

CHAPTER ONE

The High Seas

Kassie squinted at the heavens, skepticism clearly written across her face.

Robert followed her gaze. "See? Not a cloud in sight. I told you, all reports indicate fair weather. We should sail tonight."

He was right. The cloudless sky was like pink and blue candy floss as the sun dropped close to the horizon. And yet all the senses in her body told her that a storm was coming. She shrugged. Robert was an experienced yachtsman; no doubt he knew what he was doing.

"Okay, if you say so."

She slipped sideways past the superstructure, and once she reached the stern, hopped over the rail onto the dock. She lifted the mooring line off the bollard and tossed it onto the deck. In a jiffy she was back on board and joining Robert at the wheel.

He looked down at her cleavage. "I like that new bikini on you. It goes well with the denim shorts."

She self-consciously adjusted the cups, making sure they were perfectly set and the twins safely housed. "Glad you like it."

"Love it. But lose it when we're at sea. I want to look at you."

She smiled. It was no secret to her how much Robert loved her breasts. Her smile faltered as they cleared the dock. Behind them was a relaxing pleasure trip, but ahead was their next mission. Her face steeled against the caressing sea breeze, and she fixated on the horizon.

Robert put his arm around her and pulled her close. "Don't worry, my love. Nothing bad will happen to you. I will protect you, I promise."

She rewarded him with a reassuring smile, but it faltered when she looked away. Hard goose bumps prickled her forearms; her instinct was trying to tell her something, but she had no clue what about. He must have noticed, for he stood aside to let her steer.

"Here, take the helm."

As her hands gripped the large wheel, he stepped behind her and wrapped his arm around her waist. He unzipped her shorts and slid his hand inside. Looking behind her, she saw the dock

in the distance, but they were far enough out now to not be observed. Except maybe with a zoom lens.

"What are you doing?" she said, and laughed.

"Helping you relax."

She leaned back into him, nudging her ass into his rock hard groin and enjoying the tickle of arousal in her breasts. His fingers were deft and very familiar with the target. Round and round he swirled, teasing the nub of her clitoris. Her breathing became shallow and fast, and her hips pushed hard against him as her primeval lusts took over. Robert ran his lips sensuously along the line of her neck, making her skin tingle, and she groaned. Her focus turned to her feelings as she steered the boat blindly.

His free hand grasped a breast, teasing the nipple until it hurt, which elicited more groans. She pushed the denim shorts down, needing the touch of skin-to-skin, desperate to feel him inside her. Reaching back, she felt his steel-rod cock inside his shorts. Pulling him free of the open slit, she guided him to her wet and ready pussy.

"You want me to fuck you?" he whispered.

"Oh, yes."

"Put your hands back on the wheel."

As always, she obeyed him without question. The tip of his cock rested teasingly at the top of her thighs, but he did not penetrate. Instead he kept his focus on her and caressed harder and faster, working her into oblivion. When she came, her feet practically lifted off the deck, and only then, once she'd ridden the crest of her desire, did he thrust into her, his hands on her hips as he gyrated inside. It was his turn to groan. She knew how much it excited him to fuck her out in the open, and she spread her legs wide, granting him unfettered access to her body.

He slid her bikini top down over one breast and bit softly into her shoulder. "Have you no shame?" he whispered.

"None with you."

His lovemaking became more urgent and untamed, and he squeezed the flesh on her arms tightly as he came inside her. She kept a firm grip on the wheel, her eyes still fixed on the horizon, always obeying him. She remained mostly naked and exposed, but did not move to cover up, and would not until he expressly told her to do so.

He sat back in a seat, exhausted. "You know it's not too late. This mission we've been

assigned—if it's not to your liking, we can still pull out."

She turned and gave him a reassuring smile. "We've been over this, my love, many times, in fact. I'm fully briefed and going in with my eyes open. You don't have to be so worried. I can handle this."

Still, he was pensive. "Don't make the mistake of underestimating him, Kassie. Alex Weber is a ruthless bastard who will stop at nothing to get what he wants. I did a profile on him a few years back. Trust me, he's a nasty piece of work. You don't want to get on his bad side."

He pulled up his shorts, and Kassie returned her focus to steering the boat.

"I won't. I plan to do quite the reverse."

"You better get dressed before we're arrested for indecency on the high seas."

"Aye, aye, cap'n, sir."

As she rezippered her shorts, she recalled the face of their new mark. One would never guess the total bastard inside from his looks alone. Alex Weber was an insanely handsome man, with gentle blue eyes that could smoke the panties off any woman in the United States. Wealthy as sin, his public persona was that of a generous philanthropist, art lover, and civil rights activist. But all that was mere show. The Firm had a completely different profile on the man. Beneath that heroic facade, the true Alex Weber was a smuggler of booze, art, and contraband. And worse, he was suspected of human trafficking, particularly of young women brought in to please some of his more affluent American clients, or taken from the United States and *gifted* to his overseas friends.

"You seem hypnotized by the ocean, my love."

"Oh, I was just thinking about the mark."

"Anything in particular?"

"The trafficking, mostly. About how he can steal another human's freedom and still sleep at night."

"I assure you he sleeps very well. Scum like that have no souls."

She recalled a photograph of the last girl lured by his charms. Her family hadn't seen her in months. They were not going to recover her now. After such a lapse of time, this girl was considered long gone.

"Do you think we'll be able to get to him?"

"I truly hope so, my love. I truly hope so."

He rose and wrapped his arms around her waist and kissed the nape of her neck. She nestled back into him, turning her head to kiss his lips.

"So do I, my love. So do I."

And then her focus returned to steering the boat south, and all such dark thoughts were banished from her mind.

CHAPTER TWO

The Mission

He didn't like it, not at all. Kassie was still a green agent. She had only been on a few assignments with the Firm, and the thought of her mixing with this bottom-dwelling scumbag touched every raw nerve he had. Oh, she was a good agent with great potential, there was absolutely no doubt about that, but she was also the most important thing in his life. He hated her risking herself like this. But Kassie deplored traffickers with a passion, and she'd insisted they take Alex Weber on. Robert could deny her nothing; she was a big girl. But that didn't mean he had to like it.

While she steered the boat, he went below deck and undressed for a quick shower. He had been sailing all day and felt tacky from sea spray and over exposure to the sun. Not to mention the sex. The recollection made him smile.

As he lathered up he reflected on his emotions. In bed he was the master, always had been, always would be. But only since meeting Kassie did he fully understand who he was. He didn't keep his woman on a leash—well, maybe sometimes—but outside of the bedroom she was a free agent. He didn't think his role was to dominate her life so much as to protect it. And that job he took very seriously.

He had met Alex Weber plenty of times. Their mutual interest in boats had brought them into fleeting contacts at various rallies and ports. That was why the Firm had approached him specifically for this job. He had an *in*, and that was useful. And was Kassie ever to Alex's taste. But that last point irked him more than anything, for it put her in extreme danger.

As he towel dried his hair, he sat on the end of the berth and opened his laptop. The picture of a beautiful high school girl popped on the screen. She had Viking-blond hair, worn in pigtails for her cheerleading role. Her eyes were bright blue, an all-American girl ready to embrace whatever the world had to offer. He wondered what she looked like now. These girls didn't have much of a life after they were snatched. Broken and abused, maybe drugged, they were forced to have intercourse with up to thirty men a day. There was nothing desirable or romantic about this life. Unprotected sex would lead to pregnancies, HIV, and ultimately a

lonely or violent death. His stomach turned at the thought and he closed the lid. He couldn't save this girl. But he would do his damndest to protect Kassie from the slime bag.

"What are you up to down there?"

Like an angel of goodness, Kassie stood at the top of the steps leading to the cabin. The slight breeze danced amid her brunette locks, and she had a sassy hand on her hip as she looked down.

"Actually, I was about to fix us something to eat. I'm ravenous."

"That's all right, then. You may continue."

She disappeared somewhere on deck.

He loved her sauciness. He loved how one moment she could be totally submissive, and the next, the naughtiest minx who ever walked the earth. Every aspect of her personality came together as one great whole known as Cassandra Shannon, and Robert Redmond adored her. He wrapped the damp towel around his waist and stepped over to the galley. There was a midsize yacht, boasting only two cabins, but boy, was she fast. He loved to race her, or simply show her off at various marinas around the Chesapeake. She was his second and most beloved home. Well, their home, for now—everything he had was as much Kassie's as his own.

A few minutes later he heard her skip down the steps to sit at the galley table. He tossed a tea towel over his arm and served her like a *maître d'*.

"Your baked beans on toast, my lady."

She slipped a napkin onto her lap and rewarded him with a sexy wink. "Why, thank you, Jeeves," she said in a mock English accent. "I almost had to wait."

"I hope the toast is toasted to your satisfaction."

"I will let you know shortly."

He laughed and shook his head. "All the food in the world, and you settle for that swill."

"We weren't all born with silver spoons in our mouths, my love. This swill kept me going through college. I have my English roomie to thank for it. You should stop your whining and try it sometime. It's good."

He turned back to the stove and quickly returned with a second plate and sat down opposite her. "It just so happens—"

She reached across and cupped her hand over his wrist. "You're so my hero."

"I know."

They both tucked into their meals, and for a while both were silent, lost in their own thoughts. Robert was the first to push his plate away. His mind was never far from their mission.

"You will be careful, won't you, my love? Be ready for anything, always?"

"How many times do I have to say it to reassure you? Of course I will."

"And though we're both trained to do what we have to, promise me you won't fuck him, unless it becomes a matter of life and death."

She sighed. "It won't come to that. I know what I'm doing, and I'm a big girl. This dude is used to dealing with innocent victims. He won't even see me coming, I reckon."

"Maybe. But never let your guard down, not even for an instant. He has no scruples, no higher sense of morality to appeal to. His god is the dollar, and nothing and no one can stand between him and acquiring it. If he can find a way to exploit you, believe me, he will."

She rolled her eyes. "I'm not an idiot, you know!"

"No, but I have met him, and you haven't. His face is pure innocence, and incredibly misleading. Don't be fooled by it, not for a second, because if you are, you could be dead or sold before you know it."

Kassie rose from the table, taking their dirty plates to the sink. "Have a little faith, will you?"

He'd pissed her off, and he knew it. But he would piss her off again and again if one day it would help to save her life. He pulled a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket and lit up. That would piss her off, too, but he didn't care. Robert thrived on control, and in this moment he felt he was losing it. At the very least, he deserved a quick drag.

She dramatically waved the smoke from her face, then climbed the few steps back to the weather deck. He sat back and watched her hips sway with that special action women had down to a tee. But this ass was his, and he would do whatever it took to protect it, no matter how hard it fought against him. That was his job. And his job was something he was fucking good at.