

A photograph of a man diving underwater. He is in a streamlined position, with his arms extended forward and his head tucked down. The water is a deep blue, and there are bubbles and ripples around his head and arms. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of his body.

Claire Davis  
Al Stewart

IMPACT  
RIPPLES

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# Love is an Open Road

*An M/M Romance series*

## IMPACT RIPPLES

**By Claire Davis and Al Stewart**

### Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love is an Open Road* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

### What Is Love is an Open Road?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love is an Open Road*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

### Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

Each year, a dedicated group of Volunteers from the M/M Romance Group work hard behind the scenes to bring these stories to you. Our Editors, Formatters, Proofreaders, and those working on Quality Assurance, spend many long hours over a course of several months so that each Event is a success. As

each and every author also gives freely of their time and talent, it was decided that all edits suggested may be accepted or rejected by the author at any given time. For this reason, some stories will appear to be more tightly edited than others, depending on the choice of the author.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Impact Ripples

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# IMPACT RIPPLES

By Claire Davis and Al Stewart

## Photo Description

The photograph looks like an image of a desert, with sand dunes and mounds. However, a closer inspection may reveal that the image is in fact made up of naked bodies.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*Where the hell am I? I had a drink at the lounge bar, with the cute guy I met at the check in, we chatted for a while, I went to the toilet and... what, where, who? Who are these people? I am surrounded by naked bodies... well, I am naked! They are all asleep, mhm, some are stirring... And the heat, it is so hot in here, not humid but very hot. Some sort of wooden roof protects us from the sun but I can feel the breeze, warm breeze and the smell of the sea... I cannot move, why can I not move? Just my eyes can move but when I try to turn around I feel like I am stuck on a fakir bed. Drugs... I must have been drugged and kidnapped at the airport... Jake! The guy I had a drink with is just a couple of bodies from me, still sleeping. Maybe he knows what happened. Maybe not, he just opened his eyes and looks as lost as I am.*

*That modelling job for young handsome men with such a great pay even without experience... Shit, it must have been a fraud, how gullible, stupid and naïve of me! The idea of spending two weeks in the Bahamas modelling for a gay magazine with dozens of other hot guys must have sent my neurons too low to be of any use...*

*Sincerely,*

*Laura*

## Story Info

**Genre:** paranormal, contemporary

**Tags:** merman, interspecies sex, bonded, mental breakdown, sea sex, life partners

**Content Warnings:** abduction

**Word Count:** 15,494

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A special thank you to Noah, for the idea, the inspiration, and all the fish.

A massive thank you to Noah Homes for creating such beautiful covers.

*Dedication*

This story is dedicated to Loki



**IMPACT RIPPLES**  
**By Claire Davis and Al Stewart**

## **PART ONE**

## Prologue

David

*Every teatime, he came down here alone. If Mummy knew, he would be in trouble. But David didn't care. He dipped a toe into the rock pool, giggling at the tiny crab that crawled across his foot.*

*"Hello Mr Crab. Where is he then? Have you seen him?" He sang gaily, swinging his feet about, waiting. It was always the same—David would feel strange, and then he appeared—the fish boy. He couldn't talk, but David knew what he was thinking. He told Mummy, but she just smiled.*

*David had a book. 'The Little Fish Boy'. Even though he was only six years old, he read and learned every word until he could sing it to Mummy and his friend.*

*"The little fish boy from afar,  
To hear his thoughts  
You must bear the scar  
Then you can a merman be  
And live forever in the sea"*

*He so wanted to hear the fish boy, but he didn't have a scar. He wasn't sure he wanted to be a merman though, because he couldn't swim yet.*

*No sun tonight—just the wind and the cold, pushing the water up the path. If he didn't hurry, David would have no way back home. "Come on," he shouted crossly, standing up and gazing anxiously into the depths. "I see you!" He laughed, pointing at the long tail and streaming hair gliding along towards him.*

*The fish boy popped up, and David was so pleased to see him. "I was worried about you. It's choppy and cold out there tonight. Do you want my jumper?" But the fish boy shook his head, and held out his hand.*

*"Ooh, a treasure. What is it, what is it?" David shouted, jumping up and down in his excitement. Last week the fish boy brought him a round cold ball that Daddy said was a pearl.*

*David held his arm down to see what his friend had brought him, and then grabbed the fish boy's hand. "Shake hands, silly." He giggled, pumping the*

*cold hand up and down. It happened then. Something exploded in David's head. Red, blue, wave. Crash! Crash! He could hear the fish boy, see his thoughts and his pictures of under the sea. Just like the poem!*

*The fish boy was sad, all sad and lonely. His mummy and daddy were dead and David was his only friend. Gul, his name was Gul.*

*David began to cry; loud wails that made their way back up the path to his house, and Mummy.*

*"David! What are you doing down there? David! Get away from the sea. The tide is too high." Mummy appeared on the path, and the fish boy panicked and shot beneath the waves to hide. "Bye-bye, see you tomorrow," David called, knowing that his friend could hear him.*

*All night, David felt weird. He couldn't eat his tea. He threw up. He didn't want Mummy or teddy and he didn't want a book. He tried to tell them. "He's stuck. Please let me help him?" he begged, but they just made him take nasty medicine and felt his head. But he had to help him.*

*The minute they left his bedroom, he climbed out the window, pushing past the wind, down to the sea. It was really high tide now, drenching David, trying to pull him out into the waves. "Get back, you sea. I need to help him!" He shouted angrily at the waves.*

*He slipped and tripped, but somehow got to the rock pool, now completely submerged. "I'm coming to save you," he shouted, jumping straight in, even though he knew he would get his pyjamas wet and Mummy would be cross.*

*So cold—he wanted to just go and leave the fish boy. David knew if he did, his friend would die, because he was the last one and no one else loved him. He held his breath as long as he could and kicked to the bottom. Somehow he knew where to hold on, and pull. The fish boy had his pretty tail stuck under a rock, but David pulled with all his might, and then they were free, and the promise was sealed forever.*

*David was pulled out by Daddy, who was shouting and shaking. He didn't want to hear about the fish boy or being a merman.*

*By the time David was better, the house by the sea was up for sale and the weirdness in his head was all gone. He tried to tell them again and again that the fish boy was all alone and needed him, but no one listened.*

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter One

David Summers read the bank statement with disinterest. It appeared he was five million dollars better off this week than he had been last week. The profits had increased every day since he was about twenty years old, sure as the changing seasons. They were impressive, certainly, but no longer of any consequence.

The shrill shriek of the telephone cut through his thoughts, startling him. “What? Fuck off and deal with it yourself!” he shouted, slamming down the phone. Other people and the world were mere distractions, flickering into his vision like annoying specks of dust. Leave him alone.

It had taken two years to build his isolated glass palace, so near to his childhood home. He had ordered the construction, guided by some invisible force that wanted him away from people and civilisation. Now he was free from them all on his uninhabited island. His finger hovered. A single click and the phones would switch off forever.

He was thirsty again, so very thirsty—as if his throat was spread with sand and scorched by the sun. Burnt, dried out. Ash, ash, ash.

It did not matter how much water he drank, even the most expensive drops of crystalline mountain spring water left him gasping for more. Nothing could rehydrate his arid existence or his parched body. Every night as he undressed, he noted the slabs of dry skin falling from his body like brittle china.

“So hot,” he murmured, getting up to check the air conditioning yet again, sure that it must be faulty. He was always hot, thirsty, and restless, unable to concentrate on anything anymore. This place had brought him solitude, but not peace. “What the fuck is wrong with me? I must see a doctor.” He sighed, wandering through his transparent palace until he stood in front of the enormous glass panes, looking out thoughtfully.

Sand and more sand. It stretched out, endless carpets of pale beauty. There was no way to get to his barren home except by helicopter, or boat. He was used to his surroundings, but still he could not accept how strikingly beautiful and raw the view was. It unsettled him deeply. But then there was also the ocean, triggering a strange calm deep inside, even though he was unable to swim and terrified of drowning. It engulfed him. He was embroiled, confused, and increasingly losing touch with reality.

Leaving behind, and becoming. Ah, destiny.

He stood up and slowly undressed. Just lately, the feel of clothing on his skin was like abrasive thorns. He fought against scratching, because his skin would break out into sores and cuts, as if David was possessed by something trapped deep inside. Was something trying very hard to get out? He had been aware of it all his life—a tugging at the edge of this consciousness. But since he built this house, the tug turned into a pull, and now an unstoppable magnetic force.

He relaxed the instant he flung away the last garment, bringing him some relief. “That’s it. No more clothes,” he declared, laughing as a sense of joy and lust speared him, his cock bobbing up in front.

The something was pleased at his decision. It wanted him naked. He wanted David naked.

“What? Him?” he whispered, looking around him for... he did not know. “What is it? Where are you?” But he heard only the water chasing up the beach, steady as his heart.

David did not believe in ghosts or spirits, but he felt the presence just the same, and it was more real to him now than the statistics and figures on his laptop. With each day that passed, it grew stronger. When he first moved into his glass house, it had unsettled him, making him question his own sanity. A million questions had flooded his mind: was he lonely? Was he mentally unwell? Was he being poisoned?

But now, he no longer questioned or sought logical explanations. What he sought was to move closer to the presence, to find it and embrace it. God help him, but every particle of his body sought release, not from the presence, but in joining with it. To be together with him at last, and forever.

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## Chapter Two

His cock was throbbing again, but he was no longer able to masturbate, his body refusing to co-operate despite him being deeply aroused every minute of the day.

He hurried now, down the spiral steps and out onto the beach. Each step jarred his body, as if his legs no longer knew how to walk.

The sands moved as he rushed down to the sea, shifting under his feet like gentle teasing caresses, softly urging him on towards the waves. Pinpricks of fear made him pause. Too deep, not too deep.

Water. Over his head. Trapped.

“Please, I can’t,” he whispered, feeling the presence urging him forward into the deep blue. The ache to obey was more powerful than his fear—propelling him slowly forward into deeper waters until he knew he had to stop—to wait until the presence was ready for him.

He spread his legs wide and raised his arms to the sky, stretching, reaching, arching his neck back and pushing his chest forward. His stiff muscles relaxed the instant the saltwater licked at his tender thighs and balls. A hint of a breeze crept over his limbs like sensual tongues, lapping at his nipples and cock. He rocked gently, sighing with pleasure.

“I’m here for you,” he breathed. “See me? Find me.”

Strong undercurrents shifted his legs further apart, encouraging him to enjoy the cool sensations tantalising his balls and hole. David had never been fucked, but now he ached for it. He had had many lovers over the years, taken whatever men he wanted, enjoyed them, and used them, before discarding them all like toys. He had never loved, or been loved, and that was how the presence wanted it.

But now, he wanted the sea to fuck him, to roll him in the waves, to use him, own him, and to love him.

He understood that it was time to move forward, slowly.

Water... over his head... trapped.

Soothing murmurs poured across his brain. He crossed his arms above his head, and moved into the caressing waters. Tiny pricks of excitement began to

nip at his thighs, forcing his legs apart once more. He moaned as the whirlpool circled his hole, making him rock and sway.

Finally, he knew to stop or he would lose his footing. "I can't," he shouted, heart racing.

Strong forces calmed him, wrapping him in invisible arms that soothed and promised. Safe, he would be safe.

The water was chest high now and David was panting, gasping as he thrust into the cold grip of the sea. "Please," he whined, bringing his hands down to his nipples, scratching and twisting, desperate to find release.

He somehow pushed his fear away, and something firm slid around his cock, rewarding him. He lost control, bucking and pushing into the cool grip that held him so firmly. It took control, gave him what he needed. His butt cheeks were forced apart and something small but delicious teased his hole. If he didn't know better, he would think it was a tongue slipping in, probing his hole... fingers now, stretching him until he gaped. He felt the cool force of water pulsing against his sweet spot.

He abandoned any remnants of pride as he spasmed and shrieked into the sea's depths, wanting the ocean to fuck him, fill him and force away the years of emptiness and waste that had been his life. "Make me yours," he begged, bucking his hips furiously, giving himself. Grunts and moans joined with the sounds of the sea as David howled his climax into the waves.

As the orgasm pushed him into unconsciousness, he slipped down feeling the arms of the sea hold him up, and carry him to the beach.

David dreamed that he was loved, and known. That he had a home and his empty life had not been in vain after all.

Strong arms waited for the tide to come in, and then gently placed him on the beach. Hands traced the outline of his face, stroking his cheeks so gently, so lovingly.

As if he mattered, as if he was important.

And finally, just as he struggled back to consciousness, cool lips met his, a promise of ownership, and forever.

"Soon," he heard in the breeze.

By the time David opened his eyes, he was itching all over with a craving to drink gallons and gallons of salty water. The sea was once again receding from



his house and he was alone. “Come back,” he croaked imploringly, holding out an arm to the sea—his lover who abandoned him every morning.

Just once, he saw something that made him stare and freeze. A flip, like a tail, far out to sea, but then he blinked, and it was gone.

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## Chapter Three

David roamed his glass house like a tiger in heat. Up and down, back and forth—looking. Always looking—his naked body gleaming in the sunshine, hot with fever. Strange pads began to erupt on his legs and buttocks, almost like scales, painful except when in the sea.

There, always there. A whisper at the edge of his mind—not loud enough to hear but substantial enough to offer hope. When David was a child, his baffled parents told him he had an imaginary friend. At first they smiled proudly as he laid another place at the kitchen table, nudging each other as he chatted away to nobody. But over time their amusement turned to confusion, then hostility. They sent him to therapists and doctors before David learned to keep his mouth shut. Eventually, he realised there were no answers that made sense—he was connected to something with no physical presence that nevertheless guided, even controlled him.

David felt the presence, but what he missed were the arms to hold him.

In the grip now, he was unable to resist even if he had wanted to. He didn't. He wanted more—more, more. His daily visits into the sea were no longer enough to satisfy him. David needed. He needed with a longing that was as bright as nerve endings and the embers of his heart. He looked down at his scabrous body and laughed. “All over. Going now, all gone.”

He began collecting sand, filling containers and jars. He would spend hours just emptying one into another, mesmerised by the sensual flows and soft buzz as it landed. One day, he ate some, enjoying the salty grit in his mouth. “Salt, must have salt,” he muttered, feverishly, going to look for any fish washed up on the beach then tearing at them with his teeth.

The sea, always the sea. Calling him, demanding. Even as he trembled with fear at the storms that battered his house, he longed to simply jump into those monstrous waves and end it forever. But the presence forbid this.

“Not yet, not yet. Soon.”

One day he ignored the presence, his hunger taking him to the edge of the water despite the storm. He felt the screaming in his head, urging him back to his house but his desire took no heed. He flung himself down on all fours, butt in the air. “Take me now,” he howled into the wind, as the waves began to crash around him, pushing forward up the beach, then backwards into the sea.

It was a fierce storm, water battering past his head, overcoming him so quickly that he began to panic, thrashing and jerking as water filled his inefficient lungs.

A series of flashing images hurtled through his brain, and David prepared to die, drowned by his master and the sea.

Iron arms suddenly gripped him, lifting him above the water. He gasped and choked until he could breathe again. He clutched back at the arms, expecting to feel only water. Solid muscle, smooth skin, warm and real. "Who are you?" he shouted into the waters, trying to see beneath the churning deep blues and sapphire greens of the smashing whirlpools.

It was then that he caught his first glimpse since he was a small child. Even through the chaos of the storm, he saw clearly that it was a man with a sweeping tail instead of legs. He remembered the fish boy, and fainted.

\*\*\*\*

Flickering sunlight brought him back to consciousness amidst calm waters, cradled in strong arms. For a minute he was afraid to open his eyes in case it was not true. "I felt you," he whispered, blinking against the harsh sun; the storm vanished just as rapidly as it had appeared. "All my life, I felt you, but I didn't know what it was. I missed you."

The merman was beautiful. Green eyes shone through the long blond tendrils covering his face and sculpted body. "Can you speak?" David asked, raising his hand to brush away the hair. That touch made David reach inside himself, to where he still had hope.

Sparkling eyes regarded him curiously, seeing what was deep inside. David's heart beat, and beat. This was what he had felt, had wanted, had waited for.

Their lips met, melting into the watery embrace, hearing echoes of a chant. *Now, now, now.*

"I-I looked for you. I knew, but I couldn't find you," he gabbled, as the merman turned him so he was facing away, back towards the house. "What? What are you doing? I don't want to go in any more. I need to be with you."

He felt his cheeks parted as a nudging at his hole began. He was stretched and breached. David could not wait any longer. His whole body screamed to feel this union. "Ooh," he moaned, as the merman held him firmly by the hips, and began rocking. Soon, he was fully inside. David was stretched open,

panting for more. Firm hands slid up his body, over his chest and stomach as he began thrashing against the merman, desperate to be satisfied at last.

He felt his merman kissing his neck, then holding him still as something long and slimy entered David's throat. It was a tendril of the merman's hair, but it wriggled, moving downwards to the back of David's gullet.

David felt himself going under the waters as his airway was finally cut off. The thick hair filled his mouth, seeming to expand as it glided down David's body. He was filled from top to bottom, held still, fucked and possessed.

For an instant, he instinctively sucked at the hair and felt air returning to his lungs. Vivid, invasive, flashes of the merman's thoughts fired through him like fireworks: *breed, breed, become one. No more human—say goodbye.* There would be no return from the icy fingers of the callous sea.

It was all too much, too soon. All those years to get ready, and he was still not ready to give up being a man. Drowning, choking, had to get out.

He panicked, thrashing and trying to push away from the merman, shaking his head frantically to escape the hair blocking his throat.

A force immediately propelled him upwards, away from the water and the merman.

He gasped and spluttered, absolute terror making him swim to shore, back to his half-life. Saltwater stung his eyes as he finally reached shallow ground, shaking and sobbing.

The merman was waiting for him, hands gentling him, helping him to safety. "I don't understand. You tried to drown me?" David gasped, punching at the merman.

Emerald green eyes shone with tears and a face full of infinite sadness. The merman raised one hand to stroke David's cheek softly, shook his head, and was gone.

David watched him swim away into the horizon, shock and confusion rendering him immobile. The merman looked back once, and then disappeared into the depths of the ocean.

David staggered back to his house and wept, lost.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Four

He did not see the merman again for almost six months, and in that time he planned, renovated, and built. The lethargy that had overcome him with his awareness of the presence was replaced by a burning mania. Whether it was the presence directing his thoughts, he did not know.

Gone was his solitude. Enormous tents surrounded his house, where builders disgusted him with the ways of man—laughing, shitting, and destroying the peaceful ripples in the sands.

His glass palace became an eyesore on that scorching landscape. The house that had been built to resemble a single grain of sand now looked like an ugly scab of humanity—concrete mixers, fork lifts and canvas green tents.

David hated them all. Every day he pulled on the hateful clothes and forced himself out there amongst them—now aliens to him. He hated them, but he hated himself more for returning to a world where there was no love for him.

“Progress report,” he ordered, making his foreman jump at David’s voice.

“Of course, sir. As you know, this landscape isn’t easy to work with. The sand shifts, and sometimes it’s almost as if the sea is our enemy. I know it sounds crazy, but...”

“Enough. Progress report.”

“Sir, it will be at least four months before the pool is ready and able to withstand the tides and saltwater.”

“I give you two months. Be ready or there will be no payment.”

Sometimes he heard himself as if from a great distance away, but he felt nothing except the drive to finish. Every beat of his heart had only one purpose—the merman. Somehow he knew that one day, the merman would be back, and then David would be ready.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Five

It was ready. The last helicopter had departed earlier that day, and finally David was alone again, nestled in his empty glass house amongst the shifting sand dunes and cruel sea.

The new pool was fed by the ocean, forming a deep, indestructible river in the beach that led right into his house. The waves came surging up the beach gully like an angry army. It battered against the glass like hostile visitors demanding to be let in. Some of the builders had claimed to hear voices coming from those waves, eerie siren shrieks permeating the hitherto empty silence of the glass fortress.

David had been aware of the shifty sideways looks and the barely concealed contempt in the faces of his builders, but they carried out his orders without question. They were afraid, and he understood that. He managed to hide his changing body from them with garments and hoods, but he was powerless to suppress the odour of fish and salt that emanated from his body. They sensed that he was different, but David cared not. He greedily drank pint after pint of sea water, picking at his scales, and waited for the merman to return. He waited so hard it hurt.

*Come, come to David.*

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## Chapter Six

He waited.

First his feet, then his knees, became sore from prowling around the pool—encircling it like a tiger on heat. Large scabs formed on his itching, raw skin, yet he could not be still. He wanted; he needed. If David could have scratched out his own head, he would have done it. “Where are you? Don’t make me suffer!” he shouted, his words echoing back to him like the lost questions of his life.

But his pool remained empty.

He set himself crazy targets: if he could collect and count a thousand grains of sand, the merman would come. He would come. He would come! His eyes hurt from the magnifying glass, but his pool remained empty.

“I should have gone with him,” he sobbed, biting his own arm in a frenzy.

For every day that passed, David plucked a hair from his arm and mixed it with the sand. He became convinced that once he mixed the right hair-to-sand ratio, his merman would return. Then David would have him forever and the aching wound of his heart could heal.

His libido had vanished that terrible night when his merman tried to drown him, but still David tried to bring it back. He dry pumped into his hand, making his cock sore from hours of mindless jerking off with no completion.

He was slipping, slipping, slipping, like the sand running through his fingers. Whole days ticked by without eating or drinking. Not even the raw fish could nourish him now. He could no longer walk or move because he was too weak.

One night, a hunger stirred, waking him from the glass floor where he was huddled, shivering. “Gul,” he whispered, dragging himself over to the pool controls. A smile cracked his chapped lips as he felt the merman enter the gully, then the pool. With his last strength, David pressed the switch that activated the gates. They clunked into place, and David had him at last. “You heard me,” he whispered, before collapsing.

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## Chapter Seven

He slowly got better—ate fish as they wriggled, drank water, and nursed his various sores and ailments. He could not tolerate going far from the pool but he began to use an exercise bike and treadmill, gradually building up his muscles once more. Gul's presence was as strong as ever, but now it made him desire health. He wanted to be well, and strong because he knew Gul wanted that. Gul had returned to heal him.

Each morning, David would rise and try to communicate with Gul by tapping on the glass, but the merman would float with his face turned away until David had eaten and performed his daily chores. Once he finished, Gul would swim over and meet him face-to-face.

How well David knew that beautiful form by now! They had nothing to do but look. His gaze roamed over the beautiful face and emerald eyes—smiling again now that David was well—down the toned chest and arms to narrow hips that tapered away to the magnificent tail, and the fold where Gul's cock lay.

He wanted to touch so badly. Why had he thought looking through glass would be enough? Sometimes his hand would stretch out as if to stroke Gul, tracing the contours of his body. His hand would wave there like a musical conductor, with Gul leaning up as if he felt the welcome hand of a lover.

One day, David closed his eyes as his hands began their imaginary way over Gul's body—rubbing against the nipples and encircling his waist. Slipping his hand into that fold to take out Gul's long cock and slowly stroke it. Opening his eyes, he saw that Gul lay there, slowly masturbating in time to David's touch, up... down... a twist... faster... faster.

Their eyes locked as David's other hand pretended to cup Gul's enormous balls and gently squeeze. Gul moaned and arched his back, pumping into his own hand as David furiously gripped thin air. They were completely in tune, reunited.

David's tongue slipped out, and so did Gul's. They met glass, but David swore he could feel slippery warmth. "Oh, my darling," he moaned. They kissed through the glass of a million particles of sand, both pushed up against the cruel wall, cocks lined up, leaking and red.

David ached to feel that cock. Those few precious moments when Gul had fucked him, before David began to drown, never left his thoughts. His butt



twitched with the need to be filled. He pulled back in desperation, turned so that his butt was facing Gul, and pushed his hole right against the glass. “Please, please, please!” he howled. “I can wait no longer.”

Gul placed his cock against the glass, and pushed. David waited, but all he could feel was the cold glass and the terrible longing. He sobbed out his desperation, falling flat on his face on the cold glass floor.

When he turned back to Gul, he had swum away, back down to the gates that bordered the sea. He sat with his back to David, his head in his hands.

“Please, help me? Tell me what to do? What do I need to do? I can’t come in there, I just can’t. There would be no way back for me! Are you lonely? Are there others like you? Please?” David begged, but it was as if Gul had given up. David sobbed, then crawled over to the gates, and pressed the release mechanism, feeling his heart break as he watched Gul swim away to sea.

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## Chapter Eight

But David was a resourceful man.

The little fish boy from afar,

To hear his thoughts

You must bear the scar

Then you can a merman be

And live forever in the sea.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **PART TWO**

## Chapter Nine

*Oscar*

Oscar chewed thoughtfully on the candy bar, and stared at his mobile.

“Did you really?” Jake shrieked. Oscar really had. Who wouldn’t? A modelling agency seeking young guy models, no experience required.

“Yeah. I just e-mailed the final document. Probably never hear from them again.” He crossed his fingers, hoping in a way that it was all a scam.

“Jeez, Oscar. Are you sure about this? You didn’t give them any bank documents did you?”

“No, they didn’t ask for anything like that. All they wanted was a picture of me in my tiniest Speedos, and...”

“What? They wanted what?”

Oscar sighed and rolled his eyes. *Here we go.*

“A picture, Jake. It’s modelling, you know—bodies, faces, smiles. Et cetera.”

“Yeah, it’s the et cetera that worries me! What the fuck, Oscar? *Naked* pictures?”

“No, Jake. What did I just say? In my swimming shorts.”

“Close up?”

“Well. Quite close.”

“Right, send me the link. I’m checking them out. An online modelling agency just doesn’t sound legit to me. Don’t they usually send you information through the post? Contracts?”

Oscar swore under his breath. All day he’d been telling himself it would all be fine, but he couldn’t deny there was an uncomfortable nigggle that felt like indigestion, which was in fact fear. What if the model agency was a sex trafficking gang?

But his pride wouldn’t let him admit that to Jake, his online boyfriend. They’d known each other now for about a year. They’d never met, though they chatted on the phone sometimes.

“Jake, it’ll be fine. Stop worrying! I only just sent the e-mail this morning. If I get a reply, we can do some investigating, okay? I do this all the time, remember?” he lied.

“Yeah, all right. Still think you should let your olds know, though. You said you’ve never done a modelling job out of the country.”

“No way I’m telling the parents. Dad’s out playing... golf, and I’m twenty-two, Jake. Old enough to make my own decisions.”

“I know, I know. I’m just looking out for you. There are some dodgy bastards out there. I care about you, that’s all.”

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“You’re down on your targets again, Mr Taylor. Last week you didn’t even get to halfway, and two customers complained that you were rude. What’s our slogan?”

Oscar swallowed and tried to concentrate on each word, so he didn’t stammer. “The customer is our cash, and I am just some trash.”

“Start the slow clap, Mr Taylor. That’s right. You are just a tiny speck of my empire. And if you don’t buck up your ways and make more effort, this time next week you’re gonna be out of a job. Get it, sunshine?”

“Yes, sir. Sorry, sir,” Oscar gabbled, backing out of the office and feeling his cheeks burning up as he bashed into a desk in his hurry to get back to his seat.

He fucking hated this job. Trying to sell people things they didn’t want was bad enough without having to put up with his asshole boss. But jobs were scarce, and Oscar had no family to fall back on. He had no choice but to put up with it.

At least he had Jake.

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## Chapter Ten

Oscar rushed up the last of the five flights of stairs to his flat, hoping to God there were no gangs hanging about in the corners today. It was cold and wet, the rain dribbling through the stairwells creating great puddles, which stank. He really had to move, but realistically, this place was all he could afford.

He reached his door and gratefully bolted it behind him. Home, which meant that he could speak with Jake at last. Somehow, he did not notice the sparse surroundings, or the cold these days. Or not as much as he used to. He kept telling himself it was just the Internet, and Jake was bound to get sick of him one of these days, but still he couldn't stop his heart from beating too quickly every time he saw he had an e-mail.

He couldn't really afford to eat today, but his stomach growled. Hopefully the hot water would appease it, at least for a little while. He undressed and got into bed to keep warm before he allowed himself to check his e-mails, smiling as he saw Jake's name.

It took him a moment to take it in, but there it was. He had an e-mail from the modelling agency. He tapped it impatiently as his mobile rang. Jake. Sometimes it was as if he and Jake had some sort of telepathic connection, often ringing when Oscar had a particularly shit day.

"Jake, hi."

"Hey, O. I thought about you all day long. How was your day?"

"Good, yeah. I got that promotion," Oscar lied, biting his lip, hoping to God that Jake never found out the truth of his sad bloody life.

"Really? You are fucking amazing, Oscar. You know that?"

Oscar looked around the miserable flat. "Jake! I got a reply from the modelling agency."

"No way. What's it say?"

"Hang on, I'm just reading it... thank you for your interest... blah blah... we'd like to... like to... oh my God. Jake!"

"What? Oscar? What, what, what?"

"Fucking hell, this has got to be a hoax. Is this you winding me up, Jake?"

“What? No, ’course not. I’d never do that to you. Come on, read it out.”

Oscar read it slowly, unable to believe it. Of course it was a wind up, and he’d have to say no.

“Dear Mr Taylor, thank you for your photos. We would like to invite you to three weeks’ modelling in the Bahamas, all expenses paid. Your plane tickets will be sent to you next week. You will be paid.” He stopped here, unable to go on. Even though he knew it had to be shit, he still couldn’t read those words without taking a deep breath first.

“You will receive fifty thousand pounds for your time in this project.” Even with the extra breath, his voice wobbled. Fifty thousand pounds would pay off his debts and see him through college. No more debt collectors at his door. He could complete his marine biology course, and get a decent job. He could tell his boss to stick his job up his arse. He could get a new flat, shoes that fitted, and eat every day. He could even... fifty thousand pounds was... he realised that Jake was talking excitedly.

“Fifty thousand pounds? Oh my God, Oscar! Is that what they pay models?”

“What? Uur. Yeah.” Oscar winced. Like he’d know what models got paid.

“I had no idea, Oscar. You must be really well known, and really good, to get this offer.”

“Oh, no. I’m just a regular model, honestly.” Every time he lied to Jake, he felt terrible. He did. He made up excuses every time Jake suggested they finally meet. Jake had stopped asking him why, and Oscar just knew that one day very soon, the e-mails would dry up, then stop. What they had, would not be enough for a gorgeous guy like Jake.

Jake was normal. He had parents, was at college. Jake had prospects and had never seen a flat like this, and Oscar swore that he never would. It was too late now to tell him the pitiful truth—that Oscar had no family, worked in a call centre and lived in a shithole. He had no future and fuck all in the fridge. The lies made him feel sick.

If Oscar took this job, maybe. Just maybe.

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He propped his phone up, set it to a ten-second photo flash, and rushed to get into position. Five nude pictures, that was all. He could do it. Not like anyone would ever know it was him because it wasn’t the face they wanted, after all.

He spread his legs, arms on his head like the instructions said, and waited for the first flash. This was the first part he hadn't told Jake about. Cold sweat started at his forehead as he thought about what he was doing. Taking pictures of his cock and e-mailing them to some unknown modelling agency online. *Low, it was low, Oscar.*

But the money! Ten thousand pounds of lovely crisp bank notes had arrived for him that morning by signed post. For him. According to the e-mail, the money was his even if they didn't like the pictures of his cock.

He got ready for the next pictures and thought about who would be looking at his cock. Maybe some saddo-millionaire? A sex-starved alien? Oscar didn't know, but thinking about someone staring at his pictures began to make him feel aroused. Maybe he shouldn't do this. It might not even be legal.

What he really wanted was a proper relationship with Jake. With arms, hands, kisses and cuddles. Every night he dreamed of waking up together, and that soft, caring voice. For them to eat at the same table, do the washing up, go for walks, be together. Just together.

He resolutely picked up his phone, went to his e-mail account and sent the five pictures.

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"Hey, O. Listen, I really don't think you should do this. This company doesn't add up and money isn't everything."

Oscar looked around at the bare floorboards and thought about his boss calling him a loser.

"No, of course it isn't," he lied.

"You know, there'll be other jobs. You have a really good day job already, Oscar. Don't risk your safety just for some dirty lucre. Y-you mean a lot to me."

Oscar shut his eyes and clutched the phone. Sometimes he kissed his own hand, pretending it was Jake. They couldn't go on like this.

"Jake, please don't worry. I'll be fine. They said there'll be some other guys coming too, so it's not like I'll be alone."

"Yeah, I hope so. Which airport do you meet the others at again?"

"How do you know I'm meeting them at an airport?"



“Just a guess.”

“Oh. Well, it’s a private place. Near Oxford.”

“Oscar?”

“Yeah?”

“I love you.”

Not long now, not long now. Soon they would be together at last.

“I know. Me too. After I get back... let’s-let’s meet up?”

“For real?”

“Yeah. For real.”

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## Chapter Eleven

*Oscar*

Oscar knew that if he drank any more coffee, he would throw up. His stomach was a giddy mix of excitement, fear, and too many fish shape candies. Why the fuck he had eaten the whole pack, he really did not know.

Thankfully, the tiny airport was really quiet—just a few lone stragglers battling away with suitcases and tickets. Another lurch from his stomach. “I have to sit down,” he muttered weakly, looking for seats.

“Excuse me?” A tentative voice disturbed his thoughts. The voice sounded oddly familiar, but Oscar brushed it off. It was a young guy, holding an identical ticket to his own. “Hi. I noticed your ticket. Are you heading for the Bahamas modelling agency too?”

Oscar smiled at him, waving his ticket. “Hi. Yeah, I am. I’m Oscar—pleased to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you too. Thank God I’m not the only one! I was meant to meet some others, but they haven’t turned up. I’m a terrible flyer. Shall we have a drink? I’m John, by the way.”

“Yes, we’ve got time for a drink. You remind me of someone, but I can’t think who.”

They headed for the tiny bar. Oscar hoped he might get to sit next to John on the plane instead of a stranger, or even worse, on his own.

The bartender greeted them very formally, as if they were important guests. “Good morning, sirs, what can I get for you? Your drinks are, of course, courtesy of your host.”

“Eh? What’s that mean?” asked John, scratching his head.

“It means, sir, that your drinks are free. Go ahead, it’s all part of the journey.”

“Free? No way. I’ll have a... uur. Oscar, what are you having?”

Oscar frowned, biting his lip. He hardly ever went into bars or drank because he couldn’t afford it. Truthfully, he didn’t even like the taste of alcohol. He quickly ran through all the cool alcoholic drinks he remembered

guys drinking on TV, but all he could come up with was piña colada. He didn't want John to think he was boring.

“Uum. piña colada?” he asked, hoping it was even an alcoholic drink. The bartender looked at them both, raised his eyebrows, and smiled.

“Well, sirs. Not big drinkers?”

John shook his head at Oscar. “No, afraid not. I don't get much time for drinking.”

“Or me,” said Oscar, his heart soaring. They both looked helplessly at the bartender, who grinned.

“Well. Why don't I bring you a nice bottle of champagne? I think you'll like the taste.”

An hour later, or it might have been longer, they were both drunk, laughing like old friends and staggering off to the flight check in. John was shitfaced, but even through the alcohol, Oscar could see how attractive he was.

Somehow they got through the barrier, though they both had to be 'helped'. Oscar was not sure how they got to their seats, or why they appeared to be the only travellers, but as he sank down giggling he felt happy.

“G'night,” he tried to say, but couldn't quite manage it, so instead he took John's hand, and then everything went dark.

The last thing he heard clearly was John, saying, “Jake, it's Jake.”

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## Chapter Twelve

*Oscar*

For a while, the heat and brightness of the sun prevented Oscar from making any sense of what he saw. Bodies: there were definitely bodies around him, and they were all naked. Inside his head was fog, just murky wisps of memory. Modelling job—airport—Jake. Oh, they got drunk. John.

Someone had been sick and was wailing and moaning, but not making much sense. Oscar tried again to understand it all. There were six of them, all lying naked on a beach under some kind of shelter.

He gingerly tested his hands to see if there was pain. Nothing. He could only move his head, just a little. Logically, he knew that this should scare him shitless, but all he really felt was calm and peaceful.

Drugs, yes, that was it—he must have been drugged.

“Oscar.” He could just about move his head to the right, and there was John, all brown curls and puppy eyes.

“Hey. Where the fuck are we?”

“I dunno, but it doesn’t look good. You do, though.”

A sense of surreal weirdness overcame Oscar as he watched John giggling, then realised that he was laughing too.

“It must be drugs,” he gasped, unable to stop the hysteria from taking hold, before slipping once again into a drowsy and deep sleep.

He was woken by voices muttering nearby.

“You have to look for a scar, just above the cock. Fuck knows why so don’t ask me! What boss wants, he gets. If they don’t have it, take them back to the helicopter and back where they came from. Ensure no harm comes to them, Boss was very clear about that. I’ve only found one with a scar so far, and it’s very faint. I’ll keep him here though, just in case.”

Oscar blinked rapidly, trying to see clearly who was speaking. It was a man dressed in a white coat, like a doctor. He was kneeling over the bodies and examining them.

“What’s going on?” Oscar asked, slurring his words.

The man looked over and came to bend over him. “Hello there, young man. Don’t worry. It’s not as bad as it looks. Your employer has certain... requirements of you. I’m just going to examine you to see if you are suitable for your job.”

Oscar couldn’t move, but he was aware of hands on and around his cock.

“Eh! What you doing?” he shouted, sounding drunk.

“Please, calm down. I assure you, no harm will come to you. I see you have a scar right here. That’s very good. Yes, you’ll fit.”

“Fit? Yes, I fit,” Oscar replied, trying hard to sound coherent but not really succeeding.

“Excellent! That’s the spirit. You are indeed suitable for your job, and will be very richly rewarded.”

“John? Where’s John? I’m not going without him,” Oscar muttered before slipping again into sleep.

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## Chapter Thirteen

*David*

He heard the helicopter carrying the merman descendants, and rushed over to the launch pad to see how many they had found for him. How many would it take? He mustn't eat the sand with these people around, he had to stay calm. David clenched his fists and tried to force his twitching face to remain still.

"How many?" he shouted at the doctor overseeing the stretchers, who jumped and looked at him in alarm.

"Sir, only two with a scar in the place you specified. They both seem healthy and fit. I'll have them taken into the quarters as you ordered."

"Two. So few. I might need more. I don't know yet. Do your job then fuck off. I'll be in touch if I need you again."

The doctor glared at him. "No, sir. I'm not doing this again. If you would just tell me what you want with these boys? I'm not happy doing this, I told you that. Why don't you just let me examine you, sir? You seem agitated. You have some... growths on your legs that are weeping. Please, sir?"

Flurries of anxiety and anger stormed through David. These people must never know about Gul. His legs began to shake uncontrollably, forcing him to sit on the sand. He needed. Tears ran down his face as he shovelled in handfuls of sand, enough to calm him. "Fuck off and go. I've paid you. And keep your mouth shut."

"Sir, please. You're not going to harm them are you? They're so young. Don't eat the sand, sir."

Something in David snapped. "Harm them? Why the fuck would I want to harm them? Nothing. Nothing to me, any of you! Now go, go, go. Just go. Go now. *Go!*"

The doctor and the stretcher carriers ran back to the helicopter, looking back at him with white faces. But they were stupid insignificant humans, and he didn't have long left. Scars, talk to Gul and make him happy.

He watched the helicopter depart with relief, and then pulled himself back into his house with weary arms. His legs trailed along behind him, no use, no use.

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*Oscar*

“Hey, Oscar, wake up. Come on, please wake up?”

Oscar tried hard to surface from the depths of sleep. He blearily looked around him. White walls, smell of bleach, sounds of... the sea? He blinked rapidly, and tried to sit up. Where the fuck was he?

“Hey! There you are, I was starting to get worried. You okay?”

John. His name was John, and then it all came back to him. Bodies, doctors, drugs. Water, green eyes, help, help, help! He had to get out!

“What the fuck? John, where are we? They fucking drugged us.”

“Yeah, I know. I don’t know any more than you, but so far no one has touched us. We seem to be in a kind of hotel. Except the door’s locked. There’s food, though.”

Oscar sat up too fast and looked around him. They were in a pleasant room which looked out over the sea. None of this made any sense. He tentatively tried to walk, managing to get to the door. Locked. His heart began to beat rapidly as he thought back to the airport.

“Jesus. I was so stupid. What are we going to do? Fuck. Our phones?” He realised then that they were dressed in just flimsy shorts. “Christ, John. What are we going to do? We have to alert the police, or run, or something. We have to do something.”

“I’ve been awake for hours. From what I can tell, there’s no one else around and we’re in the middle of a beach somewhere very hot. Doesn’t look much like the bloody Bahamas to me. I don’t think either of us have been harmed. First, let’s eat, and think about what we’re going to do. I’m starving.”

“There’s food? My stomach is rumbling. How do we know they’re not going to poison us?”

“Yeah, next door. We don’t, but why would they? We’re already prisoners. Wait till you see this.” John grinned, leading him through an archway.

There was a table laden with delicious food and drinks.

“Looks like the feast in Jurassic Park. Let’s hope there aren’t any dinosaurs,” Oscar muttered, as they began to eat. “Remember that doctor, examining us? What the fuck was all that about? Oh, God. Jake told me this was too good to be true. I wish I’d listened.”

“Yeah, me too. Oscar, there’s something I have to—”

The door suddenly rattled, making them both jump back together, instinctively holding hands as they slowly moved backwards away from the door.

It was a man. Or at least, he used to be a man. He was middle-aged, his dark hair long, wild and matted. Big clumps of sand stuck to his face and mouth like huge dunes. He looked haunted and ill, walking as if he was in great pain. He was also naked, his skin mottled and covered with lumps and scabs. Oscar stopped himself from staring at the guy’s erect cock as he gripped John’s hand. “Where are we? What’s going on?” he shouted, thinking that no one except Jake would even notice him gone, much less report him missing.

The man indicated the bed shakily, leaning against the wall for support. “Please, sit down, and I’ll explain. You are in no danger whatsoever.” His voice was dry, rough, making Oscar wince.

He considered making a run for it despite his own wobbly legs, but John pulled them both towards the bed.

“Thank you. Firstly, let me apologise. I have no intention of harming either of you. All I want is a few moments of your time.”

“Our time? You bloody drugged us and took our clothes. Where are we? I’m calling the police!” Oscar shouted, aware of his lip trembling.

“Yes, I did. It was unfortunate but necessary. I’ll explain why in a moment. My name is David Summers. I have brought you here to take part in a small... experiment. I repeat, no harm will come to either of you. Our location is a secret and has to remain so. I’ll show you why shortly. It is a matter of great importance. After I show you, if you still want to go, I will call a helicopter immediately. But if you decided to stay, you will each receive ten million dollars.”

The man stared at them both, but there was something about his gaze that suggested his mind was elsewhere. He constantly flitted his head about as if listening to imaginary voices. Oscar’s heart plummeted as he ran through the various possibilities: sex trade, madman, and kidnap.

“Ten million dollars? You must be kidding. I’m not doing anything illegal, and where’s our clothes?” John demanded.

“You won’t need your clothes. There is only me here, and I have no sexual interest in you whatsoever. What I am asking of you is not illegal, but it must remain a secret.”



“Why?” Oscar asked, confusion and the heat making it difficult to remain angry. “Please, just let us go home and we won’t tell anyone what you’ve done. It doesn’t even matter about the money.”

“You’ll see why. Have you eaten and drunk your fill?”

They nodded.

“Oh, I should have said. Please don’t bother trying to make a run for it. We are hundreds of miles from anywhere, desert all round. If you still want to go in five minutes, be my guest. I will call the helicopter and have you taken back to the airport. All I am asking, is you give me five minutes.”

Oscar glanced at John, who shrugged. They silently followed David.

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## Chapter Fourteen

*Oscar*

Terror clutched at his heart. What had he been thinking signing up for this? He grabbed at John gratefully. David slowly led them through a beautiful, but empty, glass house. He seemed unable to walk properly, shuffling along like a crab on its back.

Oscar could not see a single item that could be considered as sentimental, or personal, in the property. It was like something off the TV, unsettling him even more. “You live here?” he asked, tentatively. Maybe if he could get the guy to talk, he would feel sorry for them and let them go?

“Live? Oh, I see. I am the owner, yes.”

Oscar risked a look at John, who was making crazy circles above his head and pointing to David. “Cray cray,” John whispered, squeezing his hand.

The glass house consisted of two floors and a few pristine items of furniture. It seemed un-lived in, as if it waited for the next owner, even though surely no one would be mad enough to live out here.

David took them to a spiral staircase. He slithered down on his bottom, past marble floors, and finally outside to what looked like a conservatory.

“Wow,” Oscar breathed.

The door led to a pool, which ran right back down to the sea. It looked deep, natural. At the end were open heavy steel gates.

“Why does it have glass all round it? Don’t you go in it to swim? Where’s the door in?” Oscar asked, confused. “I don’t know about you, John, but I’m not getting this. What are we meant to be looking at? You’re not going to drown us, are you?”

David looked at them with eyes as grim as death, his wild hair stuck out from his head like a hedgerow. He began rocking gently, reminding Oscar somehow of the ebb and flow of the tides.

“There are only two ways in or out of the pool. The sealed glass door, and through the gates, which are operated by remote control. I opened them four weeks ago, but it has made no difference. Still he is so sad that it kills me.” He paused, his face falling like clouds over a summer’s day. “All my life I waited for him, and now I think he is dying. Can either of you hear him?”

Oscar felt John's hand slip into his as they stared at David, who was so obviously completely crazy. No amount of money would be enough. David turned away from them, kneeling down by the pool, just glass between him and the inky depths.

"He is unhappy," David whispered his voice like heavy lead. "I never wanted him to be unhappy. Maybe I should go away, somewhere he could not find me? He came to me and saved me, but now he is dying. You can make him happy, because you have the scar. I have no scar you see, nothing but salt." He stopped, and seemed to remember Oscar and John's presence. "Soon. Soon you'll see and hear. He always comes when I sit here. My love, my life. My beautiful fish boy."

Oscar whimpered, feeling the sweat dripping down his back and John's hand trembling. As the hairs on the back of his neck stood up, a terrible, croaky singing crackled from David's dry lips.

*"The little fish boy from afar,  
To hear his thoughts  
You must bear the scar  
Then you can a merman be  
And live forever in the sea"*

David's words faded as a cloud passed overhead, casting shadows over the pool. "You see?" David beseeched, breaking into thin laughter. John gripped Oscar's hand so hard it hurt.

"Shit, Oscar. Let's get out of here. Screw the money, I'm fucking scared."

But Oscar had begun to feel strange and weightless. His limbs seemed to be floating. Instead of fear, he felt an essence of *déjà vu*, a half-formed memory lost in the mists of time. "No, it's okay, John. I-I don't know how, but I know it's going to be okay."

"Are you okay, Oscar? You've gone white? What do you mean?"

Oscar was aware of David, pulling him down to the floor with him. He gripped Oscar's arms and stared at him intently. "You feel it? You have the connection?" David shouted, shaking him like a rag doll.

"Get the fuck off him," John shouted, pulling at David's grip.

"The connection?" Oscar tried to speak, but his mouth felt odd, like he had forgotten how to use it. "Have to sit. I need to be near him," he gabbled,

pushing David away and running to the glass. “He’s coming. I hear. Yes, I hear.” He smiled at David, somehow understanding now... he was coming... moving through the water so gracefully... nothing to fear.

“What the fuck? Oscar? What’s going on? He’s given you more drugs? Oscar, I’m scared,” John skidded down beside him, pulling at his arm.

“Please don’t worry. Your friend is perfectly safe. That’s why I brought you here, you see. You were selected because of your scar—proof of a merman heritage. Only those descended from mer-people can use the telepathy.”

“The only fucking scar I have is from a biking accident when I was a kid, you crazy fuck,” John retorted.

“Then that is why you cannot hear him. The doctor wasn’t sure of your scar. Oscar was the only true descendant. I could find no other.”

“Merman? You’re mad. What the fuck’s a merman? Oscar?” John sounded a million miles away, small and frightened.

There was a ripple in the pool, and Oscar’s head began to throb and pound. He was vaguely aware of John holding his shoulder, asking him over and again if he was okay, but it all seemed a long way away, and of no importance.

Of course he had never seen or even heard of a merman, but as Gul emerged from the water, Oscar felt like he had always known him. “Gul, he’s called Gul. He’s here. He’s here,” he kept murmuring, placing his palm flat against the glass as he tried to touch.

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see John pointing, but all Oscar wanted to do, needed to do, was connect with Gul. His hand pulsed and throbbed as the merman placed his own hand upon the glass.

Crashing waves, the smell of the sea. A curious heavy feeling to his limbs, like he was floating. The voices of John and David faded away. His surroundings and everything external to his head became surplus. He had to do this.

There was strong glass between his hand and Gul’s, but still the connection fired through his dormant self, waking him, energising him, bringing life. He gazed back at Gul. He was stunning, resembling man in shape, not colour. The shimmering body was incandescent—radiating heat, light, and also passion and beauty.

His chest and tight stomach were well defined—muscles rippling just under the skin hinting at great strength and agility. The tapered stomach ran

tantalisingly close to his hips but then transformed into the shimmering tail, with just a small slit where his cock lay.

Although Oscar felt no attraction to Gul, still he was aware of his own growing erection, responding to the invisible force that emanated from the merman. A quick glance to David and John revealed that they were also hard, straining. John was kneeling down staring in rapt amazement at Gul, hands inside his shorts slowly jerking off, oblivious to the two other men as he rocked and moaned.

Oscar finally raised his head to stare at those ocean eyes—green, blue, grey, turquoise—and tried so hard to listen, and hear. Words, odd words, sorrow, loss, pain... love. Last chance.

“I can’t quite. He’s trying to speak to me, but I can’t understand him. He’s terribly unhappy though, you were right. He wants something very badly, but I can’t hear him. I don’t know how.”

David pushed Oscar aside and placed his own hand against the glass. “What is it, my love? What? Can’t you tell him? Won’t you speak to him?” he beseeched, tears flowing freely down his face.

Gul pushed himself right up against the glass, and David whined miserably. Their lips met, but the thick pane of glass kept them apart.

Oscar watched as Gul slowly drew back, moving back into the pool as if it pained him, his face hurt and desolate. David slid down the glass as Gul disappeared into the pool, swimming back out to sea with a final lingering look back at Oscar.

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“What the fuck?” John howled.

“Merman, yes, yes,” David muttered. “What did he say? What could you hear? Please, will you help me? I had to keep my location a secret because if the world knew about him, they’d catch him and make his life a misery. I just want him to be happy again. I caught him but now I can’t stand his pain.”

Oscar thought, and tried to articulate the strange communication. “Not words, or even images. It was more like I heard feelings. Heard his feelings. But not clearly enough. I’m not sure why, but maybe it’s too weak in me? I don’t know, but I could only get a sense. He’s miserable, David.”

He tried not to look at John, his erect cock tenting his shorts. Oscar’s own cock was still throbbing. He shook his head, trying to clear the foggy but forceful urge to stroke himself then and there.

“I know he’s sad, I get that from him too. I hear him, but the connection is weak. No scar, you see? I don’t know what he wants me to do? Did he tell you that?”

Oscar slowly shook his head. “No, but isn’t it obvious? He wants you. Why is he locked away like this? Why can’t you just go to him?”

David ran his hands through his hair wearily and turned to look back out to sea. “He tried to drown me.”

“Why would he do that? I didn’t sense any cruelty from him, just misery.”

“I don’t know. The water. It’s so terribly cruel you see. It just takes, and hurts. I. I cannot. Give it all up and feel the icy terrors every day...” David trailed off, absently pulling at his wild hair. There was no doubt that David Summers was not entirely sane. Eventually, David looked up at Oscar and John.

“Will you help me? I don’t understand him. I try, but I can’t hear. I don’t know what else to do. I can’t leave him like this, I just can’t. It eats away at me. If you want, I will call the helicopter now and you can both go home, but I am begging Oscar to stay. Of course, you can have your phones and possessions back now. It’s up to you what you tell the world, but don’t let them harm him. Salt, you see. I need the salt.” He stopped abruptly, looking completely exhausted. Drool slid down his face, dripping on the glass floor.

Oscar nodded. “I don’t understand any of this, but of course I’ll help you, no question. I’m not sure how I can help, but maybe the more I try to understand him, the easier it will get? If I can just find out why he tried to drown you. How come I can hear him and you two can’t?”

John was shaking his head at him in disbelief. “I’m not staying here. Are you both crazy? We need to call the authorities about this. Maybe they can help him. You can’t possibly keep something like this to yourself. He’s like a fossil. They might be able to experiment on him and bring back his race. There must be others. A fucking merman, Oscar!”

“No. No.” Oscar shook his head, vehemently. “David’s right, John. This has to remain a secret. I know it’s all crazy, and maybe we’ll both wake up any minute now. Gul is far too important to let people destroy him. It would kill him to be taken away and experimented on. I don’t think he has long left anyway. We can save him, I know we can. Please? Promise?”

John shrugged. “Okay, pinky promise, whatever. I still don’t think you needed to drug us though, David.”

They stared at David, who was lying flat on his back, opening and closing his mouth wordlessly, his cock twitching against his stomach.

“Fuck,” John whispered weakly. “We’re not ending up like that though, Oscar.”

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## Chapter Fifteen

*Oscar*

He sank onto the bed wearily. So much had happened in the last twenty-four hours—drugged, kidnapped, met a merman. He turned to face John, who was also lying on his bed. “Well fucking hell,” was all he could manage.

“You think this is just a dream, or some sicko’s idea of a joke? And what’s this shit about a scar? I remember the doctor looking for scars. I’ve got one just above my... you know.”

“Me too. That must be why they needed the nude pictures,” whispered Oscar.

“Now that is just fucking creepy! What are the odds of us both having scars in the same place? Is this a dream?”

“No. I can’t explain it, but Gul is as real as you or me, John. It’s mad, and incredible, but it’s really happening. I have no idea how I can communicate with him and you can’t, though. That story about a ‘hearing’ scar has to be bollocks, ’cause there’s no way I’m descended from mermen. Get real! I’ve always been good with animals, maybe this is no different? I think if I just try hard enough, maybe I can figure out what he’s trying to tell me, and then we can take the money and just go.”

“I still think we should go now. What the fuck does he want you to do? It might take years to work it out. Let’s just phone the police now and go home.”

“No, John. Just trust me, we have to do this.”

John glared at him, rolling his eyes and crossing his arms.

“John?”

“Okay, okay. I promised you already, didn’t I? Please, have a smidgen of faith in me, O.”

Oscar stared at him. “What did you call me?”

“What? Oh, sorry. Oscar, I meant Oscar.”

“No, it’s okay, it’s just... Someone else... my boyfriend calls me that.”

John stared at him intently, making Oscar slightly uncomfortable. “He’s a lucky guy,” John whispered, smiling. “What’s he like? Go on, talk to me about something normal. I’ve had more than enough crazy to last me a lifetime.”



“Oh, he’s gorgeous. It’s because of him I came here. I wanted to earn enough money so I could see him at last. You’re going to laugh at this, but I’ve never seen him. I met him on the Internet. But, I’ve not been entirely honest with him about everything.” As Oscar talked, he felt like he had known John for ages. Maybe it was the stress of the last few days.

“You lied?” John looked indignant, reminding Oscar all over again of the bedsit and his shitty job.

“Yeah. I didn’t mean to, but I didn’t think he’d still be interested if he knew the truth.”

“What is the truth? No, wait. Let me guess. You’re a married man with three kids?”

Oscar shook his head numbly, admiring John’s curls.

“Okay. You’re the missing link?”

“No, idiot. Nothing like that. I just... made myself out to be better than I really am. Good job, nice family. The truth is I’m an orphan who works in a crap call centre selling washing machines. I hardly earn enough to eat, let alone save. I thought, if I did this modelling job, maybe I could move somewhere decent and go to college. Get a real job, you know? Be a boyfriend Jake could be proud of.” He sighed, thinking of Jake.

John ran his hands through his hair and sat up. “This has all gone way, way too far,” he muttered. “Why the fuck would Jake care about where you work? Any decent guy would find you hot, ’cause I do. I know what you mean, though. I’ve told a few fibs in my time too, tried to make myself better than I am. Now I wish I hadn’t.” He stretched, making it difficult for Oscar not to notice John’s slim body, and the bulge in his shorts. “Did you see what happened to our cocks when the human fish appeared?” John finished, grinning.

“Don’t call him that. But yeah, it was weird. I still feel horny now. John, there must be others. This is the biggest find in, well, in forever. I can’t believe any of it. Is that our stuff?” Oscar asked, noticing a big bag in the corner of the room.

They fished out their clothes and belongings. Oscar gleefully found his phone. “I’d better text Jake. He’ll be worrying about me.”

“Trust me, he really will,” John mumbled, pulling on jeans.

Oscar texted quickly, imagining Jake sitting there by the computer waiting for Oscar to get in touch. “Not sure what to say. I’ll just say I am okay and the job is fine, shall I?” he asked John.

“Oh, yeah. Sounds good.”

“What about you? Do you have people to contact?”

“Ah, no. I have a special someone, but I can’t get in touch with him.” John was looking very odd, red, and worried.

“Are you okay, John? Well, as okay as you can be stuck here in the middle of God-knows-where, next to a living fossil.”

“Yeah, I’m fine. Oscar, there’s, there’s something I have to tell you. I tried before, but...”

“Hmm? Hang on, let me just try to call. The text keeps bouncing back.”

“Oh, does it?” John sounded relieved as Oscar called Jake’s number. A loud ringing came from John’s phone.

“What the fuck? How did that happen?” Oscar shrieked. “How have you got Jake’s number? What’s going on?”

“I looked at your phone when you were out cold, and Jake’s is the only number there. I assumed it was your number so I wrote it down. I don’t know why my phone rang. Maybe it’s all the weird shit going around here today. Nothing makes sense about any of it.”

Something just wasn’t right here, but Oscar was just too tired to think about it any more. John’s voice floated over him in waves, and somehow he thought it was Jake speaking. “John? Jake?” He tried to get to the bottom, but the sea bed was so murky, that perhaps it didn’t matter?

His head still felt strange, like it wasn’t really his any more. “Have to sleep,” he muttered, closing his eyes as the visions began to flash through his brain: muffled sounds, underwater, floating and sand...

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## Chapter Sixteen

*David*

He gagged again, but nothing came up. The inside of his mouth was so gritty, and dry, yet all he wanted to eat was salt and raw fish. Next to him was a pile of fish bones and skin. He had already bitten off all the flesh, but now he sorted them through until he found a big bone, and began sucking.

It would not be long now. He felt it calling him, drawing him back to its chilling depths. His fear was all that stopped him from wading into the ocean, and never coming out again, but even the fear was receding, fading away to nothing. Why had he waited so long?

*Scratch, scratch.* He wanted to rip the skin off his legs, peel himself like an orange, but his skin had thickened now, developed hard patches like scales.

Soon, soon.

One last thing. His mind skittered like schools of tiny fish, flitting about, never still, but he knew he had to do it. He breathed deeply, but this only led to a bout of coughing so frantic that he blacked out for a few moments. Not enough any more. Air just would not do.

His legs refused to work—what need would he have for legs, after all? The best he could do was to slither, arms in front of his head. Luckily the glass floor of his pool room was shiny and flat, but the bottom of the sea would be bumpy. He shifted an inch, then two. His scabby hands bled, but the salt would soon heal them.

Concentrate. David reached deeply, and found his last reserves. Somehow he got as far as his laptop. One tap with his failing fingers and he was online. “Just this, my love. Last thing. Yes.”

His fingers remembered which buttons to press. There were many overrides, and confirmations, but David had been a clever man. All his adult life he knew that one day it would come to this. He tapped the final letter just as Gul drifted back into the pool.

David was ready.

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## Chapter Seventeen

*Oscar*

“He’s here,” he shouted, sitting up from sleep suddenly. “We have to put David in the water. He has to understand. Gul can’t mate him until he accepts,” he babbled, standing up so fast that he swayed.

“What? Oscar, calm down. Oscar? Wait!”

Oscar barely heard John as he ran to find David. There wasn’t much time and it was all up to him. “David, I’m coming. Hold on, please.” He yelled desperately, racing to the glass wall. He saw Gul waiting in the pool, but there was no sign of David. “Where is he?”

“He’s over there look, by that computer. Please tell me what the fuck is going on, Oscar. I’m shit-scared and you’re as white as a sheet. There’s something not right with my head.”

John stood clutching his head, panting.

“John, it’s okay. You can feel the mating telepathy too? Don’t worry. I know what we have to do. You have to trust me. Okay?”

John nodded as the air around them began to crack like electricity and thunder. A storm was approaching, pushing water into the pool faster and faster. Oscar grabbed John’s hand and pulled him along as they ran.

“There he is,” John exclaimed as they reached David. He was collapsed over a laptop, twitching all over. His mouth gaped, his eyes wild and feverish.

“Oh, shit. David? Can you hear me? I know what we have to do. I had a dream, I saw it all.”

David fixed his gaze upon them, causing John to shrink back. Oscar took one breath and hoped to fuck there was still time. “You’re his mate, David. If he doesn’t mate with you now, you’re both going to die. Your body is ready, but you have to accept him and not fight back or try to breathe. I don’t quite understand, but you’re going to be able to breathe underwater. Just, just don’t fight, David. It only works if you accept him. The last chance, this is the last chance.” He was talking much too fast; surely David wouldn’t be able to follow and then it would be too late.

David nodded once. “Yes,” he croaked.

“John, we need to get him into the water. Can we lift him to the sea?”

“I think so.”

They managed to grab an arm each, and pull him back towards the pool, where Gul waited anxiously, swimming frantically up and down the pool. Oscar pointed desperately towards the sea, and hoped that Gul would understand.

David became more aware as they neared the sea, squinting his eyes, and cracking his lips into a smile. “Thank you,” he rasped. “I understand now. After. After, the computer. Find. Read. All yours, Oscar.”

Oscar and John pulled and pushed until David was waist-high.

“What happens now?” John gasped.

“Gul’s here—look.”

The merman swam to them, his eyes fixed upon David. He rose from the sea, pulled David into his arms. His beautiful face smiled at Oscar once, before encircling David into his arms, sliding one long lock of hair into David’s mouth, then diving under the water.

Oscar felt the loss as keenly as if he had known Gul his whole life. He clutched at John, and hoped it would be okay. “Live,” he whispered.

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## Chapter Eighteen

### *David*

He began to feel better the instant he felt Gul's arms around him. His skin welcomed the water, all those abrasions and cuts healing over. He sucked greedily at the hair this time, feeling air moving to his lungs as they disappeared under the waves. No more fear. His body was ready to be as one with Gul, to accept a life in the sea. All the small changes, which had begun all those years ago when he touched Gul's hand as a child, were complete.

It had not been Gul he was afraid of, but of giving up his human life. But now, as they gently landed on the bottom of the ocean, David spread his legs wide in readiness. Big hands stroked his body so tenderly, running up from his thighs to his neck, awakening his senses and making him eager for the changeover.

Kissing while sucking the hair was not easy, but David was keen to taste, look, and touch. He faced his fish boy at last and saw a handsome man. Once they were mated, David would be able to understand the telepathy, and eventually to breathe underwater unaided. He had never fitted with humans, because this was where he belonged. He eyes adjusted, and for the first time in thirty years, David saw clearly.

He traced the outline of the glorious tail, watching it ripple under his touch. Gul gasped, as hungry as David for them to be finally together. David slipped his hand inside the pouch, and drew out Gul's massive cock. He stared at Gul, shouting *Now* in his mind.

They moved as one—David on all fours with Gul holding him close with rock-hard arms. David felt his hole being nudged as Gul rubbed something moist and oily into him, preparing him.

Then they were rocking together, slowly at first, then faster, finally fucking away the years of wanting and wanting. Gul pounded him, filling him with mating seed, sealing them together. Making them both whole. Beginning again.

David's body exploded his release as he finally joined Gul, leaving behind one futile existence to begin his life.

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## Chapter Nineteen

*Oscar*

“Look!” John shouted, pointing back towards the desert. “A helicopter. It must be that doctor who brought us here. I remember him telling me he’d be back for us, and to just stay calm. The drugs made me forget.”

They ran back up the beach to where it seemed to be landing. “John, wait. We can’t say anything about Gul, because they won’t believe us anyway. They’ll lock us up. No one’s going to believe David brought us here to speak to a merman.”

They stared at each other as the helicopter landed. Had any of it happened? Maybe it really was all a hallucination brought on by drugs? “Hold my hand,” John whispered, as the helicopter doors opened and people in bulletproof vests descended.

A man approached them warily.

“That’s them—the two young men he had me bring here for ‘employment’ purposes. Has David Summers harmed you? He’s completely insane, you know.”

“No, he hasn’t harmed us in any way. He never told us what he wanted from us, but you’re right—he’s really not well. Last we saw of him he started walking off into the sea.”

Oscar squeezed John’s hand once, as they were led away to the helicopter.

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*A month later*

Oscar gripped the phone a little too hard. “Half past twelve, King’s Cross Station. I’ll be there, Jake. How do I recognise you?”

“Oh, you just will. We’ve been talking for over a year. You know me, and I know you. I’ll wear a red T-shirt, just to be sure. I can’t wait, O. Meeting you at last. I’m gonna hug and kiss you so hard.”

“Yeah, me too. I’d better get going then. See you soon. Jake?”

“Yeah?”

“What if you don’t like me?”

“O! That is never gonna happen in a million years. I already love you, remember? Have a smidgen of faith in me, yeah?”

It was odd, but Oscar remembered John saying those exact words back at the glass house. He shook his head to free the image of John from his mind, feeling guilty all over again. He hadn't seen or even spoken to John since that day. They were taken to the authorities, questioned alone and eventually Oscar was returned home. The only contact details he had were the officer in charge of the kidnap and drugging, and the solicitor who kept telling him David had left him all his fortune. Neither of them would give him John's details, saying only that John would be in touch.

At first, his head was still full of strange images and sensations, like he was swimming under water; vague wispy thoughts that woke him up late at night, only to fade away like echoes. He didn't feel like himself any more. He had seen a beauty so pure that the rest of the world seemed pale and insubstantial. It made no sense, but he missed Gul. Or maybe it was John, or Jake?

He still couldn't really believe any of what happened, but the money, the new flat and college course were real enough. David really had left him a fortune.

When he looked back to those few days, it was like looking through mist. He didn't expect to ever see or hear from David or the merman ever again. But he missed John. He missed him a lot. Obviously, it was Jake he loved. But still...

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Oscar got to the train station so late Jake's train was already pulling away off to some other station. He leant on a station bench to catch his breath, heart hammering with nerves. He scoured the busy platform for potential Jakes—plenty of young men but none of them in a red T-shirt.

As it started to empty, he wondered if Jake had missed the train, or even got cold feet. He didn't want to admit it, but a part of him would be glad, because then he could hunt down John. He sat on the bench and stared intently at his phone for messages or calls. But the screen was blank and dark.

He realised someone was standing in front of him. Oscar looked up as far as the red T-shirt, noticing belatedly that it had a picture of a merman on the front, before looking up to the face.

Brown curly hair and chestnut eyes looked down at him, smiling, worried. Oscar couldn't process it. The face was familiar.



“John? What. What are you doing here? John!”

Oscar leapt up, flung his arms around John and thought he might never be able to let go. They’d only spent a few days together, but now he realised how much John meant to him.

“I missed you,” John whispered, kissing Oscar on his cheek, his jaw, his nose. A million irrational and confusing thoughts bounced across Oscar’s brain. There was something he should be getting here but it kept skittering past his reason like stones on ice. The only one that made any sense was that this kiss meant everything.

He parted John’s mouth with his own, and that was the end of any pretence. Their tongues clashed with teeth as they each lost control.

Oscar only pulled away when he heard wolf whistles behind him. John held him at the hips, kissed him gently on the nose. “So you knew all along?”

Oscar shook his head at him, totally confused. “Knew?”

John laughed softly. “I’m Jake, you idiot. Did you really think I’d let you go off to some bogus naked modelling agency without me?”

“But! Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I’m sorry, Oscar. I tried to, really I did. But we were a bit busy trying to save the fish man’s life, if you remember. And then the longer I left it, the harder it got. I don’t know how many letters and e-mails I’ve written and never sent.”

“But—”

“Yeah, but. But. But.” Jake kissed Oscar. “But in the end, I just thought ‘oh fuck it’, and here I am. Let’s start again.” Jake held out his hand. “How d’you do? My name is Jake, and I love you.”

First Oscar took the hand. Then he took the other hand, and stood as close to Jake as he could get. “Delighted to meet you, Jake. You moron. I love you, too. Now let’s go home, we have a bloody lot to catch up on.”

**The End**

## **Author Bio**

*Claire Davis and Al Stewart are best friends and writing partners.*

*They like to challenge themselves by exploring the darker side of life and by finding compassion and beauty even in the most desolate of places.*

*Al sometimes describes himself as a mixture of Darth Vader and the tooth fairy, while Claire is less grounded.*

*Al has led an unconventional life and experienced many of the events he writes about. Above all, they believe in the power of magic and good manners.*

## **Contact & Media Info**

[Claire's Goodreads](#) | [Al's Goodreads](#)