

“Rising Tide”

By Lauren Rivers

CHAPTER 5

Daniel Grey stared at the creature before him almost as if trying to convince himself that what he saw was reality and not some figment of his own imagination. Legends of the existence of mermaids went back almost as far as seafaring itself yet no one had ever come this close to one that he knew. Sailors had long insisted they had seen these beautiful creatures in the distance or on fog filled evenings when the merfolk dared come close enough to the ships to be spotted, but despite the countless incidents over the years no one had ever captured one.

Of course there were claims, though when asked to provide proof it was rarely as advertised. Those who purported to have seen them or known where they could be found could rarely reproduce their supposed proof when asked to do so. Most dismissed their existence as little more than bored sailors having too much to drink or in some cases overexposure to sun, but there were a select few who insisted despite all evidence to the contrary that underwater denizens did indeed swim the seas.

Doctor Grey had never considered himself one to indulge in flights of fancy. As such he had concretely concluded that these men were little more than lunatics who needed something to fill the long stretches of time between their various ports of call. It was not that he did not believe in biodiversity, after all, he had seen hundreds of species of sentient beings walk the earth, but nowhere in his travels had he ever found conclusive evidence to suggest mermaids were more than a folk tale.

Yet despite everything he knew he was faced with living proof of what he had always deemed to be impossible. Inside the tank was a living, breathing mermaid, and based upon the glare she returned through the glass she was none too pleased to be captured. Testing her bonds, she continued to pull on the chain that secured her to the bottom of the tank to no avail. Despite her apparent lack of success it was clear from just observing her that mermaids possessed superior strength. The metal bindings were fashioned to hold men several times her size though they had been modified for their current purpose at his employer's direction.

The tank had been procured at significant expense and installed in the captain's cabin far faster than Doctor Grey would have thought possible, but when you were properly motivated it seemed there was little beyond your reach. The squirrel stood before it fascinated at the research opportunity before him. Apart from his efforts to cure Silas Werner he would be the first to examine such a unique and rare specimen. Not only would he have access to whatever he required to heal his employer but when the task was done he would have the mermaid to study at his leisure.

His colleagues would line up for the chance to know what he had discovered, not to mention the endless possibilities for what knowledge he could add to the scientific community. A heretofore undiscovered species offered limitless potential to the right people. He could only imagine what he could learn from her, given enough time. Endless questions filled his mind. Before he could begin to decide what to ask first, his employer interrupted his reverie from his bed on the other side of the room.

"Fascinating, isn't she?" he asked, making an effort to sit up. "A truly remarkable specimen."

"Quite so," the squirrel agreed. "I can hardly believe our fortune in finding one so perfect."

Silas Werner smirked. "I make my own luck. Fortune has nothing to do with it," he replied, earning a nod from the physician. "What I need to know is can you use her to develop a cure?"

"It's too soon to make that kind of determination. Of course I'll need to study her to understand how best to put her to use. The research materials you've provided should give me an adequate place to start for the time being. However, if half the claims about mermaids are true we may have found a cure for the incurable," the squirrel said.

"Let's hope so, doctor." The African wild dog leaned back, exhausted by the small effort of attempting to get a better look at the creature that would potentially be his savior. "Modern medicine has failed to provide an answer for my condition. She may represent my last chance."

"If so, then I will find the answer." The squirrel touched his paw against the glass staring intently at the specimen within. She returned the glare in equal measure. It was clear she was examining him as fervently as he was doing to her. Whatever value she presented to his research it was clear her will was not to be underestimated. No doubt she would resist when it came time to perform his tests. Despite the fact she was in his arena he knew better than to allow it to cloud his perception. Overconfidence was often a fatal flaw, one he would be certain not to display.

"I'm confident you will," Silas replied.

Doctor Grey turned his attention to the book his employer had given him containing what supposedly consisted of everything that had ever been learned about these mysterious creatures. Whether any of it was true was yet to be determined but from his first glance it was clear whoever had written it had not simply imagined everything he had said. The author claimed he had encountered one of them in some unknown sea but through methods he did not know had managed to escape his vessel and flee without anyone ever being aware of how she did it.

Clearly this suggested mermaids had more to them than would seem obvious. No doubt if all they were capable of doing was swimming it was likely one of them would have been discovered long ago by sailors simply by doing what they did as a matter of course. Yet somehow whether by accident or design the mermaids had kept themselves hidden from the surface beings with remarkable success. This strongly suggested they had a method of camouflage he had yet to discover.

The most interesting aspect to him thus far was the jewels embedded in her tail. Reflecting brightly in the light each one shone through the water, polished and perfectly shaped as if they were crafted by master jewel cutters. Lesser men might have seen them simply as things of monetary value but he knew they were far more than simple trinkets. These jewels were important, this much he knew simply from observation. He would learn their secrets, one way or the other.

She silently watched from her aquatic prison, and it was his belief that her decision to remain mute was not due to a lack of ability but rather a calculated move on her part to avoid revealing any more information than necessary. No doubt she was intelligent. It almost pained him to consider performing his tests on such an exquisite creature. Nevertheless, scientific curiosity demanded it, to say nothing of his employers needs.

He looked up as the African wild dog pulled the cord which summoned one of the crew to his cabin. A moment later, the ship's first officer appeared in the doorway. "You called?"

"Yes," Silas replied. "What is our current position?"

"Currently traveling westward in the ocean sea towards our next port of call," he said.

Silas held up his paw. "Change course. Take us to Sapphire Cove. I don't want anyone interrupting us while the doctor conducts his research."

"As you wish," the okapi replied.

The wild dog suddenly gripped his chest as he was overcome with a violent cough that appeared to wrack his entire body. He reached for his handkerchief to cover his muzzle until the worst had passed before pulling it away. Spots of blood stained the once pristine white fabric. His breathing had become labored, with every breathe seeming to take more and more effort.

Doctor Grey moved to his medical supplies using the herbs he had brought with him to mix a tea which he swiftly poured into a cup before presenting it to the wild dog. With his closest paw he held it steady guiding the liquid down his throat. Once he had managed to drink almost all of it he pulled it away from his muzzle and frowned. "It's becoming less effective."

"Or this disease is getting better at what it does," he replied. "This last dose lasted less than half the usual time."

The squirrel nodded, knowing it was more than the ingredients potentially losing their efficacy. His employer was dying, and nothing short of a miracle would save his employer from his death. As he returned the cup to its place he looked once more at the tank where the mermaid waited. "Then we'll just have to determine a more permanent solution."

He picked up the mermaid book and resumed studying its contents. The more he read the more he was certain they had stumbled upon something truly remarkable. No wonder the mermaids went through so much trouble to stay hidden from the world above. They were precious and not simply because of their rarity. The jewels attached to their tails presented almost infinite possibilities to one with the right knowledge and resources, not to mention whatever knowledge they might possess.

The journey to Sapphire Cove would offer him the time he needed to learn all she had to offer. It would take the fleet at least two days to reach it at their best speed. Long used as an isolated place to do things one generally did not want seen it would serve as the perfect location for them to do their work. Protected from all sides by a large curved island, they would guard their prize from any who might seek to challenge the merchant fleet.

As Silas pulled the blanket over his body, Doctor Grey immersed himself in the study of the mermaids. He would learn what he could from the book and whatever it did not know he would find out himself. Nothing would stop him from discovering everything there was to know about these elusive and mysterious creatures. He cast a glance over the book stand where the canine mermaid swam, never once moving her eyes away from him. It would be time soon enough for her. For now, he had work to do.

THE SILVERFISH

Gentle seas greeted the *Silverfish* on her journey towards the open sea. The directions Harumi had provided were for a location a significant distance out in the open water. From the captain's charts it indicated it was near a few small islands but other than that offered little of interest. Ethan had kept his eyes trained firmly on the surface of the water searching for any sign of his beloved Doberman archer.

The ship sailed over the water driven by a strong breeze which had given them a fair amount of speed away from the mainland. According to Harumi the area ahead was the place she had directed Diana to go. Somewhere beneath the surface was a hidden colony of mermaids.

The idea still seemed somewhat incredulous to Ethan who had yet to see one of these mysterious creatures. Of course they had always permeated the seafaring legends and stories of sailors but common knowledge was that they were little more than that. While the hawk intended to keep an open mind he still harbored a small doubt in the back of his mind.

Rhodes had spent most of the journey at Harumi's side. The curious mermaid, if that's in fact what she was, had spent most of the journey wandering the deck of the ship asking questions about just about everything. In a way it was almost cute. Rhodes seemed irritated at the constant questions but his face betrayed his true emotions. From the corner of his eye Ethan caught frequent smiles every time he would explain something else about the operation of the ship to her.

Lydia remained above with the ship's captain, who directed the *Silverfish* towards her theoretical destination. Both webbed hands gripped the wheel holding her on a steady course. The otter offered Ethan a nod, only occasionally shouting an order, which the avian was quick to carry out.

The otter locked the wheel into place and descended to the main deck. "We're at the coordinates you specified."

"Hold position," Rhodes commanded from the side of the ship where he stood with one arm around Harumi.

"Ethan, help me with the sails," he said.

The two of them pulled on the ropes to temporarily collapse the sails which immediately folded upon themselves. Devoid of wind to propel them forward, the ship slowed to a gentle crawl. The otter captain turned to the Gypsy Vanner stallion. "Any idea what we're looking for out in the middle of nowhere?"

Rhodes looked to Harumi, who met each of the group's glances in turn. "We wait. If I had my ring I could go below but as I am I can't swim deep enough to find my people."

"So then what do we do?" Ethan asked.

Harumi shrugged. "We wait."

"How do we know your people are even aware we're here?" the hawk questioned.

The red panda shifted to face Ethan. "My kind always watches the surface, monitoring the ships that pass above us. Most of them continue on their way never knowing what lies just beneath their hulls. For us to come here and hold position is exceptional. It will not take long." She moved to stare across the water, placing her paw on the railing. "Trust me, they know."

Ethan joined her in staring at the ocean surface. True to her statement it was not long before Ethan spotted shapes moving beneath the surface of the water. None of them moved close enough to identify but the outline seemed to fit what he expected. "There!" The hawk pointed towards one of the moving figures as it passed by the side of the hull.

Harumi nodded and dove into the water. Ethan and Rhodes rushed to the side of the railing where she had vanished only to see the bubbles breaking the water's calm where she had entered the ocean. After a few moments she surfaced once again, her hair wet and slicked back against her head as she held her paw up in the air.

Seconds later Rhodes dropped the rope ladder over the side of the ship. The red panda climbed aboard followed by an ivory haired stallion, naked save for some jewelry around his neck. His hooves settled on the deck as both Ethan and Rhodes glanced at each other uncomfortably while Lydia looked over her shoulder at both of them before a smirk passed her muzzle. "Oh, it's not like it's anything you boys haven't seen before." Lydia returned with a suitable set of masculine clothing.

The stallion stared at them curiously. "Ah, garments. I sometimes forget you surface dwellers like to cover yourselves with such things." He dropped them on the deck.

"On the surface it's considered polite to cover yourself," Harumi said.

"I think I know better than you what the surface is like, young lady," he replied, admonishing her with a finger. "You're lucky you were able to return to us."

Harumi accepted the towel Lydia wrapped around her shoulders. "It was all thanks to these surface dwellers."

The stallion eyed them with some hesitation. "I see. You must have told them our secret or they would not be here."

"It was unavoidable. One of their companions was transformed into one of us before I had the chance to reverse the process," she said.

"I know," he said. "A strange mermaid claiming she had encountered you arrived here asking for help."

Ethan's neck feathers puffed up slightly. "Then Diana did come here."

"Yes. At first we did not believe her claims. I assumed she had something to do with your disappearance and placed her into custody," the stallion said. "Unfortunately a short while ago she escaped and fled to the surface where she was captured by one of the surface ships before we could stop her."

"What?" Ethan asked, alarmed.

Harumi turned towards the stallion. "Hisoka, how long ago was this?"

"Several hours," he replied. "We tracked them as far as we could but they were far too fast for us."

Harumi shook her head. "Oh no."

"Which way did they go?" Ethan asked.

Hisoka pointed towards the northeast. "They proceeded in that direction though their destination is unknown."

"We have to go after them," Ethan said.

Rhodes shook his head. "Slow down, Ethan. We don't even have all the facts yet."

"Did you see what kind of ship took her?" the hawk asked.

“It was several large vessels traveling in formation, heavily armed and carrying a banner with a red symbol upon it,” Hisoka replied.

“Crimson Sun,” Rhodes replied.

Ethan nodded. “Then we need to find out where they went as quickly as possible.”

Nolan’s eyes widened in alarm. “Whoa, whoa, whoa. You’re not seriously considering going after them, are you?”

“You’re damn right I am,” Ethan replied.

The otter captain held up a webbed paw. “Are you insane?”

“You knew this was a possibility when we hired you,” the hawk said.

“Yeah, I knew we might run into them. You’re talking about going after them directly. Big difference.” The otter folded his arms.

Lydia placed a hand on Ethan’s arm as she spoke to Nathan. “Please forgive Ethan’s enthusiasm but he is right. We can’t leave Diana in their hands any longer than necessary. No matter how far they take her we can’t abandon her.”

Nathan exhaled deeply. “Even if I were to consider this crazy course of action I remind you this isn’t a warship and we don’t even have a full crew.”

Ethan shook his head. “The longer we debate this, the further away they get.”

“Even if we knew where they were we still need a plan,” Rhodes pointed out.

“Captain Phillips is right, we’re outmatched and outgunned. The direct approach is probably not our best option.”

Hisoka reached out to take Harumi’s arm. “Whatever you decide, Harumi is coming with me.”

“No,” she replied.

“What?” The horse looked at her with the authoritarian stare of a teacher. Ethan knew it well. He had received it more than once from his instructors when he was a younger avian. From what little he knew of Harumi he suspected she was not generally one to do as she was told. The red panda pulled her arm free and stood facing him attempting to appear as tall as she could.

“I said no.” Harumi returned his stare with equal intensity, and Ethan silently wondered how often this scene played out between them underneath the ocean’s surface. “I’m not going back with you.”

“Yes, you are,” he insisted. “Your actions have already exposed us to enough risk from the surface. Do not make it worse by remaining among them.”

Harumi shook her head. “Diana is in this situation because she tried to help me. I can’t leave her at their mercy. I won’t.” She stepped back when he advanced, giving Rhodes a reason to stand between them.

“Don’t interfere, land dweller.” Hisoka fixed Rhodes with a cold stare.

“The lady has made her intentions clear. Now I thank you for the information, but I think it’s time for you to leave. We’ll return her when we’ve rescued our friend.”

Hisoka stared at Harumi. “This is your final answer?” he asked.

“It is,” she replied.

The horse sighed and shook his head. “Fine. Then I shall accompany you as well. If you are intent on this course of action then it is up to me to keep you safe.”

Ethan once again offered him the clothes. “Okay, but if you’re coming along you need to put on some pants.” Hisoka took the clothes, this time without argument. While he began to dress himself the hawk returned his attention to the group. “We need to

know where they took Diana. Anyone have any ideas on how we can track down the Crimson Sun fleet?"

Nolan folded his arms with a bit of a sigh. "I might have an idea about that. There's an outpost about an hour's distance from here where sailors tend to trade news and gossip out on the open ocean. It's not much but you can get food, water, and some trade goods there if you don't much mind where it came from."

"You mean its run by pirates?" he asked.

"Salvagers," the otter said. "Crimson Sun tends to make a fair amount of enemies around here and some of them like to help themselves to a few of their shipments. It's risky, if anyone figures out what you're doing they'll come after you with a righteous fury but they don't tend to mind the occasional low priority shipment given how much business they do around here." The lutrine tilted his head slightly. "Just don't push your luck. If they catch you Crimson Sun has a habit of making examples of ships too slow to escape their pursuit ships."

"And you think these people will help us?" Rhodes asked.

"Not out of the goodness of their hearts if that's what you're thinking, but they take coin and sometimes information if you've got something worth sharing." Leaning against the nearest railing the otter met Ethan's glance. "Considering that time is probably a factor in this I think it's our only option."

The longer Diana was in Crimson Sun's custody the greater the likelihood something might happen to her. Ethan knew she was a strong personality but she was at a disadvantage as long as she was trapped in a mermaid form. If they were to stand any chance of rescuing her they needed to find her soon. Ethan, Rhodes, and Lydia stood together on the side of the boat away from the others.

"I don't see us having any other option, do you?" Ethan asked.

Rhodes shook his head. "At the moment, no. Without a new lead we're dead in the water and we can't risk running into them unexpectedly out here." The Gypsy vanner stallion glanced at their new companions. "Now we don't have much to trade but I think it's better than wandering around aimlessly and hoping we get lucky, don't you?"

"Agreed," Lydia said as she directed her attention to the otter captain. "Set your course, Captain Phillips."

"We'll be underway in a moment. I just hope you know what you're doing," he said.

"So do I," Ethan replied.

The ship cruised swiftly towards their newest destination. Less than an hour later they came close enough for Ethan to see it. The place was little more than a flotilla of small craft roped together to form a bit of a makeshift island. Towards the center was a barge which appeared to be the nexus for the floating settlement. There were a few ships seemingly patrolling the water around them for signs of enemy craft. Most likely the flotilla broke apart at signs of trouble and scattered, making it rather impossible for most to capture the majority of them.

Many of the larger craft appeared to have been modified with weapons or other things attached to the hull. Few of them appeared to be what one would call pretty. Most of them seemed to have a patchwork appearance to the modifications, more for function than appearance. As the ship came up alongside Nolan gestured towards the cluster of ships. "We're here."

Several pairs of eyes moved to observe their approach. It was clear they had caught the attention of a handful of people standing guard, no doubt to greet new visitors. It was clear from the swords on their belts they were also there to deliver a message. Behave, or you would be dealt with. Ethan kept his gaze neutral while they slowly inched closer to the floating dock where their welcoming committee awaited. "What is this place?"

"This is Libertalia. It's a way station out on the open ocean used for information exchange and supplies. You need just about anything you can find it here, especially if you don't want to have to deal with Crimson Sun." He waved to the men on the dock as the boat slowly came in close enough for them to tie the boat. He tossed the ropes to the waiting men who secured the ship while Nolan extended the plank. "If Crimson Sun is anywhere near here these people will be the ones who can tell us. Do you have something to trade?" he asked.

Ethan nodded, patting a cylindrical bundle in his hand. "I do."

"All right. These people don't much appreciate strangers so I recommend we keep the party as small as possible." He gestured for Ethan to follow him. "We won't be long."

Rhodes placed a hand on Ethan's chest. "You going to be all right in there? I can come with you if you need me to."

The hawk shook his head. "I can handle myself," Ethan said. "Just keep an eye on your mermaid until we get back."

The Gypsy vanner stallion smirked, giving Ethan a firm pat on the back. "Be careful."

"I always am," Ethan said, earning him a gentle eye roll from Rhodes.

Nolan turned back around towards his ship. "Are you coming or not?"

Ethan let out a deep breath and hurried to catch up with his companion. "Sorry!"

"Now our best bet at finding the information you need is in the barge in the center. Ruby owns a bar there and it's the best place to go for any sort of rumors or news that hasn't already been picked over somewhere else. I suggest you let me do the talking, at least at first." The otter gave a nod to the guards at the dock who seemed to stare intently at Ethan.

The hawk met their glances before doing his best to follow the ship's captain as nonchalantly as possible. He cast one final look back at the ship where Rhodes and Lydia kept watch on the deck with their new guests. Ethan kept pace with the otter as they passed over several wooden makeshift bridges between boats on their way to the largest barge in the center. It was several times bigger than the next substantial craft, its size and height making it clear this was the core craft of the floating settlement.

"What is this place?" Ethan asked.

"I told you, it's Libertalia," he replied.

The hawk shrugged. "How does something like this get out here?" he asked.

"The same way you'd expect. It all started a few years back when people needed to keep ahead of Crimson Sun and her merchant fleet. The best way to do that was to share information and make our supply lines shorter so we could stay one step ahead of them and compete. Someone had the idea to build a mobile base of operations out here for us to center our efforts. The center barge decides where to go and how long to stay there, and when it's time to move the place just breaks apart and reforms someplace

else.” He stepped onto the center barge and turned left. “The only people who know how to find it are folks like me. Every time it moves someone gets the word out and we share what we know.”

“I imagine they would love to find this place,” Ethan said.

Nolan nodded. “That’s why half our stock in trade is keeping ahead of them. Knowing where they are and what they’re doing is critical to being able to survive out here,” the otter replied.

“Then what happened with your crew?” he asked.

“I made a few mistakes and Crimson Sun made sure I couldn’t recover from them. My crew and I suffered some setbacks and when we couldn’t satisfy our contracts they were more than happy to pick up our slack. The money dried up and my men couldn’t wait. I found it impossible to keep the ship running without help and it’s been sitting there at the docks until you folks came along.” He waved his hand in the air dismissively. “That’s enough about my problems. Let’s go find out where they’re keeping your friend.” He passed through a pair of swinging doors into the largest room on the barge’s main deck.

Ethan followed, surprised at the ingenuity of the outposts residents. The barge, originally designed to ferry large amounts of cargo, had been converted into a bar and eatery within the ship. Numerous individuals sat around each of the tables, drinking and eating. Most of them ignored the new arrivals which suited Ethan just fine. He kept his gaze ahead where the bar awaited. Dominating more than half of the far wall the bar appeared fully stocked and full of customers. Raucous laughter emanated from the patrons who sloshed alcohol around rather large mugs.

At the center of all this was a young and rather attractive crimson haired Bay Andalusian mare which he assumed was Ruby. Once she caught sight of Nolan she turned towards the pair with an expression that only suggested to Ethan to be careful. The mare whinnied and sidled up to the bar with a drink in her hand and held it out slightly.

“Ruby, you shouldn’t have,” Nolan said.

“What the hell are you talking about?” she asked. “This one’s for me.” She took a swig and then slammed it down on the bar. “If you want a drink you’ll have to pay just like everyone else.”

The otter captain touched his chest in mock offense. “Ruby, I thought we were friends.”

“So did I until you fell behind on your tab. You know how it works around here,” she said. “I like you, Nolan, but if I let everyone get away with half the things you do I’d be out of business.” The mare flipped her hair before giving him a knowing look. “Now why don’t you tell me what you’re doing here.”

“I need some information,” Nolan said. “I’m looking for a Crimson Sun fleet.”

Ruby watched him for a moment before turning her gaze to Ethan. “You running?”

“Yeah, right for them.” Nolan held up a webbed paw at her widened eyes. “Trust me, it’s not my idea, but my client here has his reasons.”

“Ah, a paying customer. It’s been a while since you’ve had one of those,” she said.

Nolan nodded. “I was hoping you could tell me where we might find them.”

"It's important?" she asked, curiously.

"Yeah," Ethan nodded.

"All right," the dark brown furred mare replied. "At last report they were headed along the coast, but not three hours ago they suddenly changed course. Based on their new heading they could only be headed for one place." She looked from one of them to the other. "Sapphire Cove."

"Where's Sapphire Cove?" Ethan asked.

The otter frowned. "It's an island a few days from our current position."

"Then you know where it is," Ethan declared.

"I do, but that's not the problem." His tail drooped behind him clearly indicating his displeasure.

"Then what is?" Ethan leaned closer to him.

The otter looked at Ruby before turning back to Ethan. "There's only one way to approach the island and practically no way to do it undetected."

"So then how do we do this?" Ethan asked.

"We don't," Nolan replied. "I'm sorry about your friend but going there is suicide."

Ruby nodded. "Though I rarely say this, Nolan's right. Crimson Sun may say they're a merchant fleet but make no mistake, those are warships. If you go after them they will have an army waiting for you."

Ethan placed his hand on the bar. "We're going."

"Ethan, are you insane?" The otter held up his webbed paws. "We are one ship with no weapons. We have five people and in case you haven't noticed, they outnumber us just a little bit."

"I don't care," the hawk replied.

"Well, you should, because I plan on living past tomorrow," the otter said.

Ethan stopped and glared at him. "So do I. They have my Diana, and I'm not leaving her with them. This journey ends one of two ways. Either we save her or tomorrow holds nothing I need." The hawk turned towards the door. "Now either you can come with us or lend us the use of your ship, but either way I'm going after her."

Nolan sighed. "Fine, but we might have to renegotiate my fee after this." He tossed a few coins on the bar. "Thanks, Ruby."

"From the sound of it I'm not so sure I did you a favor," she answered.

Ethan and Nolan returned to the ship a short while later where Rhodes awaited them on the main deck. "Do we have a destination?" he asked.

"We do indeed." Ethan took a deep breath. "We're headed some place called Sapphire Cove."

Rhodes followed them both up the stairs to the helm. "How long will it take us to get there?"

"If the wind is with us, we can get there in four days. Maybe a little less if we're lucky, but you two better have a plan before we get there or this is going to be a real short trip." The otter began to make preparations to depart, leaving Ethan and Rhodes alone. The hawk stared out over the ocean, resting his hands on the railing. Finding Diana had been relatively uncomplicated. Getting her back was going to be a great deal more complex.