

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



TWO IF BY SEA

AQUAMARINE



A.D.
CHRISTOPHER

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Two If By Sea

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TWO IF BY SEA

A.D. Christopher

Chapter One

“To victory!” Carpus lifted his goblet into the air, sloshing wine from his cup to be carried away on the salty sea air.

“To victory! To Athens!” The voices of the one hundred surviving members of the Battle of Salamis were filled with a hope he had not heard in a great long while.

But then, it was impossible not to feel hopeful as they watched the remaining Persian forces flee into the morning light. The day was as beautiful and clear as any on Mt. Olympus, with a fine strong wind from the east filling their sail, urging the weary Greek soldiers homeward.

The gods were smiling on the children of Athens, of this Carpus Democritus had no doubt. Despite the arrow wound in his shoulder—sustained when their boat drew too near one of the Persian ships—he had not felt this well in body and mind since his family was driven from their home in the city by the foreign invaders. He was certain the Greek triumph at the Battle of Salamis would prove the turning point of this long war.

Xerxes, the Persian commander, had watched from a golden throne high on a nearby hill as his fleet was decimated by the united navy of the Greek city-states, as slowly but surely, dozens of his ships were sent beneath the waves to Poseidon’s kingdom. The man who proclaimed himself a god would no longer be quite so certain of victory. He would begin to fear the javelin and arrow of the Greek hoplites, to know a very mortal terror as the Athenians and their allies reclaimed their lands, their homes, their riches. The thought made Carpus smile. Xerxes deserved that fear, and more.

Carpus’ family had been among the wealthiest of the Athenian merchants, but they had managed to spirit only a fraction of their wealth along with them as they fled the city. Thieves on the road had later claimed their money chest and the urns they had

filled with the family's best goblets. By the time they reached his grandfather's estate in the countryside, the Democritus clan had only the gold in their pockets and what jewelry they could wear hidden beneath their clothes.

Thankfully, however, Carpus—though barely twelve at the time—had managed to fight off the thief who would have ripped his sailor's pendant from his neck.

"Thanks be to the gods," Carpus murmured, his words swallowed by the goblet he pressed to his lips. He drank deeply of his wine as his fingers strayed once more to the pendant at his neck.

The aquamarine, stone of the sailor, savior of those who would take to the sea. His grandfather, who was gifted with the sight, had told him many times of his visions for Carpus' future. The old man had known Carpus would take to the sea to fight for Greece but that the pendant would keep him safe. Just as it had kept his grandfather, Lucius Democritus, safe nearly twenty years before, when he had fought on this same ship.

The stone will save your life, boy. Never be parted from it, no matter what threat you must face. The words echoed through Carpus' mind, as clearly as if his grandfather had whispered them in his ear. The sensation caused an uneasy feeling to wash across his skin, raising the hairs at the back of his neck.

Carpus had time to think how odd it was that this uneasiness should descend now, when the battle was over, before the sun abruptly disappeared. It was as if the gods themselves had snuffed out the orb like a candle. One moment the day was beautiful and bright—the next, black clouds covered the sky, chilling the air and filling it with ominous portent.

His men, who had moments ago been about the business of celebration, grew quiet, turning dark eyes toward the heavens. There was a moment of stillness when each man aboard seemed to feel the danger looming so close at hand, and then the tempest was upon them. The sea began to pitch and churn and the clouds spilled forth rain like wine poured from Zeus' own goblet. The soldiers were immediately drenched to the skin,

their hair plastered around their heads before they could reach for their discarded helmets. Their cups fell to the deck as they abandoned their celebration, spilling wine like blood across the wood.

“Secure the sail! Oarsmen to your positions!” Carpus had to scream to be heard over the wailing of the wind. He clung to the rail at the front of the ship, near the giant, fearsome blue eye his sisters had painted in hopes of frightening the approaching Persian ships.

Carpus’ gaze was drawn to the eye as he struggled to keep his legs on the increasingly unsteady planks below him. What if the infamous Cyclops of the deep had seen the eye and thought to punish them for daring to use his image without clear leave? Or what if the gods of the Persians sought to punish the Greek forces for their victory? Carpus was a man who believed in the powers of the deities, of the supernatural creatures whose whims often determined the course of a mortal life.

A part of him had always sensed he would someday have occasion to meet one of the gods whose portraits his grandfather had ordered painted on the ceiling of the great room in his country home. How often Carpus had felt a chill creep up his spine as the painted eyes seemed to follow him as he crossed through the room or lay upon the couches with his sisters and two younger brothers, enjoying a light afternoon meal. How often had he known a moment of foresight much like his grandfather’s as he gazed upon the trident of Poseidon, the god of the oceans who held a sailor’s life in the palm of his hand every time mortals took to the sea.

The sea god did not care for the Democritus clan. It was a truth Carpus had sensed deep in his very soul.

Therefore, it was not as great a shock as it might have been when the tip of what looked like a giant spear began to circle around the boat or when a haunting laugh echoed from the dark waves. Even when a wall of water swept toward him, pulling him from the rail he clung to with all the strength in his body, Carpus was not surprised to feel himself pulled from his boat and down into the depths.

He had always feared a watery grave would be his end, despite the pendant his family had been certain would save his life.

Carpus clung to the aquamarine as he sank beneath the waves, his heavy armor and the swirling whirlpool in which he was trapped making it impossible to swim to the surface. The stone might be his only hope now, his last chance to survive, to make it back to the homeland he had fought for so fiercely. As his lungs began to burn and the chill of the icy water numbed his flesh, Carpus prayed for a savior, for something, anything, to pull him free of the current that tossed him this way and that, battering his warrior's body like a doll in a babe's bathwater.

Hippolita's babe...I will not live to see it born. The thought of his sweetest younger sister who had only been beginning to round with child when he had left four months past was Carpus' last. Then the blackness claimed him, snuffing out his life as easily as the sea god's storm had snuffed out the sun.

* * * * *

Hesiod waited, biding his time until the mortal man's body grew limp, signaling he had lost consciousness. Then the merman churned his mighty tail, surging upward from the black depths, catching the man in his arms and carrying him toward the surface. Hesiod broke free of the water in time to see his father, Poseidon's, storm vanish as quickly as it had come.

As the sun pierced through the clouds, Hesiod took note that there were other Greeks in the water nearby, doing their best to swim back to their ship, but he paid them no mind. Hesiod had what he had come for, the mortal man who had somehow come into possession of the sea god's pendant, the sacred aquamarine Poseidon had entrusted Hesiod with the task of reclaiming.

And reclaim it he would.

For the first time in his thirty-three years of life as an illegitimate son, Poseidon had given Hesiod a task to complete. A task for which he would be handsomely rewarded if

he was successful. He would gain a place in his father's realm, a stately castle beneath the waves, far from the black depths where Hesiod and his mother, the sea witch, had been banished years ago. Hesiod would finally be a favored son as his half-brother, Triton, had been since the day of his birth. He would know the respect of the other merpeople and the fear of those who had hunted his mother's kind since the beginning of time.

And you, my lovely mortal, are the key to it all. Hesiod quickly disposed of the man's bulky armor, then wrapped his strong arm around the mortal's chest and squeezed, forcing the water from his lungs, then sending a rush of magical heat over his flesh.

The mortal coughed for a moment before he began to breathe air once more. Bit by bit, his skin warmed and the color returned to his flesh. With a sigh, he relaxed into Hesiod's arms, his feet rising to float in the water as the merman pulled them toward the shore. But still, the man did not open his eyes.

Which, for the time being, was perfectly acceptable to Hesiod.

Now that the frail creature wasn't blue with cold, he could see what a stunning specimen he had fished from the waves. The man was muscled like a young god, every inch of his tall frame hard, lean and honed for battle. Thick, honey-colored locks, now turned light brown with dampness, lay heavily on his brow. The austere structure of his handsome face left no doubt of his noble lineage, even as his full rose lips softened his visage in a way that was quite striking.

How I would like to see those lips put to their proper use. See his mouth parted over the head of my cock, preparing to suck me deep into his throat.

Hesiod felt his tail begin to split in two, becoming the legs of his more human shape. It was what always happened when his rod grew stiff, rising between his thighs, but it didn't matter. He was a strong swimmer in both his forms and he couldn't deny that the feel of the water streaming over his increasingly aroused length felt delightful.

Combined with his erotic thoughts and the warm, heavy weight of the man in his arms, the swirl of the salt water between his thighs soon proved too great a stimulus to

one who had been so long without a lover. Strife in his mother's kingdom had kept him too busy for pleasure, a sad state of affairs he would never endure again once he gained favor with his father.

Smiling at the thought of the many lovers who would come knocking at his door once he was accepted by Poseidon, Hesiod pulled away the mortal's remaining garments, the swaths of soft cloth he wore under his battle uniform. Once his Greek captive was laid bare, Hesiod could see every inch of his stunning form, as well as note the fact that he had sustained a wound in the thick muscles of his shoulder.

Though not usually the sort to care one way or the other about the fate of man, Hesiod couldn't keep from responding to the strange urge to care for the human he had plucked from the sea. Chanting the sacred words, he brought his lips to the other man's wound, probing into it with his tongue, forcing the healing magic he had learned from his mother deep into the mortal's flesh. The man cried out in pain at first, but the sound soon became a low moan of pleasure as the wound closed and his skin heated with the aftereffects of the healing spell.

"Gods, where...the battle...the storm," he mumbled, tossing his head from side to side, restless in his sleep.

"You are safe. There is nothing to fear," Hesiod whispered into the perfect shell of his ear, unable to resist teasing through the swirls there with his tongue. His father had made it clear he would have to win the mortal's gift of the pendant, that Hesiod could not take the aquamarine from him by force.

And what better way to win a gift than by giving a gift?

Hesiod needed no further mental urging to pull the mortal's shoulders onto his chest, positioning his aroused body beneath the other man's. With a groan, he thrust his hips upward into contact with the firm globes of the other man's ass. How he wanted to spread those delectable cheeks, to prepare the mortal's tight hole with oil and drive his aching cock inside his heat.

But it was not his own satisfaction he was concerned with at the moment. He must bring his mortal pleasure. What better way to come back to the living than with your cock twitching with pleasure, shooting the seed from your aching balls into the sea? Or perhaps...into a lover's mouth?

Hesiod smiled as he let his hand drift around the mortal's body to find his cock. The man was huge, thick and hard as the stones of the cliffs they were even now drifting toward on every wave. The healing spell had heated his blood, making his shaft swell and ache. Now all that was left was for Hesiod to pleasure him until his mind had no choice but to seek wakefulness, to determine who it was that ravaged him with such wicked perfection.

Up and down, up and down, slowly, sensuously, Hesiod stroked the mortal into an even fiercer state of arousal with one hand while the other pinched and rolled his flat, dusky nipples. He nibbled along the fine column of his neck, strangely aroused by the swift thudding of his mortal heart. Soon the man's breath came in shallow gasps and he twisted in Hesiod's arms, desperate for relief from the aching in his groin.

Only then did Hesiod duck under the water and emerge between the mortal's lightly furred thighs. While his arms helped keep the still-unconscious man's upper body afloat, his mouth went to work on the prize he had found.

Gods, but he smelled delicious, all salt and heat and pure, virile man. First, Hesiod ran his tongue along the puckered flesh of the mortal's swollen sac, probing and teasing before he suckled one round, firm ball into his mouth. The merman moaned in pleasure at the feel of the delicate morsel against his tongue, beginning to suck with a firmer pressure as the man above him gasped and arched his hips closer to Hesiod's face.

He played first with one ball and then the other, finally tugging them both into the heat of his mouth before he abandoned the mortal's sac for other delights. His rod was now nearly purple with desire, jerking lightly in time with the rapid rhythm of his pulse.

Hesiod pulled the mortal's hips a bit lower in the water and descended on the engorged length with a carnal hunger he could scarcely understand. Never in his life had he been so desperate to take another man's cock in his mouth. He had known many lovers, male and female, all of them lovely in their own way and gifted with the superior lovemaking skills of the sea witch's people. But never, never had any cock or cunt tasted so sweet, never had he felt his own shaft swell as he sucked the thick head of another's arousal past his lips. Never had he known he could tumble over the precipice simply from sensing the pleasure he was giving another.

"Yes, gods, yes. Don't stop. Don't ever cease the magic you work upon me." The mortal was speaking and he seemed coherent for the first time, but even that knowledge could not summon Hesiod away from his work.

Instead he sucked harder, deeper, taking the other man's engorged length down his throat, enveloping him again and again in that hot, wet suction until the man cried out and scalding, salty cum began to jet across Hesiod's tongue. With a moan, he swallowed down every drop of the mortal's essence, knowing he had never tasted anything so sweet, so erotic as this man's seed.

Only when he had milked him of the every last drop did Hesiod allow the other man's limp member to fall from between his lips. Only then did he lift his head and look the newly awakened mortal in the eyes.

Blue. Gods, they were blue, so blue it practically made his own onyx eyes—which had grown so accustomed to the darkness of his mother's kingdom—ache as he stared into them. They were like the sky he had been denied a glimpse of in the shadowy depths of the dark ocean, as perfect as the aquamarine pendant hanging around his neck.

"You are not Poseidon," the man said, his rosy lips parted and a look of lust on his handsome face despite the fact that his shaft had just been pleased most completely.

"I am not—I am Hesiod," Hesiod said with a slow smile, not surprised to hear his father's name on the mortal's lips. Poseidon had said he had been tricked into giving

the pendant to a mortal man decades past. The man in question must have told this younger mortal the story when he made a gift of the pendant to his son.

"I am Carpus Democritus of Athens." He paused, sucking in a shaking breath as he looked around them, seeing the calm ocean and the cliffs of the nearby island. "And it seems I am in your debt."

"Yes, you are," Hesiod said with a wink, knowing the man was referring to Hesiod's apparent saving of his life, not the oral pleasuring, but deliberately choosing to misunderstand. "And it is a debt I would prefer be paid sooner rather than later."

"Indeed," Carpus said as Hesiod moved one hand between his cheeks, probing at the tight hole there with one finger and then two, suddenly desperate to have his Greek captive ashore and properly oiled. "I have always believed in paying debts promptly. It isn't wise to let interest accrue." Carpus' brilliant blue eyes flashed as he deliberately parted his legs and relaxed his cheeks, clearly welcoming Hesiod's penetration.

Gods, but the look on the mortal's face was enough to lure the stars down from the sky to stare upon his beauty. No wonder Poseidon had made a gift of his precious pendant to his ancestor years ago. If that man was one half as sumptuous as the one in his arms, the sea god would have been a fool not to promise whatever it took to get the human into bed.

Poseidon had a reputation with women—mortal and goddess alike—but it was no secret he enjoyed nothing more than a strong, perfectly formed male at his back, claiming him with a brutal rhythm. Unfortunately for his father, the sea god had not been gifted with the kind of persuasion needed to lure such a creature to him willingly. Poseidon was all might and force, a man who took what he wanted. He hadn't raped Hesiod's mother, but she was one of the few who had come to him willingly, though it was power she sought more than passion.

When it came to men, either god or human, however, a stiff shaft could not be forced with threats of death or worse. A man's arousal had to be won, much as the pendant must be won, not stolen.

Hesiod smiled. Soon, he would have both the man and the bauble.

Chapter Two

A part of Carpus was certain this was all a dream and that—in reality—his body already lay at the bottom of the ocean, lost to the mortal world forevermore. That fear made him all the more willing to follow the handsome stranger's lead, though he truly needed no other excuse than the look in those dark eyes or the way the other man's mouth had brought Carpus to a climax more earth-shattering than any he had ever known.

The feel of Hesiod's lips, the strong suction of his mouth, the way the muscles in his jaw had worked as he swallowed down every last drop of Carpus' seed. It had been...indescribably arousing, so much so that even the memory had the power to stir his shaft between his legs.

"And how do you feel now? My sailor I plucked from the sea?"

"You have found what you seek already?" Carpus asked, surprised to see the man of his fantasy walking toward him across the beach. It seemed that only moments ago, Hesiod had left him upon the large stone where he now sat. Carpus' hair was still damp and his body still tingling with the aftermath of his orgasm in the ocean. Surely not enough time had passed for Hesiod to hunt and kill a fish and mash its fat into oil.

But it seemed it had indeed.

Hesiod knelt beside him, a hollowed out stone in his hand. "Fish oil. An easy thing to find so near to the sea." His dark eyes—so dark they seemed to be made of the night sky itself—flashed as he tipped a bit of the oil into his hand. He came to his knees then, beginning to stroke the shining liquid over his own arousal.

The sight of his pale hands fisting his equally pale shaft made Carpus' own cock grow even thicker, harder. The man—who Carpus had no doubt was more than merely human—looked as if he had been carved by one of Athens' greatest artists. As if his

form had been chiseled from marble, created to show other, lesser men how a truly perfect male should be put together.

Hesiod's long, dark hair hung in damp tendrils down to his chest, as black as his eyes, creating a striking foil to the paleness of his flesh. He looked like a creature who dwelled in darkness, who had been kept from the light of the sun for decades, but he warmed Carpus' blood as if he were born from the sun itself.

Never had the Greek felt such instant lust, such an overwhelming urge to be claimed by another man. In the past he had enjoyed time with male lovers but always as the dominant partner, the one whose cock was oiled for penetration into the asses of his smaller, more slender and fair lovers.

But now, his own body practically itched with the need to be invaded, taken, used for this man's pleasure in whatever way he would prefer. Carpus hadn't even wanted to wait for the oil. He'd practically begged Hesiod to take him as soon as they arrived on the beach, but the other man had insisted on finding oil to ease his passage. He hadn't wanted to cause Carpus pain, only pleasure.

The thoughtfulness of that gesture made Carpus even more eager to please. He was on his hands and knees on the warm stone before Hesiod had finished oiling his cock, already trembling with the desire coursing through his veins. He threw a glance over his shoulder, wanting to watch as Hesiod parted his cheeks and pressed into his hole, but instead caught the other man in the act of admiring his form.

Hesiod's dark eyes roved over his ass and up the contours of his back, his lips parted and the expression on his face making it clear he found Carpus just as irresistible. The knowledge made Carpus' cock even harder until he ached to take his shaft in hand and jerk himself to release. But he forced himself to wait, knowing the release would be even sweeter if it came while Hesiod was inside his body, fucking him with all the passion he read in those mysterious eyes.

"That fish oil is quite foul stuff," Carpus said, smiling when Hesiod's surprised eyes flicked upward to meet his own. "I can barely stand the stench of it."

"How unfortunate. I thought the oil would make this...more pleasurable for us both." Hesiod's wide hand smoothed over Carpus' rump, sliding down between his cheeks to tease around his entrance. The feel of his slick finger playing with the puckered flesh made Carpus' insides clench in anticipation. He couldn't wait any longer.

"Oh, I think it will. I'm certain the smell will be less powerful once you are where you are meant to be." Carpus arched his hips and spread his legs further, knowing the action would cause his hole to be more easily seen and sensing the other man would not be able to resist such a blatant invitation.

Thankfully, he was right.

Hesiod spread Carpus' cheeks even further with his thumbs and then positioned his cock and rammed inside. Carpus sucked in a breath at the rough invasion, shocked to find how hot Hesiod's rod felt as it was buried inside him. He'd imagined it would be cool, as cool as the ocean depths Hesiod appeared to have come from. But this...this was a searing ramrod and an answering heat rushed through Carpus' body.

"Gods," he gasped, arching his back even further like a cat. Hesiod's balls slapped against his own as Hesiod started pounding him harder, adding to the stimulation. Pleasure crashed over him in waves, as powerful and immense as the ocean now watching their passion.

"You're half right," Hesiod murmured, but Carpus barely heard him. He was too busy trying not to let his hand creep to his aching cock.

Hesiod's fingers tightened on the taut muscles of Carpus' sides. "So tight," he murmured. "So good."

"Yes."

Hesiod paused. "Is it good, my sailor? Having my cock buried inside you?"

"Yes!"

"How about this?" Hesiod slid his hand down, over Carpus' flat stomach, over his groin to the top of Carpus' thigh. His finger found the cleft between sac and thigh and rubbed it, teasing the tender skin behind Carpus' sac.

"Please, yes..."

"Or this?" Finally, finally, his hand, still slick with oil, closed over Carpus' swollen cock with a grip so tight stars exploded behind Carpus' eyes. It was almost painful but not quite, causing Carpus to ride a knife edge between pain and unbearable pleasure.

And all the while Hesiod continued tunneling into Carpus' ass, slow and smooth, his groin hitting Carpus' behind.

"Please, please..." Carpus had never begged like this, not for anything. A Democritus pleaded to no man.

But Hesiod was not a man.

"Please what?"

"Stroke me, please...move your hand on me."

"Like this?" Hesiod demonstrated, one quick jerk that Carpus felt all the way through his body.

"Yes!"

Hesiod's hand left both cock and hips, moving to Carpus' shoulders. A smothered groan left Carpus' lips, but there was no need. Hesiod lifted him, forcing him to balance on his knees with Hesiod's cock buried deep inside him. Without thinking, Carpus lifted his arm, reaching behind him over his shoulder to touch Hesiod's sun-warmed back.

Hesiod sighed his agreement and reached down again. This time he fisted Carpus' cock quickly, sharply, the pressure unbearable, the pleasure unbelievable. At the same time he sped his movements, holding on to Carpus with one hand wrapped around his chest, tweaking and pinching his hard male nipple.

Carpus reached down behind him with his other hand to caress Hesiod's thigh, sneaking up farther to grip the other man's solid ass. If he could reach a little farther, he could slide his fingers between Hesiod's cheeks, find that tempting hole and give Hesiod a little of the pleasure Hesiod gave him.

Hesiod groaned and sped up, his strong arm like a bar around Carpus' chest, holding him up. The confused realization of Hesiod's amazing strength was drowned out by waves of ecstasy, blurring Carpus' vision, driving all other thoughts from his head as his body tensed and started to shake.

Hesiod's lips found Carpus' ear, the side of his neck, kissing, nibbling. Carpus' head fell back, resting on Hesiod's shoulder as Hesiod clamed him, driving in and out of him with a pace bordering on frantic.

Carpus felt equally frenzied. The cock inside him was a living thing, claiming him with ruthless ferocity. His own cock, being jerked smoothly in Hesiod's strong hand, felt swollen and heavy, ready to explode.

"Yes...yes...yes..."

Carpus didn't know if he was speaking or if Hesiod was or if they both were. The sound simply echoed inside him, breathless with need.

"I'm going to...oh yes, I'm going to come..." That was him, had to be because he didn't think he could hold on another second. He'd never been this aroused, this fully stimulated. It was as though the entire world had disappeared and left only a body on the verge of all-consuming release.

"Come, then."

Carpus screamed. There was no other word for it, no other way to describe the sound wrenched from the very depths of his soul. His seed shot out onto the rock in an arc, his fingers tightened on Hesiod's skin until they ached.

Still Hesiod thrust, still his hand milked Carpus' cock and just as Carpus started to return to his own body Hesiod gave a mighty bellow behind him. Hesiod's cock swelled into Carpus' ass, jerking, filling Carpus with streams of molten seed. His arms

closed around Carpus' chest, holding him close, so tight it was hard to breathe, but Carpus didn't care. This was a perfect moment, while his body still tingled and hummed with the aftereffects of the most intense climax he'd ever had and the amazing man who'd given it to him cuddled him close with his body still buried inside Carpus.

It was almost worth the death he feared would come next.

The gods never gave pleasure without demanding a price and after the bliss he had shared with Hesiod, Carpus had no doubt the man was sent from Mt. Olympus itself. He would be wanting something from Carpus, something more than fucking as a reward for saving Carpus' life. Now, all Carpus could do was pray that Hesiod desired something he could give. If not, his return to the land of the living might be very brief indeed.

* * * * *

Hesiod scaled the cliffs a third time, the last load of driftwood lashed to his back with kelp, not bothering to keep his pace slow and steady to avoid being revealed as something other than human. Carpus would not be able to look over the edge and even if he were able, it wouldn't matter. The wretched mortal had already guessed the truth.

Somehow he had known! Known Hesiod meant to ask something of him even before the words passed his lips.

"And probably also knew that he would refuse me, no matter that he is in my debt." Hesiod growled the words, shoving aside the voice inside him that insisted the mortal owed him nothing. Yes, Hesiod had kept the other man from drowning, but Carpus never would have ended up in the water if Poseidon hadn't called forth such a vicious storm.

"But there would never have been a storm if the mortal hadn't thieved the pendant."

It wasn't thieved – it was a gift to his ancestor who made a gift of it to him.

"He had no right to make that gift. The stone belongs to the sea."

The stone belongs to the human. The gods cannot take back boons once they are freely given. The aquamarine is his according to the laws of both god and man.

Hesiod heaved himself up onto the top of the cliffs and headed toward the cave he had found, gritting his teeth against the soft voice in his mind. This argument was useless. It didn't matter whether or not Carpus was in his debt or whether or not he had gained the pendant by honest means. Hesiod had to have the aquamarine. Failure was not an option. Just as he would be rewarded for returning the bauble, he would also be punished if he returned to the sea empty handed. Therefore, he must do whatever it took to persuade Carpus that he must make him a gift of the pendant.

"You cannot keep me tied here forever," Carpus shouted at him from his place in the corner of the cave, where Hesiod had tied his arms behind his back and bound one leg to the other before propping him up against the stone wall.

"Indeed. You are mortal and will perish long before 'forever'."

"Have your jest, but I only seek to warn you." Carpus' blue eyes looked darker now that the sun had set, the shade of deep ocean water rather than the same brilliant hue as the stone around his neck. But still, those eyes snapped with life, with intelligence, with a fire Hesiod might have guessed was passion if he didn't know for a fact the mortal wished to kill him...if he were able to free himself from his bonds. "My men will return to Greece and tell my family of the enchanted storm. My grandfather will know which of the gods is to blame. He will raise an army and he will —"

"He will do nothing. He will assume you dead." Hesiod placed the wood near the fire already burning in the pit he had made, then leaned his back against the stone. "Your family will mourn you and carry on. It is the way of humans. Their lives are too brief to be wasted."

"You are wrong. My grandfather has the sight—he will know I still walk among the living." Carpus' voice was strong, but the tight set of his jaw told Hesiod that the Greek was beginning to doubt he would ever be free again.

After a mere four hours, his hope was failing him. Humans...it was amazing they had ever managed to create any sort of civilization. They were so impatient.

"I don't think so, mortal. You won't be *walking* anywhere," Hesiod said, stretching his legs out and reaching his arms high above his head, making it clear how he luxuriated in the ability to move freely while Carpus' hands and legs were lashed together with thick, thorny vines. "I intend to keep you bound exactly where you are until such time as you make me a gift of that pendant around your neck."

"I have told you, I swore never to be parted with the stone."

"The stone does not belong to you. It is Poseidon's, my father's. You must remove it and give it to me at once."

"I cannot," he said, actually looking slightly regretful. "I gave my word."

"Your word," Hesiod repeated, trying to hide the respect that had crept into his heart. A man who would suffer imprisonment rather than break his word, surely he had never expected such honor from a human. Still, he must not soften—he must show Carpus that Hesiod would not be swayed. "What good is your word, mortal? It will not keep you safe nor gain you your freedom."

"I have a name," Carpus said, drawing himself up to sit as straight and tall as he could manage. "Do not call me 'mortal' again."

"I will call you what I like, when I like," Hesiod said, moving to his feet and closing the distance between them with slow, even steps. He stalked toward the other man as he would stalk a fish he wished to eat, as he would stalk the great sharks who dared hunt in his mother's waters.

Carpus' eyes grew wider and a hint of fear crept into his blue gaze. That wariness made Hesiod's cock begin to swell as a wicked idea formed in his mind. The mortal had obviously enjoyed their interlude on the beach. His passion, his ecstasy had been as intense as Hesiod's own.

But how would he respond now? Now that he knew Hesiod was not a friend or ally, but the son of a god who was very displeased with the Democritus men? Perhaps

now he would loathe to be violated by Hesiod's cock. Perhaps, eventually, he would make a gift of the pendant simply to be free of Hesiod's unwanted attentions.

"Roll onto your stomach, mortal." Hesiod stopped only a few steps away from Carpus, glaring down at where he sat.

"I will do nothing for you, half-breed." Carpus spit at him then, a thick wad of saliva that landed on his leg, burning his flesh as if it had been formed of molten lava.

With a growl of rage, Hesiod took Carpus by the shoulders and rolled him over until he lay face down on the dirt floor of the cave. In seconds he was on top of the other man, prying open his buttocks and positioning his own aching cock. No matter that the thought of raping this man left a sour taste in his mouth, the sight of his firm ass and broad shoulders filled him with a lust so powerful it was impossible to believe he had come only hours before.

Carpus grunted in what sounded like pleasure as Hesiod forced his shaft deep inside Carpus' ass, shoving as far as he could manage. Then he ground his hips forward even further, until he lay on his belly atop the other man, cock buried so deep it felt he had become part of the mortal.

"Damn you." Carpus moaned, a hint of pain mixing with the arousal clear in his voice.

Hesiod ignored the spark of remorse the sound caused to flash through his dark heart and pressed his lips close to the other man's ear. "I will take you, again and again. I will fuck your ass, your mouth. I will ravage you until you beg for me to take that pendant from around your neck." He punctuated his words with savage, brutal strokes into Carpus' body, thrusts that grew faster and faster, harder and harder, until Hesiod was forced to grip Carpus by the shoulders to keep from moving the other man across the ground with the power of his penetration.

Hesiod drove into the mortal, mindless now as he neared release, so lost to the pleasure he found in the other man's body that he barely heard Carpus cry out at the same time as his own shout of triumph filled the cave. Hesiod's cock spurted hot

streams of essence deep into the mortal's body as a release even better than that on the beach washed over him in waves.

Never had he known such bliss, never, gods, never...what was he going to do? How could he ever give this man up now that he had known such paradise? And how could he think himself any better than his father if he relished an act of violence so greatly? Hesiod had always thought he had more restraint, that he was not the sort who would wish to take that which was not freely given.

First the pendant and now the man's body. You seek nothing but to take from this mortal and become more like the sea god with every moment.

"Roll over." Hesiod pulled out of Carpus and stood on shaking legs, running a hand over his face as if he could wipe away the shame that filled him. "I will...get you something to drink."

"A drink...would be most appreciated," Carpus said, his voice thready and weak as he rolled over onto his back.

It was then that Hesiod saw the damp stain on the ground, exactly where Carpus' hips had been a moment before. For a moment, he feared he had damaged the other man, caused him to bleed against a stone on the floor or something worse. But then Hesiod moved his gaze to Carpus' cock. The member was still partially erect and the tip coated with the sticky sheen of cum.

The man had climaxed as Hesiod ravaged him, without so much as a single finger caressing his rod. The realization sent a bolt of desire straight to his groin and forced Hesiod to turn and run from the cave.

He could not be near the mortal, not now and perhaps not for many hours. Not until his head was clear and he could think about anything but Carpus' beauty, his fine form and his lust that so clearly matched his own to perfection. Hesiod was down the cliff and flinging himself into the sea mere minutes later. But even as he swam out into the cold ocean, he sensed it was a pointless flight he made. He would return and he would give in to his desire again. There was no way he could resist Carpus Democritus,

not when every part of him yearned for the mortal as fiercely as he yearned for a place in his father's kingdom.

Maybe even more than you yearn for that place.

Hesiod screamed in frustration and swam faster until his human legs vanished and his tail reformed, until he was one with the ocean and all thoughts of gods and man faded to the back of his mind.

Chapter Three

A fortnight later

Hesiod drifted toward wakefulness with the vague sense that something was amiss. He could feel the familiar warmth of the fire they kept lit in the cave, the firmness of the hard dirt floor beneath him and the smell of Carpus nearby—all things he had grown accustomed to in the past weeks. There was even the lingering scent of their mingled cum drifting through the air, a smell that both aroused and comforted him. The arousal was not unwelcome, but the comfort...it was not a wise emotion.

How had he allowed himself to become so attached to this mortal when attachment was the last thing he wanted or needed? Had his plan to seduce the stone away led him to this sorry state where it seemed instead of the stone, he'd come to value Carpus himself more? To crave Carpus' lips upon his, to be unable to sleep unless the other man's warm body was nestled against his own? Carpus' body...

Yes, that was it. That was the disquieting feeling that had pulled him from his sleep. He was alone on the floor, without the firm press of Carpus' muscled flesh fitted to his back. He must have rolled away to the other side of the cave to relieve himself.

"Could you do the business for me as well? I am loath to move from this spot," Hesiod said, smiling as he remembered what he and Carpus had been about that had tired him so. When no answer came from the darkened corner of the cave, Hesiod stretched his arms and rolled over.

Or tried to roll over. He was prevented from completing the motion by the bonds on his legs. Each ankle had been encircled by thick seaweed and secured to rocks behind him so that he was spread-eagle on the floor.

"By Zeus, what is—" His breath rushed from his body with a grunt as a heavy weight landed on his back, pinning him to the ground. Seconds later his wrists were lashed together above his head and Carpus' breath hot in his ear.

"This is what happens to half-gods who forget they are not so infallible as they would like to believe." The mortal laughed, then drug his teeth over the lobe of Hesiod's ear, making his cock rise between his legs even as anger rose in his heart.

"Set me free, this instant!"

"I think not," Carpus said, his strong hands teasing the tight muscles at Hesiod's shoulders. "I have been wanting to have you at my mercy for too long to give you liberty just yet."

"I am stronger than you understand, Carpus. I will free myself soon and then you will suffer my wrath for daring to—"

"Oh, I will suffer your wrath, will I?" Carpus' hands drifted down, lower and lower. His fingers kneaded the knots at the base of Hesiod's spine and then parted the mounds of his ass. "I do hope I will feel every inch of that wrath inside me again before the coming of my death."

"That death may come sooner than you think, mortal."

"True, it may. And what better argument for making certain I do not leave important business unfinished before I depart this island?" His fingers were slick now. He had found the fish oil Hesiod had taken to storing outside the cave in order to spare Carpus the smell.

Gods, not only had he found the oil, he knew *exactly* what to do with it.

His finger skittered across Hesiod's tight hole, rubbing the sensitive skin there, tapping it lightly. The very tip slid between the puckered lips, twirled for a second, slid back out. Hesiod's muscles clenched in an effort to hold it inside him, but it was too late. The finger had moved on, probing along the tender space just behind Hesiod's sac.

Hesiod's legs spread a little further, as much as was possible. His back arched, begging Carpus without words to pay attention to his hole again, to claim it. Never in his life had he imagined he would lower himself in this way. Never had he dreamed the touch of a mortal would be enough to make him quiver and shake, to make sounds of a sort he'd never heard himself make escape from between his lips.

Carpus' free hand massaged the firm muscles of Hesiod's ass, warming it. The hand disappeared for a moment, leaving a faint impression of its heat on Hesiod's skin, then returned with a stinging slap.

Hesiod moaned. This couldn't be happening. The payback he deserved for his rough treatment of Carpus earlier. He'd dreaded it, known it might happen...perhaps he'd even allowed it to happen, wanted to experience how it felt to give up control just once, to be dominated as he was accustomed to dominating.

Had he allowed it? Had he somehow willed this into being, simply by relaxing his guard, by trusting the mortal even when he knew he should not?

It might have given him pause if Carpus hadn't chosen that moment to slide one thick finger into Hesiod's ass.

"Ahhhh..."

Another slap. Carpus moved his finger, wiggling it gently, pushing it in and out of the tight hole.

Hesiod didn't have a lot of room to move, tethered as he was, but he tried anyway, raising his hips. The soft, smooth dirt beneath him rubbed against his cock. His ass practically twitched with the need to be fucked. He'd been dying for this since the second he pulled Carpus from the cold ocean. It would be mad to fight him, especially considering the bonds Carpus had tied felt quite secure. Hesiod would be able to tear his way free—there was no doubt of that—but not before Carpus had what he wanted from him.

Not only what the mortal wants. What you want, what you need.

"Are you ready to be fucked, Hesiod? To see if you enjoy it as much as captive as you have as master?" Carpus didn't wait for an answer, only positioned the blunt head of his cock at Hesiod's entry and rammed inside.

Hesiod cried out at the flash of pain, but Carpus did not gentle his use of him. Instead, the mortal shoved even deeper until it felt as if he would rip Hesiod in two with the force of his vicious thrust. Then he proceeded to take him, claim him, riding his body with a swift, pounding rhythm that was so rough, wild and exactly what Hesiod had been craving. His hands clenched into fists so tight they ached. He barely noticed.

"Gods!" Hesiod screamed as Carpus threaded his fingers through his hair and made a fist of them, jerking his head.

"Yes, this time I am your god. I am your master," Carpus hissed into his ear, passion making his voice deep and breathless. "And soon I will come in this tight hole, marking it forever as my own. You are mine, Hesiod, as much as I am yours."

Carpus pulled his head back even farther, so far Hesiod could not draw a full breath and small, black spots began to dance before his eyes. The sweet punishment of Carpus' cock grew more wicked as well until Hesiod's world narrowed to the feel of that hot ramrod thrusting inside him and the twist of his own rising passion low in his body.

His balls were filled to bursting and ached with a sweet pleasure-pain every time Carpus rammed home. His cock lay thick and aching, rubbing madly against the dirt, and he knew it wouldn't be long. He was going to come, spill his seed on the floor of the cave just as Carpus had done every time they lay together.

"Ah! Yes, gods, yes!" Carpus' cock swelled impossibly larger, stretching his ass until Hesiod groaned at the pressure. Then, seconds later, Hesiod felt the scalding jets of the mortal's cum filling his ass, the sensation so unbelievable his own release came seconds later.

The world spun and his mind felt ripped from his body by the force of his climax. Pleasure swept over every inch of him, stealing his breath, making him grimace as the pressure in his sac was relieved and his cock shot his seed onto the earth. He was whimpering by the time Carpus released his hold on Hesiod's hair, so spent and sated he felt like a boy again. A boy who had just had his first taste of the paradise to be found between a woman's legs.

"Please..." he begged, shame fighting with his elation. To beg a mortal! To be reduced to this, it was unthinkable, humiliating...and it felt wonderful. "Untie me. At least untie my arms, let me roll over. Let me look upon you."

"Oh, no. We're not done yet."

"But..."

"Silence. You're no longer in control, remember?" Something cold snaked its way around Hesiod's ankle. More seaweed rope. It seemed Carpus knew as well as Hesiod did that the bonds keeping him in place would not hold forever.

Hesiod's mind raced. His ass felt empty. Empty and a little sore, a pleasant pain like he felt in his legs after a long walk or his fins after a long swim. Truth be told, his entire body felt that way, relaxed and tender. Not an appropriate feeling. He should be scared. Carpus was even now twisting another rope around Hesiod's ankle, binding him still more thoroughly to the ground.

He deserved this and more. Neither of them had spoken of that day, the day he'd tried to force Carpus to give him the gem. The day he'd forced Carpus to submit.

He opened his eyes and saw the firm, tight muscles of Carpus' lean legs as Carpus squatted by his hand, wrapping still more rope around Hesiod's wrist. Hesiod had been certain he could free himself. He was growing less certain with every passing minute. He knew only too well how strong seaweed could be, especially when twisted and plaited into such a thickness. Had Carpus been planning this all along?

The last thing he intended to do was ask, despite the questions trying to force themselves from his dry throat. More ropes, more and more until his legs were completely wrapped from ankle to knee and his arms from wrist to elbow.

Carpus sighed behind him, the satisfied exhalation of a man who'd just completed an arduous task. "That should keep you in place," he said.

"I will still escape. The powers of the sea —"

"You assume I'll let you live."

Hesiod swallowed. The idea he might not live hadn't even crossed his mind. He never should have told the mortal that he must visit the sea daily or perish. It had been foolishness to expose weakness. Now all he could do was refuse to give Carpus the satisfaction of hearing him speak again. The satisfaction of possibly hearing in Hesiod's voice the pain and betrayal Hesiod felt. Yes, he'd treated Carpus badly. Some time ago. Since then...he'd thought things were different. He'd thought he might actually care for the mortal and be cared for in return.

The scent of the earth beneath him filled his nose, made his nostrils and throat dry. He ignored it, ignored everything as the sounds of Carpus' footsteps faded away. He was alone.

* * * * *

Carpus managed to get out of the cave and down to the beach before he started shaking. He'd planned this for so long, ever since the day Hesiod had used him so roughly...

Ever since the day Hesiod had used him so roughly and he had gloried in it. Had craved it, ever since. Hesiod's hands, Hesiod's mouth...Hesiod's long, thick cock deep inside him.

Every time he left the cave for food or water, Carpus had plaited more seaweed, hiding it behind a clump of bushes outside the mouth of the cave. Biding his time. He'd

planned to escape. Now...being inside Hesiod, really inside him, had been...indescribable. More than he'd expected, more than it had ever been with anyone.

Carpus was no stranger to such things. In his world, men took their pleasures where they could find them, and if that pleasure came at the hands, mouth or firm round ass of another man, it mattered not. So it was not shame at finding such shattering delight in the body of another male that haunted him now, that made him sink to his knees in the warm sand. It was the feeling that he'd done something unforgivable to Hesiod, something cruel.

Hesiod was a God. Perhaps only half God but divine nonetheless. The son of Poseidon. A man of such proud lineage that nobility paled before it.

A man who, despite that lineage, had still proved himself to be kind and warm. Caring when he wanted to be. Proud, but with good reason. He was a man not meant to be chained, to be tied up and left cold and unclothed on the dirt.

He'd be able to free himself eventually. Carpus knew that without a doubt. But would it be before the sun set tomorrow eve, before Hesiod was kept so long from the sea that he began to fade into the ether?

It didn't matter. The god-man had chosen his fate the day he took Carpus captive.

Carpus stood and plunged himself into the clean, salty water. He had to get away from here. No matter what he was feeling for Hesiod, he had to get away. He had a family waiting for him. His men needed him. And Hesiod...Hesiod cared only about the gem, had probably been attempting to seduce it away from Carpus the entire time. Hesiod didn't care for him.

Carpus rolled over in the surf, letting the water wash over him, letting it wash away the scent of Hesiod on his body. The sooner that was gone, the better. He should start swimming now, should strike out in the direction of the setting sun. The tide would be going out soon, he knew. He could ride those waves to land. The gem would protect him, help him.

He glanced back, half expecting to see Hesiod there, his brawny arms raised, ready to call the fury of the sea down on Carpus. But the beach was empty. Was Hesiod still tied up? Or had he set himself free, snaked his way down from the cave when Carpus wasn't looking? Was he even now lurking beneath the water, ready to grab Carpus and drag him beneath the waves?

He shouldn't care, he shouldn't be plagued by guilt that he might have doomed the merman to death...but he was. Carpus had to know, to know if Hesiod had freed himself. And perhaps he might loosen the bonds...just a bit...if Hesiod had not.

Carpus pulled himself from the water and trudged back toward the cave, feeling as though the sun itself was a watching eye. Up the steep cliff he climbed, his muscles fueled by the excitement of knowing he might see his love again.

No! Not his love...his lover. The god-man had been his lover and his captor, nothing more. Still, he raced to the cave as if he were coming home, not returning to the site of his captivity.

His breath rushed from his body as he realized that Hesiod still rested where Carpus had left him, his black hair hiding his face, providing a stark and unbelievably sensual contrast with his pale skin. That hair looked just as good spread across Carpus' stomach when Hesiod dipped his head to take Carpus' swollen length in his mouth, sucking him to an achingly perfect completion. The memory made Carpus' cock twitch, already hard just from the sight of Hesiod's body spread out before him.

"I know you're there."

"How?" Carpus was too surprised to keep quiet.

"I can hear you breathe. I can smell your skin...and the ocean. Couldn't wait to wash the scent of me from your body, is that true? When I escape from here, I'll get in the water myself. I'll follow you. I'll make you pay."

Carpus' jaw set. "For what?"

"I am the son of a god and you have bound me—"

"Is that not what you did to me? Forced me to submit to your will? Is a mere mortal not permitted to do to you what you have done?"

"You utter grievance now. I do not remember you being so distressed about it then, when your seed spilled onto the floor —"

It had. Oh, how it had. Being overpowered like that...it had made Carpus vow revenge, yes. But not because he'd disliked it. Because he did not want to admit how good it had felt to submit, that submitting had been just as intensely pleasurable as being submitted to. "Just as yours has done. Just as I can make it do again."

"You dare to —"

"I dare to do whatever I like. May I remind you, you are bound. I have the control here. If I want to bury my cock in your ass again, there is very little you can do about it."

"Silence! I will not hear more from you!" But Carpus heard Hesiod's breath catch in his chest, saw his body twitch, his muscles tighten.

He slid his hand down his stomach, curling it around his engorged cock. Just as submitting felt good, so did control. And knowing the person he proposed to control wanted it as much as he did... He would not have considered his next act if it hadn't been for that twitch, for the way Hesiod's hips lifted slightly and told Carpus without words that Hesiod too was erect again, ready again.

Carpus strode across the smooth dirt and knelt by Hesiod's face. He wanted to see it, to look the other man in the eyes. To truly know the excitement he was feeling was shared.

"Look at me," he murmured.

Hesiod didn't move. His hair still covered his face.

"Look at me, Hesiod." Carpus took his own cock in his hand, gave it a stroke. Tingles shot through his body. It suddenly became very important that Hesiod look at him, see him. Carpus still had to leave. He had no choice. And anger still surged

through him, whether it was anger at Hesiod or himself or the situation they were in, he didn't know, but it was there, adding extra power to the need choking him.

But before he left, he wanted to know that their time together had meant something to Hesiod as well. And he wouldn't know that until he looked in Hesiod's eyes.

"Look at me!" Roughly he reached forward with his free hand and scraped the hair away from Hesiod's face. Hesiod's black eyes focused on his, holding his gaze. Their depths reflected Carpus' desire. It was just what he needed.

He leaned over Hesiod's still form, placing his left hand in the dirt beyond Hesiod's head. His erect cock fell against Hesiod's cheek. Carpus pulled back slightly.

"Take it," he said. "Take it."

A moment's pause...and Hesiod's warm, soft lips closed around Carpus' cock. The wet heat of Hesiod's mouth enveloped him, swallowed him, pulled him in closer.

Carpus set his right hand in the dirt next to his left. His knees and lower thighs pressed into the dirt, his hips moving, fucking Hesiod's mouth with slow, gentle strokes.

Hesiod's tongue swirled around him as he moved. The suction increased. Hesiod was tied to the floor, unable to move...and the knowledge of that went straight to Carpus' head.

Balancing on his right hand, he slid his left down over the smooth muscles of Hesiod's back. Hesiod moaned. The sound vibrated deep against Carpus' cock.

Carpus reached down still farther, slipping his hand between Hesiod's firm buttocks. Another vibrating moan. Hesiod's hips lifted. Carpus stretched as far as he could and managed to slip his middle finger into Hesiod's ass.

Hesiod sucked harder, faster, urging Carpus to speed the movements of his hips. This he did, no longer feeling the ground hard against his knees. He felt only heat, the heat of Hesiod's mouth, the heat surrounding Carpus' finger as he moved it in and out of the still-slick hole.

Blood rushed to Carpus' pelvis. He felt himself swell inside Hesiod's mouth and moved faster, harder, shoving himself into Hesiod's mouth as far as he could go. Hesiod's hips lifted, letting Carpus' finger slide deeper into his ass. Carpus imagined how the smooth, wet dirt would feel against Hesiod's cock, a feeling he knew all too well after the time they'd spent together.

He started to explode. His balls tightened, his head fell back. Hesiod's mouth opened as he reached orgasm too. His ass spasmed around Carpus' probing finger.

Quickly, Carpus leaned back, wrapping his right hand around his cock and jerking it, milking it. Droplets of cum spurted onto Hesiod's hair, onto his face. Hesiod's eyes were closed, his mouth open, moving, seeking to catch the fluid on his tongue. The sight made something deep inside Carpus twist in ecstasy. Ecstasy and pain. This had to be the last moment they would share together. If he stayed, he would lose everything, his home and family, the jewel that was his grandfather's legacy. He had no choice. He had not been given one.

With a cry, he disengaged himself completely from Hesiod. A few quick jerks of his hands and Hesiod's arms were nearly free. The merman would live to return to the sea. That was all Carpus needed to give himself the freedom to turn and run from the cave. No matter how his heart ached, the man behind him was not his destiny. He belonged to Greece and to his family. Everything else was a dream that could never become a reality.

Chapter Four

Hesiod ripped the bonds from his arms and made quick work of the seaweed binding his legs. As soon as he gained his liberty, he was on his feet, rushing from the cave as if his life depended on it.

And it very well might. If not your life, than at least your heart.

His heart, which felt more full than he could ever remember it.

Carpus had returned for him! He had been in the sea, ready to let the current carry him to the coast of the mainland no more than three leagues away and yet he had returned. He had come back to touch Hesiod, to make love to him one more time. And what was more important, he had come back to make certain Hesiod would be able to return to the sea. The mortal had been worried that the bonds he tied would be too tight and that even Hesiod, with his superior strength, would not be able to free himself before the sun set the next day and he was kept too long from the ocean that was so much a part of him.

Too much a part of you. Even if you catch him, even if he returns your love, you will never have a future together. You are bound to the sea just as he is bound to the land. Never, except on this island where you have been kept apart from the world, will you find a way to be together in peace.

No! It wasn't hopeless. There had to be a way to find a balance between their two very different worlds. If only he could reach Carpus and convince him of all that was in his heart, then they could find a way. He hadn't imagined the passion in the mortal's eyes or the sadness when he had turned to run from the cave. Sadness inspired by the thought that he would never see Hesiod again.

Carpus desired him—of that Hesiod was certain. Now, all that remained to be seen was if desire had become something more. Could Carpus' heart have softened the way that Hesiod's had? There was only one way to find out.

Hesiod practically leapt over the side of the cliff. He tumbled down the stone face, more falling than climbing, barely touching the stones in his haste to reach Carpus. He was nearly to the bottom, the soft sand of the beach in sight, when he heard the soft gasp from above him and his eyes were drawn back up the cliffs.

There Carpus clung to the rock face, his strong body glowing golden in the late afternoon sun. He was, by far, the most beautiful thing Hesiod had ever seen, his eyes so full of life and passion and...something else, something Hesiod could scarcely bring himself to believe.

Love. Need. Tenderness. All those things and more, all those things...just for him. For Hesiod. Carpus looked at him, and Hesiod felt as though they were the only two men in the world.

No one had ever looked at him like that before, with such awe, such affection. That was the worst part—or perhaps the best part. The affection, plain and simple. As if Carpus, more than needing him or desiring him or even loving him, liked him. Liked Hesiod. Enjoyed his company.

Enjoyed it as much as Hesiod had enjoyed Carpus'. Those long evenings, watching the sun set and snacking on fish and olives and grapes until they were both sticky with juice. Licking the juice off, falling back onto the dirt, their tongues tangling, their bodies entwining, golden in the light.

"Carpus," he said. He couldn't move, couldn't take his eyes off the other man. The man he needed. The man he...the man he loved.

It was an emotion Hesiod wasn't used to. It hurt, a gentle stinging ache deep in his heart. Being together was impossible. Being separated was more so.

His legs went weak. Too long from the water, or was it simply that the powerful emotion coursing through him left no room for strength anywhere else? He didn't

know, but fear trickled in around the edges of his happiness. Nothing had changed. No matter what they felt for each other, nothing had really changed.

“Hesiod.”

Hesiod’s knees would no longer support him. He tried to sit down, but fell instead, collapsing in a heap on the rocks.

“Hesiod!”

He’d been cut, he knew that. Blood oozed sticky from a wound on his forehead. He had to get to the water. What he felt for Carpus was real, but so was the deeper need to survive.

His hands clawed at the rocks, finding purchase and pulling. More rocks scraped his chest, but he ignored it. The sand wasn’t far, and beyond it the ocean crashed and whispered, calling its siren song so loud in Hesiod’s ears he did not hear Carpus calling him. Did not hear Carpus’ feet land on the rocks beside him.

But he felt Carpus’ hands, strong and sure, gripping Hesiod under the arms and lifting him. He felt the heat of his love’s body as Carpus carried him, running to the shore, apparently heedless of the sharp edges slicing his feet.

He felt the water surround him, close over him. Felt his legs pulled together by a force stronger than either man to become one long tail as his soft human skin became scales. The strength immediately rushed back into his body.

His eyes snapped back into focus, and there was Carpus, pale and worried. Carpus opened his mouth to speak, but Hesiod silenced him with a kiss.

It reverberated through Hesiod’s entire body, all the way to the end of his fin and his fingertips and even, he could swear, to the tips of his long dark hair, now fanned out around his head in the water.

Carpus still held him, his hands supporting Hesiod under the water, but after the first surprised moment, his grip changed. It became passionate rather than merely helpful as he pulled Hesiod close.

Hesiod pushed his own hands into Carpus' golden hair, tangling in it, holding the other man's face close to his so he could slide his tongue into Carpus' mouth and taste the purity of Carpus' soul.

As his cock hardened, his legs began to split again, but he paid no heed. Merman or human, the water would strengthen him and he intended to use that strength in the next few moments.

The waves crashed around them, over them as Hesiod turned his body, slipping his legs from Carpus' grasp to stand on his own. His chest pressed against Carpus', their thighs meeting, their cocks rubbing together in a slow, sensual shiver of pleasure.

Hesiod reached up to hold Carpus' face in his hands. He should be thinking about how much he would miss Carpus, how to prolong this moment, but he couldn't seem to focus on anything but the feel of Carpus' skin against his. The feel of Carpus' hands on his body.

Together they tumbled into the surf. The tide was going out, drawing farther back from them every time, but still salt water poured over them. Lips fused, they moved forward together, acting without thinking or speaking, pulling themselves far enough up the slope of the beach so the sea still gave Hesiod the strength he needed, but the sun and gentle breeze dried their chests and backs.

Hesiod reached down, sliding his palm across the hard, flat muscles of Carpus' chest and stomach until he found Carpus' swollen cock and took it in his palm. The gasp Carpus uttered against Hesiod's mouth made Hesiod want to sing, sing the way the mermaids had when he was child.

He tightened his grip and moved his hand, up then down, slowly, not wanting to bring this moment even close to ending but wanting Carpus to know exactly what he had in mind. Hesiod was going to make love to him. This time they would lie together as more than two men with a shared lust for flesh. This time, Hesiod would show Carpus all that was in his heart.

"I, Hesiod, son of Poseidon and Grenich," Hesiod mumbled against Carpus' lips, "do hereby forfeit any claim to the pendant once belonging to my father. The sacred aquamarine is now the property of Carpus Democritus, the mortal I have come to love." It was suicide, but Hesiod didn't care. Poseidon might kill him for returning to the sea without his pendant, but Hesiod could no longer hold Carpus captive or try to take from the mortal that which he now understood was not his to demand.

Carpus pulled back from Hesiod's lips, far enough away for his blue eyes to search Hesiod's face. Long minutes passed as Carpus stared into Hesiod's eyes. The waves lapped at their legs, the saltwater sliding between their bodies to tease around their twin arousals while Hesiod waited, holding his breath until Carpus finally smiled.

"You speak truly. I believe that with all of my heart." He paused, threading his hands through Hesiod's damp hair. "That heart that will always belong to you, my love."

His love! The words sent a thrill unlike anything he had ever known coursing through Hesiod's body. His lips were fairly abuzz with pure euphoria by the time Carpus tugged Hesiod's mouth down to meet his own. Immediately Carpus' tongue darted out, demanding entry to Hesiod's mouth. The passion between them was even hotter now, wilder, fiercer and yet somehow sweeter as well.

Despite Hesiod's plans to draw out these final moments, he all too soon found himself easing down between Carpus' lightly furred thighs and taking his love's swollen cock between his lips. He moaned as he sucked the hot flesh, still salty from the ocean, deep inside his mouth, relaxing his throat until he had completely encased Carpus' thick arousal in wet heat. Only then did he begin to suckle the other man, rolling his tongue along Carpus' shaft until he tasted salt again, this time from the tip of Carpus' leaking cock.

"No, not yet. Not yet, my love." Carpus urged Hesiod's lips away from his rod, pulling him up for another kiss.

Hesiod moaned as their shafts pressed together, trapped between the hard planes of their muscled stomachs. Unbelievably, he knew he could come just from this small contact. His skin felt hypersensitive, aware in a way it had never been before. The connection between him and Carpus was now more than the rubbing of two eager bodies against one another. It was a meeting of souls and hearts as well.

"I want you inside me. Now," Carpus said as he rolled over in the sand. He spread his knees and arched his hips, presenting his ass for Hesiod. It was an invitation the merman could not refuse. He was at Carpus' back, his hands digging into the firm flesh of the other man's hips less than a second later.

Slowly, so as not to cause his love a moment's pain, Hesiod pressed the head of his cock into the tight ring of Carpus' ass. Ah. Gods! The bliss of it was almost more than he could bear. Carpus' body seemed to open for him, tugging him deeper and deeper, welcoming the invasion as Hesiod impaled Carpus on his aching shaft.

"Do not be gentle," Carpus said, throwing a heated look over his shoulder. "I want my body to still feel used by you when I arrive at my grandfather's home. I will need at least that small comfort."

The words were nearly enough to break his heart, but they were also all the encouragement Hesiod needed to begin to fuck his love in earnest.

Muscles moved under Carpus' broad, strong back as he pushed himself backward, encouraging Hesiod to go deeper, faster. Hesiod braced himself with one hand on Carpus' hip and slid his other hand down to grip Carpus' cock, hard and swollen between Carpus' legs.

"Yes...yes, Hesiod."

Hesiod barely heard his love's voice over the pounding of the waves, the rushing of blood in his head and the sound of his own breath rasping in his throat. The water splashing his legs gave him strength, enough power to slam his hips against Carpus' firm behind again and again. It gave him the stamina to keep going, to hold off the moment of his climax until Carpus was able to come with him.

Carpus reared up, lifting his beautiful upper body to give Hesiod better access. Hesiod did not slow his pace. He wrapped his arm around Carpus' chest, pressing Carpus' back to him. Carpus leaned his head back, resting it on Hesiod's shoulder, exposing his neck. It was an invitation Hesiod could not ignore. He feasted on the salty, smooth exposed flesh, kissing it, nibbling it, stroking it with his tongue.

The heat of Carpus' body enveloped him, pressed against his chest. Carpus' arms reached back, his hands locking behind Hesiod's back to hold him closer still. Together they rose from the surf, as if Hesiod's divinity somehow expanded to cover both of them as they made love like gods on the beach.

Hesiod's hand moved faster, faster, lubricated now with Carpus' precum. He could still taste it in his mouth. The flavor inflamed him. He wanted Carpus to come, so he could feel Carpus pulse around him. He wanted to watch cum shoot from his love's cock into the foamy water swirling around their legs.

"Carpus...Carpus, I love you," he gasped. His balls tightened, his cock swelled. He pushed himself, forced himself not to erupt. Not until Carpus did. He reached up, finding Carpus' hard male nipple and rubbing it, pinching it gently.

Carpus moaned. His hips jerked, every movement pushing his ass farther back to swallow Hesiod's cock all the way to the base, then forward to thrust into Hesiod's tight fist.

"Yes...my love...aaah!"

Carpus' cock swelled in Hesiod's hand, pulsed. Cum arced from the swollen purplish tip into the sea. Hesiod watched it, unbearably erotic, felt Carpus squeeze him tight, and let go.

Ecstasy rolled through him, pushed out in waves from his cock all the way to his toes and threatened to blow the top of his head off completely. His fingers convulsed, gripping Carpus' chest, holding his love close while his body shook with something deeper than mere physical pleasure. He trembled with emotion, filled with the

knowledge of his love and what it meant. He'd denied his father. He'd abandoned his quest.

And it didn't matter because he was in love with a man who loved him too. This moment was worth anything that might come after.

Together they tumbled back to the sand, Carpus' back still snuggled tight against Hesiod's chest. Their legs entwined in the receding water.

"We need to move," Hesiod murmured. "My legs will join again."

"I want to see."

Hesiod shifted uncomfortably. "It is...just a fin. A tail. You might not—"

"I want to see," Carpus said again. He turned in Hesiod's arms so his face was only a short distance away. "I want to see everything, to know everything about you."

Hesiod's breath caught. He'd never let a mortal see him in his merman form. In the sea it was normal, obviously, but on land, for a human male...he'd always been afraid it would only emphasize the difference between himself and whatever mortal he may have been with. That it would strike fear in their breast, make him something obscene in their eyes.

Now Carpus was staring at him, meeting his gaze with such open desire and approval. His concern disappeared. He nodded and closed his eyes, let the sea take him, felt his scales forming smooth and cool.

He flapped his tail, enjoying the powerful sound of his flesh beating the water. Still more enjoyable was Carpus' hand stroking him, unafraid, his expression unchanged save wonder.

"It's beautiful," he said. "Your scales catch the sun. So many colors."

Hesiod kissed him, a gentle peck on the mouth. "I cannot keep it."

"Why?"

"I cannot...I cannot be with you and still be this. And I must be with you."

Carpus' eyes widened. "I could not ask you—"

"It's the only way. You cannot become what I am. But I...I may be able to become human. Mortal."

Carpus stroked Hesiod's face with gentle fingertips. "You would give up immortality for me?"

"What good is living forever if that life is to be without you?"

For a moment he thought he'd gone too far when Carpus did not answer. Then he looked in his love's eyes and saw Carpus was simply too overcome with emotion to speak.

Instead Carpus leaned forward and kissed Hesiod's forehead, then his eyelid, his cheeks, trailing down to his lips. "I will spend every minute of my life making sure you do not regret it," he whispered. "I love you."

They held each other for a long time, watching the waves recede. Finally Carpus spoke again. "How is it possible? To give up your immortality, your need for the ocean?"

Hesiod shivered. This was the part he did not look forward to. "I can ask my mother," he said.

Chapter Five

Hesiod churned his tail behind him, his entire body rippling with the effort to cut through the calm waves as quickly as possible. He gloried in the feel of his strong merbody, knowing this might be one of the last times he ever inhabited this form. The thought caused a slight twinge of melancholy but no real pain. As long as he knew his future lay with his love, he doubted he would feel real pain ever again.

Thinking of Carpus waiting for him on the shore made Hesiod grin and swim even faster.

Night had fallen only a few hours past. If he hurried, he would be able to reach the black depths of his mother's realm and return before daylight. He was sure Poseidon's spies had kept their watch upon the island during the day but guessed those loyal to his father returned to the safety of their underwater castles by night. If he and Carpus could slip away before the dawn, Hesiod prayed they would avoid garnering the attention of his father until they were safe upon the mainland. Then it would be too late for Poseidon to punish them for Hesiod's failure to win the aquamarine.

The plan would work. It had to work.

Even if the spies were still about, they surely wouldn't notice Hesiod and Carpus slipping into the waves under the cover of darkness. Most mercreatures could not see as well in the night as Hesiod. His black eyes, so suited to surviving in the abyss to which he and his mother had been banished when Hesiod was a small boy, were the one strong resemblance he bore to Grenich.

The rest of his body was formed in the image of the sea god, a fact Hesiod had been grateful for even in his younger years when his relatively small frame made him the object of taunts by his mother's new lovers, some of the most terrifying serpents inhabiting the sea. Grenich had not tried to protect him from the monsters she

welcomed to her bed. She tolerated no weakness in those around her, and that included her son.

Still, she had shown him love in her way. Hesiod remembered curling up in the center of his mother's long tail when he was small—her lower body was formed like a snake rather than a fish—and falling asleep feeling safe and contented. The eight eyes that dotted her pale face had never frightened him, nor the wild black hair that she could command like a living thing and which she sometimes used to whip him when he was disobedient.

The sea witch was his mother and he honored her as such.

In fact, he had never disobeyed her in any large matter until that day Poseidon summoned him to the castle of the sea king with a proposition. Greenwich had warned no good would come from playing errand boy for her former husband. She had wailed at Hesiod, cursing him as he swam away, promising his homecoming to the abyss would be a cold one when he did come slinking back.

Now Hesiod could only pray that losing him to the world of the mortals would be preferable to Greenwich than losing him to her hated former spouse.

His mother had legendary powers of transformation. It was such a transformation spell that had turned her into a lovely merwoman and helped her win Poseidon's love. It was also what had allowed her to turn one of Poseidon's mistresses into a sea cow and won her expulsion from the golden kingdom. She had the power to give Hesiod freedom from the ocean and mortal legs that would carry him upon the land without failing.

But would she be swayed by his confessions of love? Love was what had earned her banishment to the lowest reaches of the ocean. Love was what —

"And where are you off to, dear boy?" The sea king's voice was unmistakable.

No other creature of the deep could cause words to ripple through the waves so beautifully. That voice could make you feel as if you were being held in a mother's arms—or crushed in the grip of giant squid.

From the amount of pressure suddenly encircling his ribs, Hesiod guessed there was more crushing than holding in his future. It was time to think quickly.

"Father, I was away to my mother's realm, to ask her aid in this venture." He spun slowly in a circle, searching the waves for any sign of Poseidon, but the king was hiding from him, most likely hoping to attack him unawares. Hesiod braced himself, preparing to swim for his life when the moment came.

If the moment came and Poseidon did not simply crush him with the power of his voice and be done with it.

"Your mother's aid? Is that so?"

"Yes. The mortal refuses to part with the aquamarine and I thought—"

"You thought to defy me and find a way to be with your pretty human lover." Through the black water ahead of Hesiod, he finally saw the shadowy form of the king. He was moving forward slowly, stalking his bastard son like prey.

But he was still in his smaller form. He had not assumed the giant shape he had used to overturn Carpus' ship, which meant there was still a chance Hesiod would live to see the morning. Not a good chance, but a chance nonetheless.

"Father, it is not so."

"Then you deny he is your lover? That you have lain with him in my own ocean, a place where nothing escapes my notice?" The threat was clear in his words and in the way the waves around Hesiod pressed against him with enough force to steal his breath.

"Of course not. I sought to win the mortal's trust and affection and, through those, your pendant." Hesiod spun in a circle again, pretending he hadn't seen the king but putting just a bit more distance between them as he moved. There would only be one chance—he must be ready to seize it. The sea king's voice was more powerful at close range. If he could just ease a bit farther away...

"I have only tried to serve you, great king." A little farther, and still a little farther.
"My methods may not have been the wisest, but I—"

"Your methods were those of a fool and now you will win a fool's reward."

Hesiod launched himself toward the shore, barely escaping the fist of water his father's voice tried to clamp down around him.

"Come back here!" Poseidon roared. The waves churned up by his voice whipped at Hesiod's skin and clenched around his tail, trying to suck him back.

Hesiod gritted his teeth and swam faster, as fast as he could. His arms and tail ached. His lungs burned, drawing water in great gasps.

Another lash of water came at him, pulling at his tail. Hesiod struggled. The beach was so close now—he'd gone farther with his initial burst than he'd dared to hope. If he could just make it before his vision went black, if he could just make it before he fell into the death sleep...

If he could just...

Water squeezed around him. Through the dark haze covering his eyes, he saw his father getting closer. Poseidon's handsome features were contorted in rage, his fist upraised. The gold trident in his hand gleamed, the only spot of brightness in the rapidly darkening sea.

Hesiod wasn't going to make it. He'd lost, he'd lost everything... He'd lost Carpus, and now Carpus too would die when Poseidon cast their island into the sea.

* * * * *

Carpus watched the surface of the water. Hesiod had just left, giving him a gentle, tender kiss that said even more than the words they'd exchanged.

Only moments had passed, but it felt like days as fear raced through Carpus' body. His love's errand was so dangerous. Even if he managed to avoid the sea king, what would his mother say? Carpus knew well the tales of Grenich. She would be just as

likely to slit her son's throat as punishment for falling in love with a mortal as she would be to grant his wish.

And his love was heading there now, into the black depths of the sea to the witch's lair, to beg her aid. Carpus shivered and clasped his knees tighter, his eyes losing focus as he stared at the moon-stained surface of the ocean. So calm, yet beneath it roiled emotions and powers Carpus could only dream of. Jealousy and anger and love and lust, stories he'd heard from childhood of powerful Poseidon and his unquenchable desires.

Suddenly the ground beneath him trembled. Carpus might not have noticed it if he hadn't been so nervous and aware, but he did and his heart started pounding. Poseidon could cause the earth itself to shake if he so desired. He could summon up a tidal wave the likes of which had never been seen, could destroy whole cities if they were near enough to the sea...could certainly destroy whole islands.

Something broke the surface of the waves. It was too dark for Carpus to see it clearly, but he knew. Hesiod was caught. His love would die now, and Carpus realized with shaking clarity that if Hesiod lived no longer, he didn't want to live either.

Barely realizing what he was doing, he stood and flung himself into the churning waves. The water was warm still from the heat of the day, but Carpus knew it would not stay so. The farther from shore, the colder it would get until his arms and legs grew numb and his chest ached. Numb enough to stop moving. Numb enough to let go and pray the gods would at least be merciful enough to let him see Hesiod in the afterlife.

His eyes stung as he swam farther, his powerful arms and legs slicing through the water. His breath grew short, but he refused to allow himself to surface.

The voice crashed through his body, somehow turning the water into a weapon. Poseidon. The sea king must be near, and if he was near, perhaps Hesiod was too. Perhaps Carpus could see him, hold him as they both passed from this life.

Something burned against the base of his throat, but he ignored it. He had something to fight for now, something to work for. He forced his eyes open wider, trying desperately to see through the black water.

His legs kicked faster, fighting hard until he thought his lungs would explode. The burning at the base of his throat was like an open flame. When he glanced down, he saw something so surprising that he forgot he was underwater and took a great gulp of it into his lungs.

The aquamarine. The gem glowed, filling the space around him with fiery blue light. He could see his own body moving, could see the space around him, and realized two things at once.

First was that he was breathing water, filling his lungs with it but not choking. And the second was that he was face to face with Grenich, Hesiod's mother.

He jerked back, trying not to scream. That would be disrespectful, and even if he hadn't wanted her aid, he would not have wanted to be so to his love's mother.

Grenich reached for him with her hair, long black tendrils curling around him. Carpus forced himself to stay calm, to bow to her as best he could.

She stared at him for a long moment, her eight black eyes shining in the pale blue light. Carpus didn't know which eyes to look into, so he cast his down, looking at his feet. He felt as if she were examining him, looking into his spirit.

Abruptly she let go. Carpus dared to look at her, but she was not looking at him. She turned to her right, pointing her hair in that direction, and Carpus understood. That's where Hesiod was.

He held his hand to his mouth and bowed again, thanking her. She nodded. Her hair wrapped around his torso, squeezing tight, and Carpus braced himself as she used it to fling him through the sea.

He flew like a bird, like a spear when thrown at a fish. The water around him blurred into a streak of blue. The gem still burned at his throat and he still breathed. A miracle.

Finally he saw Hesiod. His chest ached. His love was mangled, bloody, his body barely moving as he floated face-up just below the surface.

Before him swam Poseidon, stronger and bigger than Carpus had ever dreamed. For a moment he forgot to move, forgot to breathe, forgot everything in his awe. Never had he seen such a man.

Except...he had. Hesiod looked just like his father, save his dark hair and eyes. Their strong, manly bodies were so similar as to be twins of each other, their features just as alike.

Poseidon raised his trident, ready to deal his son a killing blow.

Carpus screamed. "No!"

He swam as fast as he could, his arms outstretched. Behind him he felt a rush of water, a huge wave, pushing him faster.

Hesiod turned toward his voice. His face was broken, mangled. His eyes were so swollen they barely opened, but his expression changed when he saw Carpus there.

"Hesiod!"

Carpus reached deep within himself, reached with every bit of strength he had and the force of will that had commanded his fleets, and closed his arms around his love's chest.

"Carpus!" Hesiod's voice was so weak! How had he survived? Would he survive yet?

The trident flew at them, bubbles rising from its gold shaft. Carpus closed his eyes. This blow was not meant for Hesiod. Poseidon's face had changed from mere anger to furious rage and he'd changed the direction of his blow, aiming straight for Carpus.

But no blow fell.

Poseidon's anger echoed through the ocean, reverberated in Carpus' chest. He opened his eyes and saw Poseidon try again, with more force, the muscles in his enormous arms turning to cords as he flung the trident forward...

Only to have it glance off the bright blue aura surrounding Carpus and Hesiod.

The sea king's face contorted, his body growing larger, turning into the beast Carpus had seen all those days ago. The thing that had attacked his ship and killed so many of his men.

Hesiod's arms closed around Carpus' chest, holding him closer. As carefully and quickly as he could, Carpus began swimming away, praying the aquamarine's power would not fade until they were back on land. He held his love as tightly as he dared, mindful of Hesiod's injuries. He could not imagine the pain his love must be feeling, both the agony of his wounds and the knowledge that there was no forgiveness to be found beneath the sea. Had he been able to see his mother, to beg a boon from her? Or had this whole deadly journey been for naught and Hesiod was still chained to the ocean?

The ocean, and the ocean God who would kill him if he dared enter it again?

Carpus' feet touched the sandy bottom. His lungs started to burn. The water in them suddenly felt unnatural, choking, deadly. He couldn't breathe. He had to get it out...but he had to get Hesiod safely out of the water first.

He turned back and saw Grenich, her hair flying wildly around her, taking her place between himself and Poseidon. Guarding Hesiod and him from the sea king's anger. Blocking them from his sight.

But what good would it do? Poseidon could raise the oceans around them, around their little island and crush the life out of them both. The aquamarine had saved them, had somehow given Carpus the ability to breath and deflected Poseidon's blows, but for how long would that power hold?

He had no time to stop and think, to worry about it. His lungs burned, the water choked him. His legs were giving out and Hesiod had become a dead weight in his arms.

With his last bit of strength he flung himself forward, pulling them both from the salty water and onto the warm sand. His body rebelled; the water came up from his

stomach and lungs, pouring from him in a series of great choking lurches so agonizing he felt certain death could not be far away.

At least he'd found Hesiod. At least if they were to die now, they would be together.

Cold fingers closed around his arm. Hesiod. Carpus turned to look at him, at his weakened love. His handsome face was swollen and bruised, his body a wreck, but he was still beautiful in Carpus' eyes.

"Carpus...you came for me."

"I will...I will always come for you." Carpus managed to shift himself across the sand, to wrap leaden arms around Hesiod and lay his head on his love's heaving chest. "I will never be parted from you and if we must leave this life to be together...so be it."

"So be it." Hesiod's chest shook as he tried to draw breath. Carpus felt the tail disappear and his love's legs separate. "I love you, Carpus. In this life and the next. For eternity."

"And I you, Hesiod." Carpus blinked tears away, discovering with no surprise that his eyes did not want to stay open. "For eternity."

They lay on the beach together and waited for death.

Chapter Six

When Carpus awoke, the sun was shining, reflecting so brightly off the white sand that it was impossible to see. He squinted into the light, struggling to focus his burning eyes. Dear gods, but it was the most brilliant sunrise he had ever seen. It made him wonder if perhaps he and Hesiod were no longer in the mortal realm, if perhaps they had passed into the golden fields of the underworld. Hesiod would surely know. Being half god he had –

“Hesiod?” Carpus reached out to feel the sand beside him, growing frantic as nothing but sand met his questing fingers. “Hesiod!” He shouted his love’s name, but still no answer came.

No! He couldn’t have journeyed to Hades’ realm alone, not when he and Hesiod had spoken their intention to remain together in life or in death just before they succumbed to exhaustion. Heedless of the stinging sensation in his eyes, Carpus stumbled to his feet. Blind or not, he would search for Hesiod and he *would* find him, no matter how long he had to wander these strange white sands.

“Carpus! Wait, don’t take another step!” The urgency in Hesiod’s voice made Carpus halt immediately.

Besides, what need was there to search if Hesiod had found him? He was alive! Or...he was also dead. Either way, they were going to be together and that was all that mattered.

“Take my hand. Here.” Carpus eagerly closed his fingers around Hesiod’s hand, even that small contact enough to make his heart race. “Now, come this way. Let’s get the last of the spell off you.”

Hesiod’s hands moved to Carpus’ eyes, brushing with a firm pressure that gradually banished the white haze from his vision. Slowly, his love’s face came into

view, as perfect and handsome as always. The sight of Hesiod's features, no longer marred by the abuse his father had dealt him, made Carpus certain they were in the afterlife. Such serious injuries could not have healed so quickly in the mortal world.

"We are dead then?" Carpus asked, with only the slightest hint of sadness in his voice. He would miss his family and wished he'd had the chance to say goodbye, but at least he and his love were together.

"No, but you would have been if you'd taken another step." Hesiod pointed behind him and Carpus turned to see steep limestone cliffs not three paces away. One more step and he would have plummeted to his death on the sharp stones below.

"Gods." Carpus sucked in a shaking breath as he realized how near he'd come to such a brutal end.

"It is not the work of the gods, but of a witch." Hesiod pulled Carpus close, holding him in the strong circle of his arms. "Mother's spells are intended to be hazardous to mortals. Traces of the enchantment cauld remain on the face after the spell is done. Many a human has wandered to their doom in that blindness, ensuring Greenwich need not keep her promises to them should they succeed in whatever challenge she put forth. Even when she seeks to do good, the side effects are apparently the same."

"This is the sea witch's work, then?" Carpus traced a light hand over Hesiod's newly healed face.

"Yes, as are these." Hesiod gestured to the fine tunics they were each wearing. Carpus' was a bright sky blue with darker midnight decorations and Hesiod's a deep green that brought out the green and gold flecks in his eyes.

"Your eyes! They are...transformed," Carpus said, unable to believe he hadn't noticed the difference right away. Hesiod's black eyes were gone, as was his starkly white skin. Now his flesh bore a slightly olive tone, like the finest golden oil.

"Indeed, they are. As is the rest of me." Hesiod smiled, delight dancing in his new eyes. "Greenwich searched your heart and the love she saw there softened hers."

Said heart leapt with hope. "Then you are no longer bound to the sea?"

"I am not. Grenich granted me mortality and each of us safe passage from Poseidon's kingdom." Hesiod turned to look at the land around them. "I know not where she sent us, but from the warm feel of the air, I would say we are some distance south of our —"

"Phalerum. We are near Phalerum," Carpus said, unable to believe he hadn't recognized the cliffs right away. "We are only a half day's journey from my grandfather's country estate. If we set off now, we can be home by noon meal."

Hesiod's smile faded. "But shouldn't we stay here for a time until you can teach me what I need to know? I am a stranger in this world. I do not understand the ways and customs of mortals."

"I'm not sure the Democritus clan understands them either." Carpus laughed. "My family has always behaved very differently from the average Athenian citizens, both before and after we were forced to flee the city. Our women and men dine together and our slaves are treated like family. My eldest sister has remained unmarried, my second sister chose her own husband and my youngest sister studies philosophy with my brothers. My grandfather can see the future and I have, at times, found the beginnings of the same skill within myself. We are oddities, each and every one."

"Still, won't there be questions we must be prepared to answer? Who I am, where I come from, how we happened to —"

"We will tell them the truth and they will aid us in creating a story to satisfy other curious minds," Carpus said, more grateful for his unique family than he had ever been before.

In the past, he had been loath to bring friends or lovers to his house for fear that they would harshly judge his sisters for their outspokenness or his grandfather for allowing the girls such freedom after Carpus' mother and father passed away. Now he knew those same free-thinking, open-minded qualities would allow Hesiod to be embraced into the bosom of his clan, no matter what he was now or had been before.

"Come," Carpus said, twining his fingers through Hesiod's. "Let us begin our journey. There will be much celebrating to be done once my family realizes I have survived."

"And you are eager to be home," Hesiod said with a nod.

"Not as eager as I am to be inside you once more," Carpus said, his cock thickening at the very thought. "The sooner my family's celebration has concluded, the sooner we may begin a more private celebration of our own."

Hesiod's new eyes flashed with unmistakable heat. "Now that, my love, is enough to speed my footsteps."

* * * * *

"We insist you and Carpus take our quarters," Hippolita said, guiding Hesiod toward the door much later that night, after many hours of feasting and drinking wine finer than any Hesiod had ever tasted. "Akakios and I will sleep in my old room in the great house and be quite comfortable."

"Indeed. You both need your rest after your adventures." Akakios, Hippolita's husband agreed. "And neither Hippolita nor I will mind being awakened early in the morning by the younger ones. We do naught but sleep in our bed of late since the child has begun to kick so fiercely."

"Akakios!" Hippolita's blue eyes, so similar to Carpus', flashed with amusement. "Mind your tongue. You're supposed to be setting a good example so that Hesiod may better learn the way a Greek man should behave. You shouldn't ever discuss your wife's pregnancy with other men or anyone, for that—"

"I doubt it will be an issue, dearest, as Carpus is not likely to conceive anytime soon." Akakios laughed and easily dodged the slap his wife aimed at his shoulder. "Good evening, lads, and welcome home."

Akakios turned and strode down the hall, his animated wife chattering at his side. Hesiod watched them go with a smile. Every member of the Democritus clan had

welcomed him heartily—from Carpus' merry-tempered grandfather to each of his five siblings—but Akakios and Hippolita had quickly become favorites. Hesiod supposed the sentiment went both ways as the young couple had eagerly offered up their smaller house behind the main Democritus stronghold for Hesiod and Carpus' use.

And use it they would, though not for a sound night's sleep. Not yet anyway...

"I am of the same mind, my love," Carpus said, a wicked smile on his face. "I'll race you to the bedroom. Back left corner of my sister's house."

Then they were off, dashing through the darkened courtyard, laughing like children. Never in his life could Hesiod remember feeling so safe and content, so excited for the future or so very loved. Carpus' family had opened their hearts and minds to him, just as he'd said they would. After only half a day, Hesiod felt he was one of them, another long-lost brother welcomed home.

"Mortal legs aren't quite as swift, are they?" Carpus beat him to the door of the smaller home, but Hesiod pulled ahead in the entryway, surging forward, pushing his new legs until they burned. He might no longer have supernatural strength, but he was still faster than most anything on two legs.

"Ha! Your mortal tongue spoke too soon," Hesiod panted, laughing as he fell upon the bed seconds before Carpus. "Now you must pay the price for failure."

"And what price is that?" Carpus asked, also breathing hard and fast.

That breath left him in a gasp when Hesiod's powerful arms reached for him and pulled him close. Carpus' mouth was already open, eager, when Hesiod pressed his lips to it, his tongue sliding in. It was like the first drink of cool water after a day spent working outside. Passion filled Carpus' body just as that water would, made him whole.

His family had been only too happy to greet Hesiod. Having a male lover was certainly nothing they would frown upon. But still...they had not been alone together all day. Had never been together in a soft bed, under a real roof, well fed and comfortable.

Carpus couldn't wait.

He wrapped his arms around Hesiod's shoulders, glorying in the feel of his love's powerful muscles beneath his palms. Their chests, their stomach and thighs fit together as if the gods had fashioned them to be so.

Which Carpus guessed they had.

"The price," Hesiod murmured between long, hot kisses, "is to get yourself onto that bed, now. Get those robes off. I want you naked and ready for me."

"I'm always ready for you." Carpus lowered his head, kissing Hesiod's neck, sliding the tip of his tongue up the vein to Hesiod's earlobe, then biting it gently. His hands tangled in Hesiod's dark hair. "Always."

"Prove it."

Carpus pulled away and rolled onto the mattress, aware of Hesiod's eyes on him. He tugged the robe off his head, glanced back.

Hesiod was nude. Faint light from the candles made his newly tawny skin glow, outlined sharply the firm, strong muscles of his abdomen and chest. It danced over his strong, thick thighs and the even stronger, thicker appendage jutting up between them. Carpus' heart pounded even harder. He reached down, palming his own erection, letting his love see how excited he was.

What happened next was a blur. One minute Hesiod stood by the door, so beautiful Carpus' eyes hurt. The next he was on the bed, his skin warm and smooth, his hand taking Carpus' away so he could hold Carpus' cock himself.

Carpus moaned. His head fell back. He raised his arms, wanting to hold on to Hesiod's shoulders, but dropped them instead. Letting his cock be the only place where their skin touched. His eyes fell shut and he floated, lost in sensation.

A gentle hand on his shoulder urged him down until he was stretched across the bed on his back. His eyes opened on one of the most beautiful sights he'd ever seen.

Hesiod knelt above him, his cock hovering only a short distance above Carpus' mouth. Carpus reached up, craned his neck, only managing to reach it with the very tip of his tongue. It was enough. He stroked the thick vein running along the bottom and Hesiod's groaning sigh echoed in his ears.

"Come to me, my love," Carpus whispered. His hoarse voice echoed in the room. "Let me taste you."

Hesiod obliged, moving as smoothly as if he'd still been a creature of water. His cock slipped into Carpus' mouth, thick and delicious, flavored with the essence of Hesiod himself. Carpus felt he could live on nothing else for the rest of his life.

He sucked and stroked, moving his head, reached up to urge Hesiod to thrust into his mouth. Hesiod's hand found Carpus' cock and stroked in time until Carpus' hips started rising from the bed, jerking out their own impatient rhythm.

Hesiod pulled away. "I want to be inside you everywhere."

Carpus smiled. "Then do not wait."

By the bed stood a pot of olive oil, golden and smooth in the dim light as Hesiod poured it onto his fingers. Carpus closed his eyes, unable to hide his smile as Hesiod anointed Carpus' tight hole with it. He opened them again to watch his love coat himself with the oil, smoothing it over his thick cock, making it gleam. It was even more beautiful than it had been before.

Carpus started to rise, but Hesiod held him down with one slick palm on his chest. "Stay as you are."

Carpus let Hesiod guide him, scooting him up the bed. Hesiod's finger dove back between Carpus' legs, playing with his sac, playing with the puckered flesh of his entrance, rubbing him until Carpus had to grit his teeth to keep from begging. First one finger, then another slipped into him, probing gently, making him ready for the stronger, more perfect invasion of Hesiod's thick erection.

Finally Carpus' knees were pushed back, his heels braced on the bed. Hesiod knelt between his legs and replaced his fingers with the head of his cock.

Carpus groaned as it slipped into him, stretching him. Bliss shot through his entire body. He opened his eyes, able to look into the face of the man he loved, amazed and finally unafraid of the deep intimacy of eye contact while their bodies were joined.

Hesiod pulled back, slid forward. His arms trembled on either side of Carpus' chest. He dipped his head for a kiss, probing Carpus' mouth with his smooth, sweet tongue.

Carpus' hips started moving on their own, urging Hesiod deeper. Pleasure burned and twisted through his body, up his arms, pooling in his pelvis. He felt dizzy with it, drunk with love and need and the deep satisfaction of being joined with Hesiod. As their kiss deepened, Carpus' hand slid down his stomach, finding the thick stalk of his own erection. He stroked it, tugged it gently, played his fingers over the tip.

"Yes, love...let me see you... Let me watch you. I want to watch your face when you come. I want to watch your seed spill from your body."

Carpus sped his movements, stroking in earnest. Inside him, Hesiod's cock moved faster, seemed to swell, exploring every bit of Carpus' tight channel. The combination of penetration and friction was all too swiftly becoming too much for his body to bear, too much sweet pleasure to be contained within his mortal flesh.

Mortal. The word called to mind everything Hesiod had sacrificed to be here with him tonight, to be bedding him in the candlelight. That realization, combined with the mixture of love and lust burning in Hesiod's eyes, proved to be his undoing.

"Gods, yes! Come with me. Come with me, my love." Carpus cried out as his cock jetted thick, hot streams through his fingers and onto his quivering stomach.

Hesiod cried out and shoved his hips forward one last time before his face twisted with passion and he too found release. Carpus reached for the other man even before Hesiod's member had ceased pulsing within him, needing to have Hesiod in his arms again.

"Come, tell me of your first time in bed as a mortal," Carpus said, hugging him near.

Hesiod collapsed on top of him with a smile and a sigh, turning to press a soft kiss to Carpus' cheek. "Do not tell the rest of the gods, but sex as mortal man...is even better than when the blood of the immortals runs through your veins." Hesiod paused, bending his elbows on either side of Carpus' head so that he could stare down into the other man's face. "Or perhaps it is simply that I love you even more now than I did a day ago."

Carpus didn't know whether to smile or weep with joy at the great treasure he had brought home with him from war. Instead of either, he pulled Hesiod down for another kiss, and another and another. Soon they were well on their way to seeing how quickly their mortal bodies could recover in order to celebrate again a love Carpus knew was as immortal as any god, as the sea itself, as the waves that had carried him to his love.

About the Author

A.D. Christopher came back to his love of writing after ten years as a florist and wedding planner. A love of romance, combined with a passion for...passion inspired him to pen tales of strong, powerful men and the alpha males who love them. A.D. is lucky to have many gay friends as well as straight friends who know how to act gay in public.

He welcomes mail from readers and is thrilled to be writing for Ellora's Cave.

A.D. welcomes comments from readers. You can find his website and email address on his author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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