the map, but there was still a possibility they would find something, especially considering how many ships had gone aground in this area for decades after the discovery of New Zealand.

Caesar kept a close eye on Zara and Isla, who were diving buddies. The two of them

chose a location and dropped down to the sea floor to explore with their metal detectors.

Everyone had a pouch attached to their hip where they could stick any items they found to bring to dry ground and examine. They were all well aware that anything they found belonged to the government of New Zealand and not to themselves. The Ministry of Culture and Heritage would need to catalog and record all items.

Searching for treasures in New Zealand was permitted, but keeping the spoils, or even moving them, was not. Anyone caught doing so would be fined heavily and possibly imprisoned.

Caesar stayed close to the women while Hawking and Phoenix searched several meters away. Because the dive was relatively shallow, they could stay down for about two hours before they would need to come up to the surface. If they found nothing and wanted to try again, they could swap tanks and go back under.

About a half-hour into the search, Isla pinged her bolt against her tank.

Caesar turned toward her and watched as she pointed to the ocean floor. He made his way closer with the others while Isla reached down to gently disturb the sand with her hand. A few seconds later, she discovered what looked like a brass candlestick.

Even through her mask, Caesar could see her eyes widen with excitement. He had to admit, a candlestick was a good sign. It wasn't the sort of thing they would expect from random garbage.

All five of them spread out and sifted through the sand, trying not to disturb it so much that it limited their visibility. It took almost another hour before Hawking alerted everyone that he had found another artifact. His was a goblet.

Caesar's heart was racing. This was exciting. There would never be any way to know for sure if any treasure found in this area specifically correlated with the map Isla had inherited from her grandfather, but that didn't matter so much as finding evidence that it was possible.

In Caesar's mind, if all they ever found were these two items, he would call this exploration a success. As it was, they didn't need to look any further. It was time to turn the quest over to the government and let them handle it from there.

As soon as Hawking marked the artifact's location, Caesar gave the sign that it was time to return to the boat. Just as he tipped his head back to orient himself with the location of the bottom of the boat above them, something splashed into the water from near the cave entrance.

One second later, another similar splash occurred. He froze when he saw the two black shadows, his mind filling with flashbacks of the time he'd been out with Mindy.

Someone grabbed his arm, and he glanced to the right to see Isla staring at him.

The whistle sounded in the water a moment before the two men descended. When Caesar saw both holding spearguns, his heart nearly stopped. For a moment, he was paralyzed, dragged into the past, but then his brain kicked into gear. He grabbed Isla's arm and angled her behind him.

A glance to one side indicated Phoenix was blocking Zara from the quickly approaching divers. Where was Hawking? Caesar couldn't see him anywhere.

The two men descended so fast that there was no way to avoid them. The water wasn't very deep. In seconds, they were both holding out the spearguns, aiming them toward Caesar and Phoenix.

Caesar wished he could have gotten Isla to safety, but there hadn't been time. She was holding on to the gear at his back. Even if he could communicate with her and tell her to swim toward the surface, that would just leave her vulnerable. He couldn't take that risk.

Heart racing, he removed his knife from his belt, but he and Phoenix would never be able to face off with two men with spearguns while protecting Isla and Zara. Where the hell was Hawking?

Caesar couldn't take his gaze off the men coming toward them, and he had no way to communicate with anyone above water. Kestrel and Rocco were probably losing their minds since they had no way to descend. They would have seen these two divers jump in from somewhere near the cave, and now, they were stuck above with no idea what was happening.

Caesar felt foolish for not thinking about the fact that divers didn't have to approach by boat. Why hadn't he considered the possibility that they could enter from land? They could have been hiding there for hours, waiting for the opportunity to leap. There were many elevations along the shoreline. These men could have jumped in from only a few feet above the water, situated their masks, and then slid underwater so fast that Rocco and Kestrel wouldn't have had much of a chance to react.

Movement in Caesar's limited peripheral vision indicated someone was coming up behind one of the two divers. Holy shit. Kestrel. He'd palmed a weighted belt to help him descend, but he was holding his breath.

Caesar kept his gaze locked on the two men coming directly toward him and Phoenix, but he noticed Hawking coming from behind the second man. Thank fuck. Those two had no idea what was coming.

With nearly synchronized precision, Hawking and Kestrel attacked both men from

behind, causing them to fling around as panic seized them both.

The man who'd been aiming at Caesar dropped his speargun, and Caesar lurched forward to grab it, barely snagging the strap before it hit the ocean floor. His jerky motions caused Isla to let go of him, but he used his fins and thanked God for all the time he'd spent working out to get back between her and the skirmish.

There was blood in the water now. It was hard to see. Phoenix was wrestling the speargun from the second man. Kestrel held an arm tightly around the first man's neck.

Caesar aimed the speargun at the man's thigh and pulled the trigger.

The asshole jerked and flailed around as soon as the spear was embedded in his leg. Caesar knew how bad it hurt. He'd been there. It was fucking painful.

The man was still fighting, though. He pulled a knife and turned to swing it at Kestrel.

Caesar used the speargun to knock the knife out of the guy's hand before grabbing the sharp object that protruded out both sides of his thigh and wrenching it hard.

The man arched his back in severe pain, giving Kestrel the opportunity to stab him in the gut. Disarmed and severely injured, the man was no longer a threat, and Kestrel grabbed hold of his gear and yanked him toward the surface.

Kestrel was surely hurting for oxygen, and he was hauling dead weight, but he didn't stop.

Caesar turned to find Hawking had stabbed the second diver several times. Blood was flowing out all around him, but he was still fighting. Phoenix had managed to get his

speargun, and he held it up, threatening to shoot. Finally, the man lifted his hands in surrender, and Hawking grabbed him by the gear and pulled him toward the surface, too.

Caesar spun around to find Isla still at his back. Her eyes were wide behind her mask, but she didn't seem to be injured or panicking. Zara didn't either. Those two women had Littles in them who could giggle and play and make mischief, but they were also strong women with spunk and fight in them.

Caesar let go of the speargun and grabbed Isla by the shoulders, making eye contact. When she nodded, he set his forehead against hers and took a deep breath. They were going to be okay.

Chapter Twenty

“You’re bleeding,” Isla shouted. Rocco had pulled her out of the water first before helping Caesar. Isla was pointing at Caesar’s leg. He hadn’t even been aware that he’d been stabbed, ironically in almost the same location as the time he’d taken a spear through his thigh.

“It’s nothing, Little Fish. A flesh wound.”

She shook her head. “It’s oozing. Let me help you get your suit off.” She grabbed his arm and tugged, attempting to force him to obey.

Her efforts to move him to do her bidding would have been comical if it weren’t for the fact that Caesar was more interested in making sure everyone in his family was safe.

There were two police boats in the water, with multiple officers working to haul the injured divers out of the water. One officer had transferred onto Caesar’s boat at some point, and he hurried around everyone to get to Caesar. “Medics are on the way.”

“I’m fine,” Caesar assured him. “I’ve endured worse.”

“Caesar,” Isla shouted in a tone he’d never heard before. “Do you forget I’m a nurse?” She glared at him as she shrugged out of her wetsuit. “Get that suit off now before I have your men hold you down and cut it off,” she ordered.

He smirked but quickly sobered when he saw her expression. She'd never looked at him like that before. She was serious and concerned, not just as his Little but as a nurse.

He cupped her face. "Okay, okay, give me a second." He glanced around.

The boat was crowded with the women trying to stay out of the way while the men helped Kestrel, Phoenix, and Hawking onto the boat. It looked like Hawking had been stabbed in the arm. He wasn't paying any attention to it, much like Caesar. The man's adrenaline had to be pumping just as high. He probably hadn't noticed the wound yet.

Celeste did, though, and she ran toward her Daddy to grab his arm. "Get this suit off. Hurry."

Hawking kissed her before doing her bidding and shrugging out of the top part of the suit.

"Caesar!" Isla yelled.

He jerked his attention back to his Little. She was furious. Not wanting to upset her further, he went to work, removing his wet suit while she turned her attention to Hawking. His arm was exposed now, and she grabbed it and leaned in close. "It's not deep," Isla told Celeste. "Are you squeamish?"

Celeste chuckled. "Not at all. I'm a scientist. I've been present for open-heart surgeries."

Jack tossed Isla a T-shirt. Isla wrapped it around the wound and looked at Celeste again. "Hold this here. Don't let him talk you out of it."

Isla turned her attention back to Caesar, who was trying not to wince as he lowered the wetsuit past the wound. It stung, but it wasn't too bad. The worst part was the salt water dripping into it.

"Sit," she demanded, pointing to the bench behind him.

He dropped onto his other hip and extended his leg, never taking his gaze off his woman as she worked. She was fucking spectacular. Efficient, demanding, so in control.

Sometimes, medical professionals could keep their heads as long as the victim wasn't one of their own relatives, but his Little Fish seemed to be able to ignore the fact that she was working on her own Daddy while she tended to him.

He watched in fascination as she poured a bottle of clean water over the wound before examining it closer. "It's not deep. You'll probably need stitches, but I don't think any muscle, tendons, or ligaments were involved."

The police officer held up a first-aid kit that was already open.

Isla reached in to grab a roll of gauze. She quickly opened it, carefully unrolled a long length, cut it off, and pressed it to the wound before wrapping an ace bandage around it several times to secure it in place.

Caesar ignored the long gash because he'd rather be watching his woman work. She was amazing, and he loved her so much it hurt.

"Is he stable enough to answer questions?" the officer asked.

"Yes. He'll be fine. They both will," Isla responded. "Stubborn but not dying."

She started to step out of the way, but Caesar stopped her by reaching out to grab her wrist so he could haul her toward him. As soon as she was close enough, he wrapped a hand around the back of her head and pulled her ear down to his mouth. “I love you.”

She gasped as he leaned back, but she finally smiled at him. “I love you, too, Daddy,” she whispered.

“Will you make sure everyone else is okay while I speak to the officer?”

“Yes. I’m going to see if they need me on the other boat.”

Caesar stiffened and wrapped his hand fully around her bicep. “No. Too risky.”

She narrowed her gaze at him. “I’m a medical professional first and foremost. I tend to wounded people no matter who they are or what they’ve done.”

“Those men intended to kill you, Isla,” he reminded her.

“And lucky for them, they did not succeed, so I’m alive to make sure they don’t die.”

The police officer stopped her with a gentle hand on her shoulder. “It’s okay, ma’am. The officers on the other boats have medical training. And a medic is pulling up now. You’re better off staying here.”

Isla looked around at the same time as Caesar. Sure enough, another boat was pulling up. She sighed and took a deep breath before dropping down onto the bench next to Caesar.

Relief flooded him. The thought of her working on those other divers made his chest tight. He couldn’t have stopped her but was grateful he hadn’t needed to try.

“So, what happens now?” Isla asked Caesar several hours later when all of them were back in the basement of Danger Bluff.

Caesar had an arm around her where she sat next to him on the couch. He wanted to haul her onto his lap, but she’d refused over and over because of his leg.

His leg was fine. Ten stitches that had been hardly necessary considering how shallow the wound was. Magnus had already arranged for a doctor to come to Danger Bluff before the rest of them had returned to the main building.

He stroked her arm. “The Ministry of Culture and Heritage has been informed of the location. They’ll take over from here and send divers in to recover anything that might be buried in the area we mapped for them. It’s unlawful for citizens to disturb possible locations of buried treasure.”

“What’s going to happen to those two divers?” Zara asked. Since she’d been under the water with them and seen the entire event, she was far more bitter about the fate of those men.

Caesar couldn’t blame her. “One of them is in stable condition in the hospital. The other is still in surgery but is expected to pull through. They will be prosecuted. What we do know is that they are the same men who rented the boat that passed by us several times the other day.”

Isla shivered. “How do we know there aren’t dozens of other people also looking for the treasure?”

Caesar hugged her closer and kissed her temple. “We don’t,” he murmured.

Everyone sat in silence, letting that sink in. Caesar wasn’t sure how to proceed, but he hoped to speak to Kingsley first thing tomorrow to figure out how to put an end to

this madness. How many people knew about the map? It could be hundreds.

Caesar drew in a breath. “The good news is The Ministry of Culture and Heritage is sending someone to pick up the map itself. At least it will be in the hands of the right people who can preserve it. In addition, they will be sending a dive team to search the waters in that area. Whatever else is down there will be collected, which will make looting far less interesting to anyone out there still hoping to make a buck off of Isla’s grandfather’s treasure map.”

Isla relaxed slightly against him, leaning her head on his shoulder. “I can’t believe how much trouble I’ve caused,” she murmured.

Caesar gave her a squeeze. “Stop that. We’ve been over this. It’s not your fault. All you did was follow through on a quest your grandfather had intended to take. There was no way either he or you could have known how it would pan out.”

“I guess.”

“He’s right,” Sadie agreed.

“Yeah.” Lyra nodded. So did everyone else.

Rocco stood. “I think we all need a good night’s rest.” He reached for Sadie’s hand.

Caesar was eager to get Isla alone anyway. He wanted to assess her mental status without everyone hovering. He wasn’t entirely sure she was holding it together inside even though, on the outside, she appeared to be relatively calm.

After witnessing how relaxed she could be in the midst of a crisis, he would never be certain how she was feeling in any given situation in the future. He’d watched and admired her for hours as she’d taken care of not just his wound but Hawking’s, too.

It had turned out they weren't the only ones with minor injuries. Kestrel had taken a hard kick to the gut, which had concerned Isla because she'd worried about internal injuries. She'd watched him closer than anyone else.

A few of the Littles had gotten banged up in their mad dash to get back into the boat as soon as the two divers had been spotted jumping into the water.

Isla had played nurse to everyone, which had given Caesar insight into what kind of a nurse she was—the best kind with the perfect disposition. If she could hold herself together when faced with multiple injuries among her own friends—who were now her family—then he suspected she was a solid rock when working with strangers.

When he stood and lifted her into his arms, she protested, “Daddy, put me down. You have ten stitches in your leg. You’re straining them.”

He nuzzled her neck and chuckled. “I’m not straining anything, Little Fish. You’re like a pile of cotton.”

“I am not.” She frowned at him.

He ignored her and held her in his arms all the way to their apartment, grinning when he paused to look at the shark on their door. It warmed his heart to know that his door—the last of the six—finally had a picture on it. It symbolized the fact that he, too, had found his Little, completing their family.

After carrying her through to the bathroom, he stood her on her feet. “Clothes off, Isla.”

He proceeded to remove his own.

She pulled her shirt over her head. “I don’t need a bath, Daddy. We just took a

shower together a few hours ago.”

A shower had been Caesar’s first stop after the doctor had stitched him up. The man had put a giant waterproof cover over the wound and had left Caesar with several more so he could keep the gash covered when he showered.

There would be no scuba diving for him for at least ten days until the stitches were out and he got the all-clear. All excursions for the next two days had been canceled and rebooked, at which time Caesar and Jack would trade places. Caesar would stay on the boat, and Jack would take the divers down. They would pay a few other employees to snorkel with the guests.

The best part of all of this was that Caesar was about to spend forty-eight solid hours with his Little girl. Except for a few meetings with Kingsley and the team, he was on a two-day medical leave.

“Nope. You don’t need a bath.” He pointed toward the hamper. “What you need is to be naked.”

She finished stripping. “Maybe I should wear one of your shirts to bed.”

He also dropped the rest of his clothes in the hamper before grabbing their toothbrushes and putting paste on them. He handed her hers and stuck his in his mouth.

As he stood next to the woman he was head over heels in love with, he considered how totally normal and domestic this scene was—the two of them, naked and brushing their teeth before bed.

After rinsing and drying off on the hand towel, Caesar guided Isla toward the bed.

“Naked is a bad idea,” she murmured as he pulled the covers back.

“Naked is the only idea, Little Fish. Get in.”

“We’re not having sex, Caesar,” she insisted in her adult voice. “You’re hurt.”

He turned off the lights and climbed in next to her, pulling her into his arms and tucking her head against his shoulder.

“Daddy...”

He kissed the top of her head. “Isla. I need to touch every inch of you that I can. Stop arguing. I was scared out of my mind today. If anything had happened to you...”

Her breath hitched, but she didn’t speak.

He kissed her temple. “You’re my life, Little Fish. I never want to feel that kind of fear again as long as I live. So, yes, I need your naked body against mine, and you should also know I’m only going to wait about eight hours before I make love to you. The only reason I’m going to wait that long is because we both need sleep.”

“But—”

“No buts. It’s a shallow flesh wound. It’s not affecting my cock at all. If you’re super worried I might strain myself, I’ll lie on my back like a good patient while you ride me. How’s that for compromise?”

She giggled. Thank God. Lifting her head to see his face in the dim light of the nightlight, she smiled. “I get to be on top?”

He chuckled, shaking both of them. “Every day if it makes you smile like that.”

She smiled broader. “Now I’m all hot and bothered.”

“You’re welcome to ride me right now if you want.” He lifted a brow. He knew she was exhausted.

She sighed and dropped her cheek back against his shoulder. Her fingers roamed over his chest. “Morning is better. Daddy?”

“Yes?”

“Thank you.”

“For what, Little Fish?”

“For loving me. For taking care of me. For saving my life.”

“No thanks necessary. You’re mine to protect forever and ever. It’s my job, and I will take it very seriously.” He stroked up and down her arm. “Tell me how you’re handling everything, Isla. It was an emotional day. You worked hard. It was stressful. I want to take your pulse.”

“I’m good.”

“Isla... That’s not a sufficient answer.”

She sighed. “It was stressful. You’re right. I was scared. When I saw that cut on your leg, I nearly fainted, but then my professional side kicked into gear, and I set aside my personal feelings and got to work.”

“I was so very proud of you. But it’s okay to let go now if you need to. You’re safe.” He hoped she understood that he meant emotionally safe. While in his arms, he

always wanted her to feel like she could cry if she needed to. “I’ve got you.”

“I know you do, Daddy, and I think that’s why I’m not falling apart. I don’t have to. You’re holding me together, and that’s enough.”

His heart was overflowing. How had he gotten so lucky?

Chapter Twenty-One

Isla woke up to the thin stream of light coming in along the edge of the blinds. The deep breathing from the man next to her told her Caesar was still dead to the world.

She was glad. It didn't seem like he ever got enough sleep. He needed it. She did manage to carefully rise onto her elbow so she could stare down at him. His thick dark hair was messy from sleep. He had a soft beard that was the result of only a few days without shaving. The man could grow a full beard in less than a week if he wanted.

The sheets were down around his waist, so she was able to stare at his impressive pecs and explore the intricate tattoos on his chest and arms. He was so gorgeous. Every inch of him was enticing and made her mouth water.

She loved his strength, both the physical and the emotional. She knew with certainty she would always be able to count on him for anything, and he would never let her down.

She also suddenly knew with complete clarity that she was not leaving this man to return to the States. She would stay here if that's what he decided or go with him anywhere. She could be a nurse anywhere on Earth with a bit of effort.

Suddenly, his hand slid up her back. His voice was deep with sleep when he murmured, "You look like you're planning world domination, Little Fish."

She giggled. "Sort of, but first, I'm planning to climb over you and sink down over

your cock.” She shocked even herself with her bold words as she shoved the sheet down to expose his erection, wrapped her hand around his length, and stroked it up and down several times.

His shaft was already hard. Had it been that way in sleep?

“Mmm... That feels so good. I’m not going to turn you down.” He stretched out one hand, palmed a condom from the nightstand, and tore it open with his teeth before nudging her hand aside to roll it down his thick length.

Isla was already aroused from staring at his perfect body for the last several minutes. Wetness coated the inside of her thighs, so when she rose, shook the covers away, and lifted one leg over his body, she was ready.

She lowered her slick folds down to rub against his shaft, pinning it to his torso. She couldn’t contain the moan that escaped.

Caesar reached up to cup her breasts. A second later, he thumbed her nipples, driving her arousal higher. “So sexy.”

“Is your leg okay?” she managed to whisper, glancing down and wincing at the long bandage. Was this really a good idea?

“What leg?” he teased.

“Daddy...”

“Little Fish, look at me. Forget my leg.”

She focused on him and ground her clit against his shaft.

“That’s my girl. Lift up and let me inside you. I need to feel you wrapped around my

cock.”

She shuddered at his command, instantly doing as she was told. As soon as she lifted her hips, his erection lodged itself at her entrance as though it knew exactly where it belonged.

Caesar’s moan filled the room when she thrust down on him, impaling him with no warning. She loved the sound of his pleasure. It fueled her own. She also found out immediately that she loved the way she could grind her clit against the base of his cock, pushing him deeper, controlling how fast and hard she would take him.

“So gorgeous,” he whispered as he pinched her nipples and gave them a twist.

She lifted almost off and then thrust back down, preferring the sensation of being impaled by him far more than the empty feeling she’d had when his erection had been lodged at her entrance.

“That’s it, Isla. Take what you need. Do what feels good.”

She arched her chest forward and tipped her head back as the need to come grew by the second. “Caesar…”

He slid his hands to her hips and held her down tightly against him, and that was it. She came hard, pulsing around his length, wishing she could bottle this moment up and keep it forever close to her heart.

A few seconds later, she grasped onto another even better moment when her man bucked his hips upward and groaned loud enough to shake the room as he found his own release.

Yeah, she was in the right place at the right time with the right people.

She'd never felt so satisfied or so lucky.

"Do you think they heard us?" she asked an hour later as they stepped out of the shower.

Daddy chuckled. "I don't care. I've heard all the rest of them having sex from time to time. Payback is a bitch. The walls between these apartments aren't paper thin, but they can't quite contain the kind of moaning you were doing."

She swatted at his chest playfully. "Me? What about you? The furniture shook when you came."

He chuckled, the sound making it impossible to stop grinning. If she had her way, she would never stop smiling again.

"I need food, Little Fish. Stand still so I can fix your hair and get clothes on us."

Her cheeks were flushed as she stared at herself in the mirror while her Daddy carefully combed through her wet hair, parted it, and braided it in two lengths behind her ears.

When he was done, he led her through the bedroom and into the playroom, where he left her standing so he could choose something for her to wear.

Isla loved these moments. She loved how he took care of everything, letting her simply be in her Little space.

Ten minutes later, they were both dressed and heading for the elevator. The rest of the fifth floor was quiet, so Isla assumed everyone had already gone to the basement.

The second the elevator opened in the basement, the silence was broken. Isla stepped off the elevator to a room filled with noise and chaos. The entire team and all the

Littles were gathered around the huge table.

The surface was covered with bagels, danishes, donuts, and breakfast sandwiches. The Littles all had sippy cups of milk or juice. The Daddies had coffee. For a moment, Isla stood rooted to her spot, soaking it all in, so much love filling her that she was nearly overwhelmed.

When Daddy tugged on her hand to encourage her to move to the table, she snapped out of it but only partly—just enough to join the fray, take a seat, and let her Daddy fill her plate. He already knew what foods she liked and could put just the right amount in front of her. How did he know her so well?

She wouldn't question it. She simply accepted it.

A sense of peace filled her.

And then a phone rang, breaking into the perfection that was the chaos of the room. Everyone stopped talking and moving.

Rocco rose from his seat and leaned over to reach for the conference phone in the middle of the table. "It's Kingsley. He messaged me that he would call in this morning."

Rocco connected the call, and a deep male voice with a British accent filled the room. "Good morning, everyone."

Isla had never spoken to Kingsley, but she liked his voice. She'd also learned that no one in this room had ever met the elusive man who saved lives and played matchmaker.

A rumble of good mornings filled the giant basement in response.

“I was so glad to hear that everyone was safe after yesterday’s incident. I’m sorry a few of you were injured.”

“Nothing that will slow us down,” Hawking responded as he rubbed the bandage on his arm. He’d needed several stitches to close his wound, too.

“I don’t think anything could slow any of you down,” Kingsley responded with a hint of humor in his voice. “Let’s get right to business. I’ve done some digging and discovered that the two men who attacked you yesterday followed Isla all the way from Florida. They were informed about the map by one of the men Isla showed it to before she left the States. There’s no evidence that any other person or group was interested in the map besides those men. It’s my belief that Isla is now safe.”

Isla blew out a relieved breath. “Thank you, sir.”

“My pleasure, Little one. Welcome to the family.”

She was startled by his words and glanced around to find everyone smiling at her.

“Now, it would seem all six of you have completed your tasks and repaid your markers. I’m grateful to each of you for staying together as a team and helping each of the others accomplish their missions. You can consider your debts paid in full. You are all free to go about your lives.”

Silence filled the room as they all glanced around at each other.

Caesar was the first one to break the silence. “Sir, it would seem Danger Bluff is our life now. We’re a family. I don’t think anything could break us apart. If you require us to leave the resort so you can bring a new team in, we’ll understand, but make no mistake, we will remain together as a unit while we find our place in the world.”

Isla grabbed her Daddy’s hand, tearing up as everyone nodded in agreement.

After a moment, Kingsley responded, “I thought that might be the case, and I’d hoped you all might agree to stay on at Danger Bluff. I would never insist on continuing as your boss, but I’d be beyond pleased if you all stayed. The Bluff is an amazing vacation spot that will bring in a huge profit as it continues to grow. If you’re all amenable to the idea, I’d like to propose that you accept my offer of permanent residence in exchange for running Danger Bluff like the well-oiled machine it has become under your care. I will send over salary packages as well as stock options, retirement plans, and medical insurance. How does that sound?”

Seeing everyone’s faces light up made Isla’s heart pound.

“Hello?” Kingsley said after a long pause.

Kestrel cleared his throat. “We’d be thrilled to accept your offer, sir.”

Magnus nodded. “I dare you to find a better computer team than me and Juniper,” he joked.

“Who would lead the rock-climbing tours?” Rocco asked rhetorically.

“Or the helicopter excursions?” Kestrel added.

Hawking grunted. “Security would be shit without me.”

Phoenix laughed. “So would maintenance.”

They all turned to look at Caesar, who was grinning wide. “I’m going to need a few days off from scuba excursions, but then I’m in.”

“Good. Good,” Kingsley said. “Isla, I’ll work on getting your paperwork straightened out so you can become the resident nurse at the resort if that’s amenable to you...?”

Isla sat taller. “Yes, sir. Thank you.”

“Then it’s settled. Consider yourselves permanent residents of Danger Bluff. I hope you find years of happiness and laughter. You’ve all earned it. I do have one other item to suggest to you. Each of you still holds a coin. I have teams scattered all over the world. It is likely that others in trouble could use the team’s help. I do not have one situated in New Zealand. Well, other than you,” Kingsley shared.

“We could rescue people just like we were saved from danger,” Rocco noted.

“And pass along our coins so that others have a second chance as well,” Magnus said, pushing the bill up on his cap uncharacteristically to meet the men’s gazes.

To Isla, it appeared that each man was gauging the others’ reactions. Knowing them all, even for a short time, she was not surprised when each nodded. Their decision was made.

“We’d just get bored being hotel employees. Count us in, Kingsley,” Ceasar informed him.

“I’ll be in touch,” Kingsley promised.

The phone went silent so fast it startled Isla. No one else seemed shocked by Kingsley’s abrupt end to the conversation.

For long seconds, they all stared at each other before everyone jumped to their feet and ran around hugging.

Isla joined the excitement, hugging her Daddy first before turning to wrap her arms around Lyra. Soon, all six women were in a huddle, jumping up and down, screaming with laughter, a hint of apprehension written in the tension lines on their foreheads but overwhelming happiness that they could stay together. Isla guessed they all felt

like she did—scared about the dangers their Daddies could face while saving others but sure that the team would never be happy simply sitting on the sidelines when others needed help. The Littles would support each other in an equally strong team as their Daddies did.

When the women finally settled and turned to face the Daddies, they found all the men grinning from ear to ear, arms out, waiting to be filled.

Isla ran toward her Daddy and threw herself into his embrace, trying not to scold him when he lifted her off the floor to rain kisses all over her face. His leg would be fine.

Everything would be fine. Better than fine. Perfect.