

ONE

The day didn't *look* like second hand revenge. Instead of ominous dark clouds hanging low over a pewter sea, the hot Greek sun reflected glittering sapphires off the Mediterranean. The wake of the motor launch frothed blindingly white as it carried marine archaeologist Dr. Calista West to the megayacht *Stormchaser*, anchored in open waters south of Crete.

Salt spray cooled her bare arms and legs as the *Riva Iseo* cut through the dark water. The sleek, twenty- seven foot Italian work of art, with yards of glossy mahogany, soft leather, and sleek lines, looked like something straight out of a James Bond movie. Expensive and ostentatious. Draco Thanos, the short, wiry forty- something chief engineer of *Stormchaser* sent to collect Callie from Heraklion, controlled the fast tender with all the deference of a guy handling a sleek sports car. Callie wasn't even sure what day it was anymore. A short flight in yet another ostentatious, expensive toy, a private plane from Athens. A twelve- hour flight from Miami, an hour flight from Athens to Crete, and another two hours by luxury tender. She was hardly at her best to deal with Jonah Cutter. Tuning out Thanos, who'd kept up a steady conversation in broken English for the duration, she spread her feet, bracing her hands on the rail as they hit some chop. Her stomach did a somersault that had nothing to do with the waves. The closer the motor launch carried her to *Stormchaser*, the harder Callie's heart pounded.

Anticipation. Fear. Excitement.

Thanos pointed unnecessarily. The massive ship was freaking impossible to miss. "There she is." Callie's fingers tightened on the rail as the ship loomed large against a sparkling backdrop of calm azure water and robin's- egg- blue sky. Brilliant sun bounced off acres of white paint and gleaming brass. *Twenty, thirty mil?* Callie guesstimated, put off by the unnecessary flaunting of the Cutters' wealth.

"Spectacular, isn't she?" Thanos said proudly as he slowed the tender, angling it sideways to dock aft next to the wide dive platform where a guy sat reading. He got to his feet as they approached, lifting a hand in greeting. Callie waved back.

She used both hands to tuck any loose hair back into the neatly tucked French braid on the back of her head, even though she knew there were none. She was too controlled to have flyaway hair. Her penchants for order and organization were perfect for her chosen career. She'd come by them the hard way. By now the traits were ingrained and comfortable.

Without the fine cooling misted spray of the water, and wind generated by the fast movement over the sea, the sun beat down unrelentingly, drying her damp clothes in minutes. "She's something, all right." Too big, and far too fancy for a *dive* boat, but wasn't that the Cutters all over? A family of modern- day treasure hunters, they flaunted their wealth like robber barons or nouveau riche Internet millionaires, with total disregard for anyone daring their ownership of the seas.

For a moment Callie had a niggles of misgiving for what she was about to do. Jonah Cutter hadn't done anything to her personally; she'd never even met the man. Never met *any* of the Cutters. But they adversely impacted people she loved.

She was uniquely qualified to balance the scales.

Straightening her shoulders, Callie grabbed her duffel before Thanos could reach for it. Ingrained and as sure as her dark hair and green eyes was her independence. Drawing in a salt-laden deep breath, Callie let it out slowly as the tender bumped the edge of the wide dive platform where the older man, dressed in cargo shorts and a yellow polo shirt, waited to grab the rope. *And the game begins*, she thought, braced to disembark, her fingers tightened on the bag's handles.

Lying was against everything she believed in. Been there, spent a lifetime perfecting the skill. Just because she was good at it didn't mean she liked doing it. But not only did she have to lie through her teeth for the duration, she had to be convincing as well.

She reminded herself that these people were *not* her friends. She could not soften and bond with

them. Growing to like anyone on board *Stormchaser* would make what she was going to do harder. She'd known going in that she'd have to keep to herself as much as possible. She was here to do a job. Making friends would muddy the waters and certainly complicate things. And, she admitted, make her second guess herself—which she unfortunately usually did. She tended to overanalyze things before jumping in. Indecision was, she knew, her worst characteristic. Still, once she'd made a determination, after weighing it from a hundred different angles, she tended to be like a dog with a bone defending the decision.

Her friends tried to get her to be more spontaneous. But it was hard for her. Every decision had consequences, and those had to be weighed and calculated and looked at from every angle.

What wouldn't be hard? Pretending. *That* she was damn good at. If anyone knew how to pretend, it was her. She'd done it from kindergarten on. When she'd learned to lie for her parents. Why they'd forgotten to sign her up for school programs? Why they weren't there to pick her up after school? Why she rarely had a lunch packed, or money to buy lunch? She'd known instinctively that to say her mama was passed out from Jack Daniel's would be bad, and mentioning that sometimes her dad didn't come home would be worse.

These circumstances weren't the same, but she figured she'd honed her acting chops. She could do this by mentally tarring everyone on board with the sins of the Cutters. Which were too numerous to count.

And by keeping as low a profile as possible.

The gray-haired man held out his hand, helping her from the boat to the diving platform. "Saul Pinter." His full, mostly gray beard was neatly trimmed. Fit and athletic, he had a nice smile and firm handshake. "Welcome aboard, Dr. West."

"Thanks, call me Callie." A cursory glance revealed the dive platform geared with the usual dive equipment and a row of wet suits ready and waiting. At least she'd get to do what she loved. Dive. Discover. "Is Mr. Cutter diving?"

Saul shook his head, jerking his thumb toward the ladder leading to the deck above where they stood. "Jonah will have seen you, and be on his way down. Heads up, he'll meet you halfway."

Oh, Callie doubted that very much, but she merely smiled as her heart thumped. Anticipation—no, dread? After all the planning, things were finally happening. "I'm looking forward to seeing our wreck."

"You haven't missed anything. We only arrived late last night ourselves," Saul told her, returning to his chair and the book he'd been reading. "We're all eager to get started."

Was that a jibe because she hadn't joined them two weeks ago? Callie mentally shrugged. Climbing the ladder, she observed in a quick sweep the spotless decks, the gleaming bright work and shiny brass. *Stormchaser* was spit-polished. She'd heard Zane Cutter's ship was a piece of crap, but so far she couldn't fault his half-brother on the maintenance of *his* ship.

Several men, in the whites of crew members, leaned on the rail on an upper deck watching her curiously. Callie lifted a hand in greeting and kept going. It was a perfect afternoon to dive, the ocean smooth with just a slight chop. A light breeze loosened strands of hair off her face and neck and brought with it the faint smells of fresh paint and yeasty baking bread.

Water slapped the hull, and the sound of voices died as the men disappeared from view. A gull cried as it wheeled in a perfect circle overhead, then dived like a jet, skimming the water after some hapless fish.

There wasn't anyone else around, and she walked toward a set of sliding doors just as a man stepped out onto the deck ahead of her. His face lit up as he came toward her. *Jonah Cutter*. Callie stopped to wait for him, the sun hot on her scalp, the glare off the water bright despite her dark glasses. The opinion formed before the man even opened his mouth. Her assessment was quick and unflattering. But then she was predisposed to disliking him.

Cocky. Self-assured. Entitled.

Exactly what she expected. Her shoulders relaxed. Handing Cutter his ass wasn't going to

be difficult at all.

The Matthew McConaughey look- alike wore blue, flower- printed Hawaiian board shorts, a too- tight red T-shirt stretched over sculpted muscles as if it had been painted on. She'd heard that youngest brother Zane was the vain one, but clearly his half-brother gave him a run for his money.

Under six feet tall, sun- bleached shoulder- length hair, movie- star good looks, and boy, didn't he know it. Cutter was like a peacock spreading his tail as he removed his shades to eye her up and down.

Shorter, less attractive, and more smarmy than she'd been led to believe. And she'd been led to believe the worst.

Maintaining a friendly smile, she extended her hand when he got close enough. He was about the same height, so they were eye- to- lecherous- eye. "I'm Calista West, thanks for including—"

"Now, aren't you just the prettiest addition to the team, darlin'?" he cut in with a southern drawl and a heated look from unremarkable blue eyes. His lingering handshake was the opposite of firm. Callie disengaged and resisted wiping her hand on her shorts as he looked at her like a dog staring at a juicy bone. Raking his fingers through his sunbleached brown hair, the better to show off his physique, he gave her a wide, white smile. "Welcome aboard."

Never had two words sounded so suggestive. Smoothing a hand over her tightly constrained hair, Callie made sure the sun glinted off the plain gold band on her left hand. Although she suspected a guy like this wouldn't be deterred by a wedding ring, she had other methods to repulse if the ring didn't work.

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