

RENDEZVOUS AT SEA

by

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Like a statue the slender Fresca stood on the smooth gray rocks. The northeasterly gusts whipped her hair into brown snaking strands, her short black dress into revealing swirls. The salt of tears merged with that of the Atlantic as the spray cloaked her, gave solace.

“Apollo!” she called, but knew it was useless. He wouldn’t come in this weather. Waves were breaking over the rickety pier where they always met.

She was trembling, the cold numbed her legs. She thought, not for the first time, of how tempting was the sea. Just commit yourself, no more pain. She stroked her face. The wind had stilled the ache. It would swell, the bruise would tell the story in the light of day.

She shook herself, swore, felt the anger warm her body. With clenched fists she stepped down carefully, worked her way through the large

boulders and strode across the gravel to the narrow path. No, she'd not tell him the truth. Let him wallow in uncertainty. Let the jealousy eat at him like a cancer. He wouldn't hit her again.

She quickened her pace on the path. When the porch light came into view she stopped. The idea was so clear and logical. Why hadn't she thought of it before?

By the time she'd stripped and was laying in the hot lavender water sipping cognac, Fresca had her plan laid out. She had topped up her snifter and the tub several times and was vaguely aware of the old church bell chiming midnight when Geoff walked in.

She didn't look at him. "How was the party?"

He was untying his bow tie, unbuttoning the waistcoat. "I'm sorry I hit you."

"You're back early," she smiled, sipped her cognac, studied her prune toes above the bubbles.

"Without you it was a dreadful evening. People hardly spoke to me but to ask where you were."

"They'll not believe whatever you told them once they see my face," she turned to look at him. He groaned. Her left eye was nearly closed, her high

cheekbone invisible beneath the puffed flesh. The contrast to the perfectly sculpted right side made her look freakish.

He sank to his knees beside the tub. "My Fresca, forgive me. Never again, I promise."

"I know," she said calmly. "Go to bed. We both have early mornings."

"I just lose it when I think of you with some..."

"Don't," she ordered. "Last time I provoked you. This time you've no excuse. You are the only man in my life." She turned away, "Now give me space to heal and forgive you."

Slowly Geoff stood and left her. When she joined him in bed he stayed on his side though his breathing told her he was awake. He had left for work when she awoke to sunshine and blue skies. The storm had passed.

Fresca dressed quickly. She put on no music, this day must be pure concentration, but she did take a few of her favorite CDs. In the kitchen she smiled with pleasure at the feel and taste of fat purple grapes, the bite of tangy Roquefort cheese on toast and the smell of Jamaican Blue Mountain coffee as it perked. She began selecting supplies from the cupboards and composed two bundles in heavy-duty rubbish bags.

In her workroom she downloaded onto disk her efforts from the day

before. The article on changing weather patterns was nearly finished. As long as she e-mailed it to the paper within the week they'd be happy. She packed her laptop into its case, added batteries, auxiliary lead, disks, manual (just in case), pens, pad, etc. The research she had compiled on Apollo and his vast family filled several disks, garnered from sources worldwide. Would her future writings about him be recognized as expert, objective observations? She shrugged, rechecked her mental list before sealing the waterproof bag.

Into her duffel bag went her favorite casual, practical clothes. No ironing or dry cleaning, she smiled and added insulated underwear. Everything she needed was already aboard, but she was planning long-term and didn't want to come up short.

Fresca laughed, "Dad, your old manual typewriter and the Swiss army knife that you gave me may finally be pulled out of the locker." She missed him. He had been an adventurer, so different from Geoff. She had inherited many of his characteristics. And, he had left her 'Escapade'.

A knock at the door snapped her out of her reverie. She hesitated, decided she should answer. A smiling young man with a box of yellow roses was waiting on the porch. She didn't refuse delivery as she had the last time.

She put them in a vase but didn't bother to read the card Geoff had enclosed. No doubt asking forgiveness, promising no repeat. Again. She shrugged. Apollo will never send me flowers. Will never need to.

She drove first to the bank, then market, then on to the marina. Three trips with the cart and everything was stowed. 'Escapade' was kept in sailing order by the marina staff and Fresca kept it stocked, as she had been taught. Her dad had purchased the sleek wooden ketch before she was born and it was still berthed in the same slip.

She gave the boat a once-over and was satisfied. The alarm on her Casio sounded. An hour 'til her rendezvous.

Fresca started the trusty old diesel, cast off the dock lines and pulled out of the slip, her tension building. This was the hard part. Would he leave with her? Would he stay with her? There was so much she didn't know. For four months they had met at the pier almost every day at 2 o'clock, depending on the tide. On the good days they'd swam together. The few times Geoff had joined her Apollo had stayed out of sight.

Outside the marina she headed up the coast. It was less than a mile to the small inlet. She had left a note on Geoff's desk pad: 'Please don't worry. It was good, but now we're better apart.' She'd automatically put 'Love'

before her signature. Well, she did still, in a way. That was why he had struck out at her. He had felt but not understood the change. His possessiveness and insecurities had always been a problem.

She dropped anchor in the one sandy spot at the mouth of the inlet. The tide had just turned so 'Escapade' would be fine until she found Apollo. She struggled into wet-suit and tanks, made her way down the stern ladder into the choppy sea.

She sank to 30ft and headed due east toward the pier. Visibility was less than 10ft so Fresca kept her wrist compass at eye level. She was concentrating on maintaining a steady course when she was pushed from behind. She tumbled into a slow spin, unbalanced and choking as she lost her regulator.

'Don't panic' flashed in her head like a neon sign as she groped her mouthpiece back into place and inhaled. Her mask was fogged so she didn't see the large body bearing down on her. She reached to clear the mask and felt pressure on her stomach, felt herself being pushed. Disoriented, she couldn't tell in what direction until she broke the surface.

And there was the beatific smile of Apollo. Fresca was coughing, trying to steady herself. He obviously couldn't tell exactly what her limitations

were, but each time he had put her in jeopardy he'd pushed her to the top and waited.

She wanted to hug him, felt a flush of frustration that she couldn't talk to him, explain the situation. She clapped, then extended her arms in an open circle in front of her breasts and waited while he dove then returned, pushing his head up into the circle. Her happiness was absolute. She opened her arms as he lifted up, towered above her, then fell back, rocking her in the waves.

Replacing mask and regulator, she dove. As much as she wanted to play, time was important. They must be out of sight before Geoff returned and tried to stop her. Checking the compass, she headed for 'Escapade'.

Immediately she heard Apollo clicking beside her, watched his sleek body, so strong and graceful. He did look like a God. She had impulsively chosen the name the first time she had seen him and, yes, it was appropriate. She forced herself to look back at the compass, then up, and was surprised to see they were already at the boat. She maneuvered to the anchor chain, took hold and watched Apollo survey the boat. Breaching, he took a look at the part that was above water, then dove under the keel and was beside her. He pressed against her side, she stroked his head, ran her hand over the

scar that sliced from left eye to blow hole.

How can they call you a Common Dolphin, she wondered. She'd recorded everything she could find but had been disappointed at how little was actually understood about them. Most was just data, observations. Apollo was amazingly attuned to her emotional state, attentive to her needs. She was sure he understood her plan.

She headed for the stern. Holding on to the ladder, she tossed her fins into the cockpit and climbed up slowly. The cumbersome dive gear she stowed in its locker and scrambled down the ladder again. Apollo emerged as if awaiting her next move.

"I love you so much!" she laughed. "I wish I could just swim away with you, but at least I've got 'Escapade'. The question is can you, will you, stay with me? We will make our way down the coast into the Caribbean. We'll stop at different islands and you can let me know where you want to spend the season. What do you think?"

As if in response he dove, flapped the surface with his tail fluke, did two tight underwater flips, surfaced with loud whistles.

"Yes!" Fresca yelped and punched the air. She scrambled forward, lifted the anchor and motored out away from the shore. As soon as the wind was

steady without the interference of land, she hoisted the mainsail, thrilled at the silence. Her heart quickened with the first splash. He was with her!

She watched him dance and cavort around the bow. Then another joined him, and another. Within minutes there were at least ten dolphins, probably more.

“Is this your family?” She watched them, lost track of his scar amidst the undulating bodies, then he was there again. “Our family?”

She looked back at the disappearing land, took a deep breath. “I’m not an adulteress, Geoff.” She sat down, dangled her feet over the side, smiled as she saw Apollo look up at her. “I’m just following my dream.”

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