

Untamed Love

By Anton Swanepoel



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Chapter 1: The Challenge

9th floor, Investment International, Manhattan New York

Aurora's hazel eyes soaked the words up that hinted at romance and adventure while they danced on her laptop, her coworkers forgotten. Licking her full lips, she leaned forward to get a closer look at the book's cover. *This is so ridiculous*. Her heart pounded in her chest while her finger hovered over the mouse button. Just as she brought her focus back to the book's title, a lock of her long curly auburn hair fell over her eye. Not that she needed to read it, the title was ingrained in her memory; she had only been staring every day for the last week at the book.

"Surfing the internet at work?" Aurora gasped when Emily spoke next to her. She failed to notice that Emily left her desk and walked over to hers. And how could she miss Emily's perfume? Who wears a seductive perfume like Beyonce Heat with its fruity, floral, and woody mix to work? And that low cut, body-hugging red dress is overstepping things.

"Backpacking Southeast Asia, by Anton Swanepoel." Emily laughed. "Are you finally leaving us?"

"In your dreams." Aurora sneered and locked eyes with Emily's. Up until a month ago, the two managers kept out of each other's hair. All changed with Josh's resignation.

"I am going to Cambodia for a vacation after I close the deal on Monday." Aurora finally said, causing Emily to break eye contact and look at the laptop screen. *Ha, I won*, Aurora laughed inside.

"Backpacking is not a vacation that is slumming it. But I guess that is all you are used to and deserve." Emily cut back. Aurora's face reddened, and her eyes narrowed. Emily liked to flaunt that her family was rich, and that she owned a luxury apartment in Manhattan, while Aurora rented a small one-bedroom apartment out of the city.

"Has it got something to do with that 22-year-old vow you made?"

"It's a promise not a vow, but yes." Aurora replied, wishing she never told Emily about the promise.

"Whatever. Well, have fun with the bedbugs and other insects from your book tonight; I am going on a dinner date with Rick." Emily threw the words in Aurora's face. She had been waiting the whole day for the best time to brag about it. It was just the right news to spoil Aurora's weekend. The color drained from Aurora's face, and a warm victory feeling filled Emily from her toes up. It was no secret between the women in the office that Aurora was mad about Rick, the company director. He looked more as if he should be on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* with only shorts on, than an investor in a suit.

"You did not." Aurora gasped.

"If you have insecurities about sleeping with him, I am not going to lose out on having those muscular arms hold me." Emily laughed, then turned and walked back to her desk. Aurora's thoughts and emotions were in a tumble drier, just as Emily planned. One side of Aurora wanted to jump up, punch Emily, run over to Rick's office, and kiss him. The other side of her agreed with Emily and her late grandmother, she did not deserve a man like Rick. Aurora crushed a piece of paper under her desk while imagining it was Emily's throat. With Emily's slender figure, huge implants and fake charm, she could get any man in bed with the bat of her eyelashes. And, like a praying mantis, once she used them up, she discarded the men like trash. Emily slept her way up the corporate ladder. Anyone who stood in her way she dealt with through backstabbing or manipulation. No doubt Emily will open her legs for Rick tonight, Aurora's dream man.

"Well, I need to go put something more revealing on for tonight." Emily winked as she picked up her hand bag and walked out of the office. Emily gave an exaggerated hip swing as she walked, causing nausea to rise up in Aurora. Rick was to make a recommendation in the next few days to the board members as to who between her and Emily should be promoted to senior manager, Josh's old position. With Emily entertaining Rick for the night, it almost zeroed Aurora's chances of a promotion, unless

she can get the deal through on Monday.

Rick's muscular body passionately embracing Emily filled Aurora's thoughts and her breathing hastened. Aurora jumped up and threw a pen after Emily but missed the doorway completely. With a clang, the pen bounced off the glass partition wall of the office, landed on the floor and rolled behind Aurora's chair.

"You will not get the promotion," Aurora hissed and then clenched her jaw. Crimson faced, her eyes threw daggers at the door. A few office employees outside peered over their cubicle partitions at her then ducked down when she looked at them. Seeing Aurora upset was a shock for them. Aurora was always calm, friendly, helpful and full of energy. Aurora took a deep breath, and then dropped into her chair.

Aurora ran her fingers over the rough brown paper ledger than contained her ticket for a promotion and a better life. The documents inside were an investment portfolio worth \$100 million, the company's largest single investment deal yet. Although Emily helped her to an extent with the portfolio, it was Aurora's baby. Slowly, Aurora pulled the papers out. Her fingers trembled while she looked over each investor's details that she personally sourced by going from hospital to hospital until she had enough rich doctors to create the group portfolio. All other investments the company dealt with were of single rich people. With the large single investment, they did not need to buy into other schemes, but could create their own and negotiate better investment terms.

The money would be invested in countries such as Bahamas and Cayman Islands where sizeable sums of money could be invested tax free through legal loopholes. This allowed the investment to make a substantial return on investment. On paper, investors owned shares in offshore companies that often consisted of little more than post boxes in exotic locations. Holidays became business meetings. Carefully Aurora replaced the documents and closed the folder. All the information she needed was already captured within the system, she just needed to finalize the presentation. Aurora leaned back in her chair and sighed.

Everything was completed a week ago, but her drive for perfection had seen the meeting delayed until Monday. Not that the doctors needed much convincing. All had already verbally agreed, and Monday's meeting was more to answer any last questions and then sign the paperwork. Aurora locked her fingers and stretched her arms out in front of her. The clock on the wall chimed 3 pm, drawing Aurora's attention to it. *A quick once-over and I can go home for the weekend. If I push hard, I can be home by seven tonight, have dinner and a bath, and be in bed by eight, perfect.* Aurora's lips thinned slightly and her eyes lit up. She rubbed her palms together. *When I close the deal on Monday, the board will never accept Emily for senior manager even if Rick nominates her.*

Aurora took a deep breath, kicked Emily from her thoughts, and then let her eyes rest on her laptop. Gently she bit her lower lip. The guidebook on backpacking mystical and remote locations begged for attention. Bugs, dirt, noisy roommates and winging it on vacation were not for her, but Jeni her best friend had suggested it as a good guide book to get. Angkor Wat in Cambodia had called to Aurora since she was four. However, she feared the answers she may find there. Jeni went a few months back, but work kept Aurora from joining her. Jeni's descriptions of the place, as well as the wild tales of making love at some remote temple was the final push Aurora needed to agree to go. If there was a place Aurora dreamed of being seduced, it was at a remote temple.

"Why not?" Aurora whispered and then clicked the buy button. While Amazon sent the eBook to her iPad mini, ready to be devoured later, Aurora closed the internet browser and opened up the portfolio files as well as her presentation. For an hour, she fought to keep Emily out of her mind, but lost.

"I hope you choke on your dinner." Aurora cursed then pushed her chair hard away from the desk. The pen on the floor jammed in one of the chair's wheel. Aurora's heart stopped and her jaw dropped when the ceiling came into view. With a thud, she landed on her back. For a moment, Aurora ground her teeth, then she burst out laughing. Giggling she pulled her skirt down over her lean legs in case one of the men came storming in. Sadly,

no hero came to her rescue, the story of her lonely life. Shaking her head, she slowly stood and righted her chair. *Yes Jeni, I know; my temper causes much of my own problems.*

"Are you alright Miss Aurora?" Dorothy, Aurora's personal assistant stepped into the office. Her cubicle was directly opposite Aurora's office.

"Never better." Aurora smiled and stood. 63-year-old sweet Dorothy walked over with a cup of hazelnut and chocolate topped Caffè latte, or Aurora's delight as Dorothy called it. Carefully she put it down on Aurora's desk.

"Oh thank you Dorothy, it is just what I needed." The office loved Aurora when she convinced Rick to install the expensive coffee machine in the kitchen. She had argued that it was cheaper than workers going out to purchase coffee and be unproductive.

"I know it is none of my business, but if I may Miss Aurora. Are you more upset that Emily is going on a date with Rick, or that she may get the promotion?"

"I, I don't know." Silence filled the office for a moment.

"When you figure out which one matters more, go for that one." Dorothy put her hand on Aurora's shoulder. "It is past four. I am leaving now. Everyone else is already gone for the weekend, please do not work too late tonight."

"I won't. Have a lovely weekend Dorothy."

"You too Miss Aurora."

The aroma drifting up from the desk tingled Aurora's nose and relaxed her mood. The velvet liquid warmed her from the inside. Well if Rick wants to sleep with Emily, let him. If he is that easy, then I do not want him. I want a knight that will fight for me, and then carry me away in his arms. That can make me forget about the world as we make love and make me want to scream, I Love You. With her priorities in line, Aurora immersed herself in her work.

The clock on the wall stood at 22 past seven when Aurora finally finished. Quickly she saved the PowerPoint presentation as well as the portfolio files on her laptop. Her finger hovered over the mouse button. *I always save a backup copy of the presentation on*

the company server. Why is my gut telling me not to? It is stupid not to have a backup, and only myself and Rick can access the files. Aurora shrugged her shoulders and backed up the PowerPoint Presentation on the company server. With a quick email she directed the weekend staff to make 25 copies of the portfolio documents and have them bound in folders, then have them delivered to the Hilton hotel early Monday morning. The documents contained additional information not shown in her slides, as well as the legal documents needed to be signed to conclude the deal. The meeting was scheduled for 10 am in one of the hotel's meeting rooms. Aurora was proud of the system she helped put in place. It would allow her to concentrate on getting ready for the meeting, knowing that experienced staff saw to the documents being correctly bound and delivered on time. It also impressed the clients when additional staff showed up for a meeting and helped prepare for a presentation.

Satisfied that all was perfectly planned, she leaned back in her chair and picked up her iPhone from her desk. With a few swipes and taps on the screen, she ordered an Uber pick up. Normally, she would walk the two blocks to the subway, take the train out of the city and then walk the four blocks from the station to her apartment, but Emily messing with her head made her an hour late. Besides, January in New York was not ideal for night strolling, plus it was the thirteenth of the month. Aurora looked at the confirmation on her phone and stood. *15 minutes and the ride will be here. Just enough time to lock up. It is going to be a perfect weekend, and on Monday I will secure my promotion.*



"Is this you?" The Uber driver asked while he brought the car to a stop in front of an old apartment complex, 12 stories high and 15 windows wide. Its' rough grey walls were a stark contrast to the soft white snow coming down.

"Yes. Thank you for the ride." Aurora said and took out her

cell phone. With one swipe on her phone she accepted the charges and then climbed out. Aurora gasped when the icy evening air slammed into her. Slush crunched under her black leather boots while she ran to the entrance, her laptop bag firmly clutched against her chest. Behind her, the Uber driver honked his horn. Aurora resisted the temptation to turn around and wave. *I don't need this now. I can feel his eyes burning on my ass. He practically drooled over me the entire way over. I wore this outfit for Rick, not him.* A gust of air slammed into her when she opened the lobby door, and a shiver ran through her. *What I need now is Rick's toned muscles against my naked body and his hot lips on mine.* Aurora skipped the elevator and ran the two flights of stairs up to her apartment. She needed to release some pent up energy before she exploded. The running also helped to partially clear her mind. Aurora fumbled with her door lock and then kicked the door.

"Damn you Emily. I deserve Rick more than you do. You only want to use him." Aurora cursed. Clenching her jaw, she fought the anger that rose up in her. After counting to 10, Aurora tried the lock again and succeeded in opening the door. A familiar cherry scent hugged her when she entered the apartment, and gave her a bit of comfort. Aurora's emotions were split between being mad about Rick going on a date with Emily, and blaming herself for not accepting his dinner offer two months ago. She had yearned to say yes, but he just popped into the office and asked her to join him after work. She did not have the right outfit on and wanted their first date to be perfect. Aurora kicked the door closed, then dropped the house keys on the glass dining table to the left of the door. After dropping her laptop bag in the beanbag to the right of the room, then walked to the wood wall unit against the right wall. She turned the hi-fi on. While soft flute music filled the living room, she walked over to the open-plan kitchen to the left of the dining room and inserted a single-serving cup in the coffee machine. No TV decorated the wall unit that housed the hi-fi, that's what cinemas are for. The hi-fi's only companions were a few trophies won in Karate championships and a framed picture of Aurora's parents kissing, her most prized possession. With a

cup of Aurora's delight in hand, she walked over to the bean bag, moved her laptop bag to the three seat couch next to the bean bag, and then dropped into the beanbag. The soft plush leather folded around her slender athletic figure and gave her comfort. Memories of long hours spend reading books filled her mind while she sipped the velvet liquid.

Aurora froze. Will Rick really sleep with Emily on the first date? What if I am working myself up for nothing, and he just takes her for dinner? Hope flickered inside Aurora and lifted her spirit. Monday, I will close this deal and get the promotion. Then I will deserve a man like Rick. Aurora's gaze fell on the Japanese swords that hung on the wall next to the wall unit. A first prize she won while competing in Japan. The highest honor in her style. Sadly, even that did not impress her grandmother. Aurora stood and walked to the fridge, then pulled out a microwave meal consisting of chicken and vegetables. Expertly she slid the plastic container out of the box while walking to the microwave on the kitchen counter. Still thinking about Emily and Rick, Aurora pulled a top drawer out, grabbed a fork, and then stabbed holes in the plastic film while imagining stabbing Emily. Satisfied that she killed Emily and gave the meal enough holes for the steam to escape, she popped the container in the microwave and set the timer. While the microwave nuked her food, she pulled a bottle of red wine from the fridge and poured herself a glass.

Aurora finished her glass before the microwave acclaimed victory over the food with a ding. Grabbing the same fork she killed Emily with, she headed for the bean bag and made herself comfortable. The normally tasty food was bland in her mouth. Aurora stared at a piece of chicken on the fork. *I am sure Emily and Rick had a super nice meal at an expensive restaurant. Ahhh, why can't I get them out of my head?* Aurora jumped up, replaced the flute music with rock music and turned the volume up. She grabbed her iPad mini and cellphone from her laptop bag, then headed for her bedroom situated at the end of the living room. Her love for oriental culture was more pronounced here. A futon served in place of a bed. Two pink paper lanterns hung from the ceiling and

bathed the room in a soft glow. Cream silk bedding adorned the bed, the only luxury Aurora allowed herself. Sleeping naked, she loved the feel of silk on her skin, like a lover's soft touch that she yearned for.

Aurora undressed while she moved to the en-suite bathroom, and left a trail of clothes on the floor. The twice weekly hour-long karate classes and weekend jogs through the park kept her fit. With her five foot seven strong and lean frame and perky c-cup breasts, she turned a lot of heads. Just not the one she wanted. At 28, she was debt free, a manager, and had a promising future ahead of her. Aurora placed the iPad and cellphone on the floor, then opened the bath taps. Carefully she measured a bottle cap of apricot and coconut bubble bath out, then shrugged her shoulders and poured two caps worth of bubble bath in the bath. Aurora cupped her breasts and gave them a little squeeze. *Rick, you could have had these tonight, but you chose plastic. See if I care.* Aurora tipped her nose up and inhaled sharply, then stepped into the bath. Soft bubbles caressed her body. After closing the taps with her toes, she picked up her iPad. Her eyes devoured the backpacking guide while her mind imagined Rick joining her on exploring remote temples. Sadness filled her heart when thoughts of Emily taking her place alongside Rick popped up. Aurora placed the iPad on the floor next to the bath, then picked up her phone and dialed Jeni.

"Hello darling." Jeni answered in a laughing tone.

"Hello."

"What's wrong?" Jeni was immediately alert when Aurora did not respond with her normal cheerful voice and jokes. Aurora was a bubbly person and when she was short on words, something had upset her greatly.

"Rick dumped me and cheated on me." Aurora choked out while tears formed in her eyes.

"What? Your dream guy and boss?"

"Yes."

"Ah, I am sorry. Do you want me to come over?" Concern filled Jeni's voice. She had warned Aurora before that her crush on

Rick was not healthy for her.

"No no, I just want to talk a bit."

"Okay. But hold on. When did you guys start to go out? You said nothing."

"Well, we have not exactly been on a date yet." Aurora admitted sheepishly.

"So how did he dump you and cheat on you then?"

"He is going on a dinner date with Emily tonight."

"What? That cow that climbs the corporate ladder one dick and knife stab at a time?" Jeni gasped.

"Yes."

"I am so sorry Aurora. I did not expect Rick to fall for her fake boobs."

"Me neither. Hey, but I got the book you told me about. I never thought it was so cheap to travel in Cambodia and Thailand." Aurora changed the subject knowing if they continued to talk about Rick that Jeni would demand to come over. Aurora needed a hug tonight, but not from Jeni.

"Told you. You will have a blast there. When is this next deal done?"

"Monday is the big presentation. I expect them to sign there and then. All should be wrapped up by Tuesday."

"Well then, there you go. Start packing your bags. In a few days you are heading to Cambodia on vacation." Jeni cheerfully exclaimed.

"Just like that hey?" Aurora laughed.

"Just like that. You have been planning to go after you secured the deal, or are you chickening out?"

"No, I am going. Scared, but I am going."

"Are you going to finally ask Rick on a date when you get the promotion?"

"I don't know."

"Ask him to go with you to Cambodia. Imagine making love to that hard body of his at some remote temple. Angeline Joli style." Aurora's cheeks turned red, and her rose buds hardened. Butterflies fluttered in her stomach and then dived straight down,

causing Aurora to open her legs. Aurora swallowed hard when the butterflies caused swelling at the apex of her legs, the little sluts. Aurora slid one hand down to between her legs and touched herself while imagine it was Rick's hand. Her breathing raced while her hand moved faster and faster.

"Aurora, you still with me?" Aurora jerked when Jeni's voice ripped her to reality.

"Shit shit shit." Aurora yelled when her phone slid out of her hand and into the bath. Frantically she searched through the foam bubbles for it. By the time she pulled it out, it was too late.

"Nice going Aurora." Aurora scolded herself, then burst out laughing when she thought of what Jeni would say when she told her why she dropped the phone. Aurora placed the phone on the bathroom floor next to the iPad, and then slid back into the bath. She may as well finish what she started before Jeni showed up. With the talk they had and the phone going dead, Jeni would rush over immediate. Bubbles tickled her throbbing rose buds as they popped against them. Aurora's hand moved to the apex of her legs. Closing her eyes, her hand became Rick's. His fingers glided over the pearl of her womanhood then in and out of her portal of pleasure. His lips burned hot on her's. Aurora's heart beat widely and she gasped for air while her body exploded in ecstasy, coming from deep down inside her to wash all over her. Panting, Aurora let the feeling ravage her senses while she relaxed her muscles. She lay still for a few minutes, then quickly washed and climbed out of the bath, dried herself, then dressed and waited for Jeni.

True as a friend Jeni was, she banged on Aurora's apartment door two hours later.

"What the hell?" Jeni blurted out the moment Aurora opened the door, then jumped forward and hugged Aurora.

"Sorry. I dropped my phone in the bath."

"I thought maybe you killed yourself over Rick." Jeni said, her voice stern. She gave Aurora another hug, then let her go and stepped into the apartment.

"Wait, how did you drop your phone in the bath?" Jeni

asked while Aurora closed the door. Aurora turned cerise and looked down at the floor while she played with her thumbs.

"Aurora?"

"Well." Aurora swallowed nervously. "You know when you said maybe Rick could join me in Cambodia."

"Yes?"

"Well, then you talked about making love at some remote temple."

"You imaged having sex with him and dropped your phone in the bath." Jeni burst out laughing.

"Kinda."

"Welcome to being a woman." Jeni snorted, tears running down her face. "Hey, I think I dropped five phones in the bath while reading some erotic novel. I now have one of those waterproof iPhones."

"I am so stupid. I am madly in love with him, but am afraid of going out with him, and now Emily stole him."

"Sugar, the man is not dead, and it is just one date. Let's have some wine." Jeni said and put her arm around Aurora's shoulder. Together they walked to the fridge, where Aurora took out a wine bottle, while Jeni got them wine glasses.

"Is Rick going to be there at the meeting on Monday?" Jeni asked.

"Yes, why?"

"Well, there you go. Wear something that will make him forget Emily."

"I don't have anything that will do the trick."

"Then tomorrow we will go shopping Aurora."

"You think it may work?"

"Of course. I have just the thing in mind that will make his head spin. You are so much hotter and smarter than that cow." Jeni winked. "Now come, let's forget about Monday and Rick and have some wine. "

"You staying the night?" Aurora gasped.

"Of course, my best friend has an emergency." Jeni laughed.

“Thank you.” Aurora hugged Jeni and fought to keep back the tears. She could not wait to see the outfit Jeni had in mind, nor the expression on Ricks face. Jeni knew how to dress to impress.

Chapter 2: The Big Day

Satin bedding glided over Aurora's soft skin while a sharp shrill filled her bedroom. With a grunt, Aurora lifted her head from the pillow she was embracing and snoozed her alarm. 8:00 am. A second later Aurora bolted upright, her heart pounding. *It's Monday, today my life changes.* Aurora jumped up and sprinted for the bathroom to remove the pressure on her bladder. Relieved, Aurora stepped into the bath and opened the tap for the showerhead. Hot water mixed with sandalwood and lavender shower gel caressed her skin. Breaking all previous records, Aurora was done in the bathroom and stood in front of her bedroom dresser table. A sensual body-hugging low-cut dress already waited for her body. Jeni insisted she wore it, but Aurora had doubts. It was a business meeting after all. Aurora picked up the black see through underwear, Jeni's color; Aurora preferred pink. She chewed on her lower lip for a moment, then tossed the clothes on the bed. The knot in her stomach released. Sorry Jeni, I am just not as wild as you. Aurora selected a light grey smart business suit and see-through pink Victoria Secret underwear, just in case she did end up asking Rick out for a meal after the meeting.

A banana and apple served as breakfast while presentation high points milled in Aurora's head. Satisfied that she was as ready as she could be, she grabbed her laptop bag from the glass table in the dining room, her thick overcoat that hanged over the couch, and then headed out. With her company phone drowned, Aurora had to stand in the street to hail a cab. Icy morning air slammed into her face, reddening her cheeks. Aurora pulled the collars on her overcoat up. *As soon as the meeting is done, I will give the phone to the tech service department to replace.* Slush cracked when a yellow cab pulled up next to her.

"Hilton hotel." Aurora said when she jumped into the back seat. Cherry aroma enveloped Aurora, and her eyes widened. *Mom?* Confused she looked around, then relaxed and leaned back into the seat. A sent bottle swayed to and fro from the rear-view mirror. The cab fought through soft snowflakes that floated down,

and angry drivers filled with Monday morning road rage.

"Here we are." The driver said when he brought the cab to a stop. The clock on the dash next to the fare meter read 9:30 am, perfect timing. Aurora paid the cab, buttoned up her overcoat, and then jumped out. With fire in her step she headed for the hotel's lobby. Ignoring the cold, Aurora held her head high and nodded at the doorman when he opened the door. Entrances always mattered in business meetings. With purpose and squared shoulders Aurora approached the reception desk. Aurora resisted the urge to look around and search for Rick. She put a little more sway into her hips, just in case he watched her enter.

"Good morning. I am Aurora Newton from Investment International." Aurora smiled when she reached the reception.

"Good morning. How can I help you?"

"Was there packages deliver from my company to here?"

"Yes, it arrived Saturday. I personally accepted them." Aurora took a step back. *Saturday? Why Saturday, I hope they are still sealed.* Aurora's heart rate quickened.

"Where are the packages now?"

"I do not know."

The color drained from Aurora's face. An arctic shiver ran down her spine. She swallowed hard while panic threatened to overtake rational thought.

"What, what do you mean you do not know? Where is the meeting room?" Aurora stuttered.

"What meeting?" The clerk's eyebrows dipped and she scanned Aurora down and up for a moment. The world around Aurora started to crumble and she grabbed onto the reception desk.

"Investment International booked a meeting room for today for 30 people." Aurora said louder than she wished. The receptionist flipped through a book then looked up.

"The meeting was moved to Saturday past." The words slammed into Aurora. Her knees almost buckled. She was practically hanging onto the reception desk. Darkness closed in around her. Her heart beat raced. Her breathing was fast and

shallow.

"Why, why was it moved? Who changed the date?" Aurora blurted out in near panic. The receptionist dropped her gaze to her book.

"I don't know who changed the booking, but a Miss Emily Heart from Investment International ran the function on Saturday."

Aurora's knees gave in and she dropped to the floor. *No, this has to be a nightmare.* Her heart tried to burst through her chest. Aurora gasped for air. The receptionist's voice sounded miles away when she called Aurora's name, then for help. Aurora did not care who the receptionist called. No one could help her now. Seconds later, strong hands picked her up and carried her to a couch in the lobby. A damp cloth wiped the sweat from her brow.

"Drink this." A male voice said and a can of Coca-Cola was stuffed into Aurora's shaking hands. Warm male hands helped her hold the can while she took a few sips. Slowly, color returned to her face.

"I am Doctor Martin Harris, the hotel's doctor. How are you feeling?"

"Better thank you." Aurora lied. Dread formed a pit in her stomach. She struggled not to throw up.

"Is there someone we can call?"

"No thank you. I need to get to work."

"You almost fainted. I suggest you go to the hospital or at least home with someone."

"I will be okay, thank you. I just received bad news and need to get to work." Aurora slowly rose. Fire filled her eyes, and anger engulfed her heart. *Emily will die for this.*

"Thank you for the soda doctor. What do I owe you?"

"Don't worry about it, just get some rest."

Aurora nodded to the doctor then picked up her laptop bag that was placed next to the couch. She downed the last of the soda on her way to the door. The doorman opened the door and raised his hand to signal a cab.

"Are you sure you will be okay?" Doctor Harris called from

behind.

"Yes, thank you. I will be now." *But not Emily.*



The sun just started its descent for the day when Aurora's cab stopped in front of the complex Investment International was based in. Aurora's guardian angel sat on her shoulder and begged her not to go in, she threw him into the slush in the road. Aurora paid the cab and walked to the lobby, not bothering with her change. Stunned faces watched her pass security while she gave only short replies to greetings. The elevator ride to the ninth floor felt like ages, and angered Aurora more. *Rick better take my side in Emily stealing my deal, or he is dead as well.*

"Good day Aurora." Candice said when Aurora entered Investment International's reception area.

"Good day Candice." Aurora forced herself to smile.

"I am sorry." The sincerity in Candice's voice stopped Aurora dead. *Does everyone know?*

"Sorry for what?" Aurora demanded, causing Candice to look down.

"It is better if Mr. Rick tells you."

"I am sorry Candice, I did not mean it. It has been a rough day."

"I understand. Good luck." Candice did not dare to look Aurora in the eyes. Clenching her jaw, Aurora ignored the eyes that peeked over cubicle partitions while she walked to her office. *Bloody hell, the whole office knows already that Emily stole my deal.* Aurora's heart stopped when she rounded a corner in the passageway. A man was carrying her stuff out of her office. Aurora's face turned red and lava flowed through her veins. Two staff members in the passageway bolted out of her way and ducked into the nearest cubicles, then peered over the partitions at her.

"What the hell are you doing?" Aurora shouted and

stormed the man, but then stopped dead when something caught the corner of her eye. Slowly, she turned her head. In her office was a man painting lettering on the glass office door. *Senior Manager Emily Heart*. Aurora's left eye twitched, and an artery bulged on her temple. She balled her fists at her sides until her nails dug into her palms.

"We have been told to move these things to another office, one floor down." The man stuttered.

"One floor down." Aurora yelled, causing the man to cringe. The eight floor was for low level staff that worked on smaller projects. It took Aurora three years of working her butt off to get out of that dump. It took Emily only one, and a number of leg spreads.

"Put that down, I will be right back." Aurora hissed and then stormed down the passageway towards Rick's office. With each step, her blood pressure rose, while behind her, people slowly left their cubicles and piled in the passageway. Aurora ground her teeth when she stopped in front of Rick's office. The glass door was closed and all the blinds drawn.

"You are so handsome when you frown." Emily's laughter from behind the door cut into Aurora's heart. Aurora threw the door open with such force that it slammed against the wall. Glass exploded and littered the floor in shards. Emily shrieked and jumped behind Rick's desk.

"Aurora what the hell?" Rick gasped. He sat on the front of his desk and slowly stood.

"What the Fuck Rick. You let her steal my project and then give her my promotion?" Aurora shouted.

"No one stole your project or promotion. It is the company's project, and Emily worked just as hard on it as you, having just as much right for a promotion." Rick countered.

"I got all the doctors to go for the idea. I made the presentation files. I got the banks and places to invest the money. I got the legal documents needed. Fake boobs over there did nothing."

"Wow, wow, calm down Aurora." Rick said and held his

hands up.

"I am calm." Aurora snapped, then took a deep breath. "What the hell is going on with my office? Why is my stuff being moved downstairs?"

"The board was so impressed with Emily's performance on Saturday that they approved the suggestion that she be made senior manager early this morning. Emily and I decided to give you your own team as thank you for the work you put into the project."

"Approved the suggestion. You suggested her as senior manager?" Aurora gasped.

"Yes. I think Emily and I make a great team." Rick's words burned in Aurora's ears.

"You only suggest her for the promotion because she opened her legs for you the weekend." Aurora snapped. Rick opened his mouth, then closed it. For a moment he was totally taken aback, then composed himself.

"Aurora, we have been dating for a month now." Aurora's jaw dropped. Slowly, she looked from Rick to Emily and back. Rick had a concerned look on his face, while Emily's face gloated.

"You have been screwing her for a month now?" Aurora stuttered.

"What I do in my time is my business Aurora." Rick countered.

"You fucking asshole." Aurora hissed between her teeth. Anger, betrayal, hatred, shock and despair mixed in her body and went rampant with her emotions and mind. Her vision partially blurred and she could not think straight.

"Wow, never thought you had it in you." Emily laughed.

"Shut up you whore. You have been screwing him since the senior management position opened while planning behind my back to steal this deal." Aurora cut Emily down.

"Aurora wait..." Rick tried to step in.

"No you wait. You two have been planning this from the beginning. Waiting until I had everything ready and then went behind my back and closed the deal." Aurora screamed, drowning

out Rick's voice.

"Emily tried to get a hold of you on Saturday after the clients phoned her. They could not get a hold of you. The clients needed the meeting done Saturday. One doctor had to leave the country. What was I supposed to do?" Rick yelled back.

"You could have personally come and search for me, postpone the meeting, anything but call that slut in."

"Aurora you are going too far with your name calling. Please calm down." Rick held his hands up and took a step closer to Aurora.

"Don't you come near me with those hands." Aurora hissed.

"Maybe you should take the vacation you planned. It is already approved." Rick suggested.

"Vacation, vacation! So that you two can screw each other in my office while I am gone."

"You are valuable to this company, but you have gone too far now Aurora. You leave me no choice but to report your behavior to the board."

Emily snickered behind her hands. Aurora threw a death stare at Emily, then turned her gaze to Rick. The two locked eyes for a moment. Aurora launched forward and landed a solid punch on Rick's jaw. He dropped to the floor like a sack of potatoes.

"I hate you for sleeping with her. I loved you." Aurora yelled while Emily rushed over and hugged Rick. *Shit, what did I just do? What did I just say?* Aurora took a step back and covered her mouth with her hands.

"I am sorry Rick." Aurora blurted out.

"I did not know you felt this way about me Aurora. Please go before you do something that will get you arrested." Rick said while he slowly stood. He held his jaw with his hand, in obvious pain. Slowly he leaned back against his desk to stabilize himself.

"What is going on here?" Pat, the company security guard yelled from the door.

"Please escort Aurora out of the building as quietly as possible and revoke her access pass until further notice." Rick said

softly, trying to move his jaw as little as possible.

"Are you firing me?" Aurora gasped.

"Take the week off Aurora. You are a manager. It is not for me to decide your future in the company. There will be a formal board hearing when you come back."

Pat took Aurora by the arm and then gently led her out of the Rick's office. People bumped into each other while they scurried to get back to their cubicles.

"Best you walk out by yourself. It will look better that way Aurora. I will be a distance behind. I like you, but if you do not go, I will have to drag you out."

"Thank you Pat."

"Good luck Aurora."

Aurora squared her shoulders and took a deep breath. She held her head high while she walked to the reception area where she stopped in front of Candice.

"Can I please use your phone?"

A tear formed in Candice's eyes when she handed over the phone. Aurora smiled and placed her hand on Candice's shoulder. She gave Candice's shoulder a little squeeze, then dialed Jeni.

"Jeni Hello."

"Jeni, its Aurora."

"Hi, what's up sugar? How did the meeting go?"

"Can you meet me for a drink?"

"Oh shit. Yes, half an hour at our normal place?"

"Thank you Jeni."

"For you, anytime."

Aurora cut the call and handed the phone back to Candice then turned towards the elevator.

"I am sorry Miss Aurora. You deserved the promotion." Aurora slowly turned to face Candice.

"Don't worry Candice, it is not over." *I have enough dirt on Emily to bury her at the hearing.* Turning to Pat, she smiled. "Let's go Pat."

Chapter 3: Moving On

Freezing wind howled and tucked at overcoats and jackets while boots crushed ice under a grey sky. Inside the upscale New York restaurant the atmosphere was warm and inviting. A jazz band played music in the corner. Aurora slowly turned the wine glass in her hand while she watched life pass by through the floor to ceiling windows. She gave the red velvet liquid another swirl, then took a big sip.

"So, stop keeping me in suspense, what happened? You barely said a word since I arrived." Jeni demanded from across the table. Aurora finished her glass and then took a deep breath.

"Emily did the presentation on Saturday."

"What?"

"She closed the deal, and the board approved her promotion this morning. Rick actually had suggested her for promotion. By the time I got to the office, my stuff was already being moved out."

"Oh Aurora. I am so sorry." Jeni took Aurora's hands. "But when did Rick put the suggestion in?"

"Must have been the last week or so. They have been dating for a month."

"That cow. What did you say to them?"

"I called Emily and Rick a few names, and I punched Rick."

"You punched Rick, the company director? Crap. And now?"

"I sort of got suspended for a week. There will be a formal board hearing to see if I keep my job."

"Bloody hell, what a day Aurora." Jeni let go of Aurora's hands and called the server over by holding up her empty glass. The server nodded and quickly brought a wine bottle over and refilled their glasses.

"Have you decided on what you would like to eat?" The server asked.

"We better, or this wine is going straight to my head." Jeni laughed.

"I am not really hungry." Aurora mumbled then stared out the window.

"Two grilled chicken salads, extra feta, and keep the olives." Jeni ordered for both of them. The server gave Aurora a questioning look as to confirm the order.

"She will eat, don't you worry sugar." Jeni winked at the guy. Red faced the server glided away. Jeni had an Amazonian warrior's body and was well endowed. Together with her wild spirit, she gave the impression that a night with her, would be a night never to forget. Jeni studied Aurora for a moment, then leaned back in her chair. She ran her thumb over her lower lip while her mind switched into high gear.

"Do you think Rick will press charges?" Jeni asked.

Aurora went white and cupped her mouth. "I did not even think about it. I don't know. If he does, my career is destroyed. I will never get another job as an investment broker in New York. I would be a failure losing such good a job. I would never get a man, for what man would love a failure like me? Jeni, I am scared."

"Calm down sugar. What did Rick say after you punched him?"

"Well. Before he could say anything, I said that I loved him. He said that he did not know I felt that way about him. He seemed more shocked about what I said than the punch."

"Well, there you go. I am sure he will not press charges."

Aurora opened her mouth to reply but held her breath when the server placed their food on the table. With the adrenalin in her blood mostly depleted, hunger woke up in her. Aurora started on her salad while watching a couple enter the restaurant.

"Today is like the door Jeni."

"What do you mean?"

"Here we are all warm and cozy inside, and when we pass the doorway, in an instant, we are in the cold and harsh wind. Today my life changed from cozy to disaster in an instant."

"Okay, that's it. You are going to Cambodia to see Angkor Wat."

"I am?"

"Yes. I know you. When you get all philosophical like this, you crawl into your cocoon and sit at home eating ice-cream then cry yourself to sleep while hugging your pillow."

"What else is there to do?"

"Exactly. Can you do anything until the hearing, no. Will you have the time if you prove you did the work and get the senior manager position, no. Will you ever go if you lose your job, no. So, now is the time to go."

"What are you doing?" Aurora's eyebrows dipped when Jeni pulled out her cellphone and let her fingers run a marathon on it. Jeni ignored Aurora for a while, then looked up.

"Right, there is a flight later tonight to Siem Reap. We will finish our meal then go and pack your bags. We can book the ticket on your computer. You are going tonight."

"Just like that?" Aurora's heartbeat quickened. A mixture of excitement and fear flooded her body.

"Just like that." Jeni smiled. "It will be fun. Who knows, maybe you will even meet someone to wipe away the cobwebs down there and clear your mind of Rick."

"Cobwebs?" Aurora coughed and almost dropped her glass. Tears formed in her eyes while wine came out her nose. While trying to catch her breath, she cleaned her face up with a napkin.

"Honesty, when was the last time you had sex, and I do not mean your hand." Just then the server arrived to check on them. Aurora and the server both turned bright red.

"Close your mouth sugar." Jeni winked at the server. "Aurora, if you are afraid that you are out of practice, I am sure sugar over here will be glad to help you remember the bedroom moves." The server tried to protest and brought his hands up, knocking Aurora's wine glass. Red velvet bled into white table cloth.

"I am sorry." The guy stuttered and grabbed a napkin then patted the tablecloth down.

"Calm down sugar. She did not say yes yet." Jeni snickered and gave the guy a light pat on the bum.

"You are unbelievable." Aurora giggled. The server gave the two a confused look, not knowing what to do.

"You can go. I will call you if she says yes." Jeni waved him away with a smile. When the server scurried away, Aurora and Jeni looked at each other, and then burst out laughing.

"There's my bubbly friend." Jeni said and hi-fived Aurora.

"Okay, seriously now. You really think I should go?" Aurora asked, then started on her salad again.

"Definitely. You have that guide book I told you about, and I will give you my itinerary and hotels I stayed in. Nothing to worry about."

"This is actually so exciting. I do not even know what to pack. I have never done anything without triple planning."

"Aurora, sugar. Cambodia is hot and the backpacker men even hotter. The less clothes you take, the better." Jeni smiled, causing them both to burst out laughing.

"You make it sound like I am going on a sex trip." Aurora said when she finally stopped laughing.

"Well, there are nice temples to see between sheets and naked massages."

Aurora let the comment slide. They finished their wine and salad in silence, and then sat for a moment looking at the snow coming down outside.

"Shall we go pack?" Aurora energetically asked.

"You betcha." Jeni motioned for the server to come over. "Sorry sugar, Aurora has a headache, maybe another day. You can bring us the bill." Jeni's comment drew a stern look from Aurora. The server's shoulders hung slightly when he walked away. Minutes later, he was back and silently placed the bill on the table without looking up. Aurora and Jeni settled the bill, splitting it, then stood.

"Thank you." The server smiled when he saw the generous tip.

"This is for being a good sport." Aurora said, then grabbed him by the lapels and kissed him.

"Wow." The server uttered when Aurora let him go and

walked away.

"What was that?" Jeni laughed and gently hit Aurora on the shoulder when they left the restaurant.

"I have no idea what came over me." Aurora blurted out, then did a twirl.

"Girl, you are hornier than I thought. Have you actually ever asked a guy out for even a coffee?"

"No."

Jeni shook her head, then flagged down a cab. "Let's go argue about what goes in your backpack." Jeni laughed while they climbed into the cab.



Jeni stretched her legs out on Aurora's couch, then wiggled her toes in her pink and orange striped socks while she balanced Aurora's computer on her lap. While balancing a cup of green tea with honey in her left hand, her right hand tickled the keys on the laptop. Jeni shifted her weight, and then glanced at Aurora next to her in the bean bag.

"Aurora. When are you going to get some proper furniture in this place, like a decent couch?"

"I have what I need."

"Sugar, just because your grandmother did not allow you to have anything in life when she raised you does not mean you cannot allow yourself some luxuries. You deserve to spoil yourself. You work hard for it."

"Please don't go there, not tonight. Leave my grandmother in her grave please."

"Sorry. Right, over two years on your passport as you said, should be enough." Jeni changed the subject and replaced the plaster on a festering wound in Aurora's heart.

"Should be?"

"Depends on how difficult it is to get Rick out of your mind."

"Jeni!"

"Just saying."

"It is okay Jeni. You do not need to buy the flight tickets for me. I can afford it."

"I know, but if I leave it up to you to buy, then you are going to fret for days about what the best flights are and what hotels to stay in, and never go."

"Hey, I like to plan ahead." Aurora countered.

"Like 50 years ahead." Jeni laughed.

"I like to plan every detail. That's what makes me good at my job."

"And boring on a date." Jeni snickered. "I am also booking you a room in a dorm with the flight, lots of hunks just for you."

"No, No. Not a dorm in a backpacker place. I want a single room in a hotel." Aurora gasped then struggled to get out of the bean bag. She rolled onto the floor and rapidly crawled on all fours to Jeni who laughed while she held the laptop in the air and pushed a button.

"Done." Jeni exclaimed proudly, then furrowed her brow when she lowered the laptop. "Houston, we may have a problem." Jeni said under her breath.

"What have you done Jeni?"

"Well, I accidentally booked you a ticket to Bangkok."

"Bangkok? I don't want to go to Bangkok. I want to go to Siem Reap and see Angkor Wat. How did you manage that?"

"It is not my fault. It is yours. You rushed me when I was checking to see the price difference in flying to Bangkok first."

"Cancel it....Jeni?"

"It is nonrefundable."

"What? Why?"

"I wanted to make sure you do not change your mind sugar. Just looking out for you."

Aurora shook her head and then crawled back to her bean bag.

"Now what Jeni?"

"Just hang around Bangkok for a day then take a bus over

to Cambodia and fly back from there."

"No, if I am going, then I am going directly to Angkor Wat. That is why I am going over. To realize a dream." Aurora snapped.

"Okay okay. You are as stubborn as you are meticulous. It is not a problem. Almost all hotels and backpacker places sell bus tickets from Bangkok to Siem Reap. When you land, just ask a tuk tuk to take you to the hotel I booked you a room, and then buy a bus ticket and off you go, simple. And if you are tired, you already have a room booked, see." Jeni smiled.

"How long is the trip from Bangkok to Siem Reap?"

"Eight hours about."

"Ahhh, you are killing me Jeni. Now I need ice cream. You want some?" Aurora said then lazily got out of the beanbag.

"Vanilla?"

"Only for you Jeni."

"Thanks sugar."

"I do not know how you can eat that stuff."

"I open my mouth, chew, and then swallow, easy."

"Very funny."

Aurora opened her fridge and took out two small tubs of Haagen-Dazs ice cream. She turned the chocolate-chip ice cream tub twice over. She loved chocolate ice cream with the same passion she hated vanilla. Each, reminded her of a person she lost. Aurora walked back and handed Jeni her ice cream and a spoon, then ran her hand over the back of the couch. The thick woven fabric was slightly rough to the touch. Memories of her mother cradling her and breasts feeding her flooded back. *Strange how I can remember that from so long ago, and I cannot remember much of my life growing up with grandmother.*

"You done daydreaming? Shall we pack?" Jeni asked and stood.

"Lead on." Aurora said then followed Jeni to the bedroom where clothes were already spread out over the futon. Aurora scoffed her ice-cream down on the way.

"Is the backpack big enough?" Aurora asked and glanced at the blue Eagle Creek backpack next to her futon. She had bought

it two weeks before on a recommendation from Jeni.

"Was for me. It's 70 liters with an added 24 liters removable day bag. Now, let's get started." Jeni picked up a bunch of underwear and threw them at the top of the bed. "These can stay."

"No. I want extra underwear." Aurora countered.

"You are going for a week. Why do you insist on taking so much clothes?"

"You never know. They may not have a washing machine. I like being clean."

"Aurora. They have laundromats all over, and a little dirt will do you some good. Now forget about all those warm clothes you set out. It is warm there."

"I read it is the rainy season and cold now." Aurora countered.

"Sugar. Their winter is our summer. Let me handle the packing."

"No. If I leave it to you Jeni, you will pack only skin tight T-shirts and shorts."

"That will improve your chances of getting a guy." Jeni snorted then picked up a pillow. "Dam you are stubborn." Jeni knocked Aurora over the head with the pillow. Aurora's jaw dropped and she grabbed a pillow as well and returned the favor. A full-on pillow fight erupted ending with Aurora and Jeni panting where they lay spread out over the bed.

"Nice going Jeni. Now all my clothes are wrinkled." Aurora giggled. Jeni gave Aurora one last hit with the pillow and then looked at her watch.

"Crap Aurora. We need to get going."

"Oh hell, where did the time go?" Aurora blurted out and then jumped up. Both just grabbed random clothes on the futon and then stuffed it into the backpack.

"Get your passport and special wallet." Jeni said and grabbed the smaller backpack and stuffed a change of clothes in it as well as make up and other toiletries that can go in hand luggage. Jeni had given up on getting Aurora to carry a clutch purse instead of her Rip Curl surfer wallet that she bought in Miami.

"Okay, you are set. There is a change of clothes in here for you. It is 19 hours to Malaysia. Freshen up on the airport on your lay over. From there it is only a few hours flight to Bangkok. Put your laptop, passport and wallet in here. Keep this bag with you at all times." Jeni handed Aurora the smaller backpack and then picked up the larger one. "Hell Aurora. What did you pack?" Jeni strained under the weight.

"Just what I thought was needed." Aurora laughed.

"Well come along then." Jeni said then pulled out her phone. She ordered an Uber pick up while she struggled out of the apartment.

"10 minutes and our ride is here." Jeni shouted over her shoulder while she continuously pressed the elevator button. Behind her Aurora locked up. Giving up on the elevator, Jeni made for the stairs with Aurora in tow. Aurora shivered when the cold January New York wind hit her in the face. With Cambodia being a lot warmer, she dressed in demin pants, a T-Shirt, and a wind breaker. There was no use to lug around and overcoat. Like two hyperactive kids waiting for the time to open birthday presents, they joked until a silver SUV pulled up next to the curb.

"To the airport James. In a jiffy." Jeni exclaimed in a mocking voice when the driver climbed out. Laughing, he opened the back of the SUV, helped Jeni with the backpack and then opened the doors for them. Introductions were done on the fly while they closed the doors and sped off. Jeni glanced back to the overstuffed backpack. *I don't think that will make the weight limit.* Jeni turned and then started to flirt with the driver.

Aurora watched the buildings flash by while Jeni was deep in conversation with the driver. *I am really doing this. I am going to see Angkor Wat. Aurora's heart pounded in her chest. I have only flown once before, and that was with Jeni to Miami. Miami with its stunning beaches. Aurora sighed and gave a sideways glance at Jeni. Thank goodness Jeni knew better than to try to drag me in into the deep ocean. She even elbowed a guy in the face for trying to drag me deeper than hip level in. Thank you Jeni for protecting me. With all my karate training, I could not even defend myself.* The scar on Aurora's left

hand started to itch, and she rubbed it gently. Even though she was only four at the time, the event was burned into her memory. That was the day she died and lost both her parents in a drowning accident. They were on their way to visit her grandmother in Minnesota when the car skidded out on ice and plowed through the barrier. It careened down the embankment and crashed through the ice layer on top of the river running next to the road. Shivers ran through Aurora when the memory of ice water engulfing her flashed in front of her. Instantly she was back in the car, four years old, and dying. Her mother's scream gnawed at her nerves. She had tried to reach her mother from where she was on the back seat, but the safety harness kept her back. A shiver rippled through Aurora and her throat closed off. Her body froze while ice water spilled over her head. Aurora gasped for air but got only water. Her heart stopped and she died. If it was not for....

"You okay sugar?" Jeni's voice ripped Aurora back to reality. "Holy shit Aurora, you are covered in cold sweat." Jeni gasped when she took a good look at Aurora. Jeni placed her hand on Aurora's chest. "Bloody hell girl, you are going to have a heart attack. I am sorry. I did not know you are this nervous about going. We can turn around. It's okay."

"No, no, I am okay. I have to go. I was just remembering that day."

"Oh sugar." Jeni said and hugged Aurora tightly. Tears flowed freely between the two. They held each other for a long time, and then slowly let go.

"I am so lucky to have a friend like you." Aurora sniffed.

"Babe, you are my sugar, and I would not change you for anyone."

"Not even that hunk of a firefighter you are now dating?" Aurora laughed and wiped away the tears.

"Damn girl, you make it hard to be friends with you, but yes, not even him." Jeni laughed. Aurora took a deep breath when the airport came into view. *If Jeni only knew that I am scared to death she would probably fly with. But I have to do this, alone. I do not know why, but it is as if the rest of my life awaits me across the ocean. No matter*

what Jeni says, I do not care about finding a guy. Aurora blushed slightly when the little sluts in her stomach dived down to between her legs, and her rose buds hardened. *Who am I kidding, a night or two of action would be great. Just as long as the guy knows it is only fun, no strings attached. The last thing I need is a guy following me back to Manhattan.*

"You coming?" Jeni's voice ripped Aurora from her hot embrace with a stud at some remote jungle temple. Confused she looked around. Jeni stood outside the cab next to her bags. Thanking the Uber driver, Aurora jumped out and grabbed the smaller bag when Jeni handed it to her.

"Not a moment to lose, your flight is almost boarding." Being stronger built than Aurora, Jeni effortlessly slung the big bag over her shoulders and dashed to the airport entrance. Knowing the airport like the palm of her hand, Jeni made a beeline for the check in counters while she glided between travelers. Aurora struggled to keep up, apologizing to each person she bumped into, just to bump into another when she turned to apologize. Twice, she lost sight of Jeni. With the airport being heated and the sprint after Jeni making her sweat, Aurora took off her wind breaker and tied it around her waist. When there was an opening, Aurora dashed forward to be directly behind Jeni. With a thud Aurora crashed into Jeni when she suddenly stopped.

"What's wrong?" Aurora gulped when Jeni slowly turned around.

"Well. I kind of remembered the time of your flight to Cambodia, but you are going to Bangkok."

"So?"

"Well, your flight is not checking in, in the next 45 minutes as I thought." Jeni pointed to a flight roster board in front of them.

"How long do I have?"

"About three hours." Jeni blushed and pointed to Aurora's flight number way down on the list.

"Well. Let's check the bag in and then get something to eat." Aurora smiled and continued to the check in counters ahead of them. Being early, there were few travelers in front of Aurora, and

soon it was her turn. Jeni placed the large backpack on the scale while Aurora handed over her passport. The flight attendant let her fingers walk over her terminal keyboard, and then stopped and glanced at the numbers on the scale.

"The bag is overweight. It cannot be checked in."

"Can we not pay extra for overweight?" Aurora asked.

"Sorry. Not on your class. Plus your bag is over even overweight regulations. You will have to take some stuff out."

"Okay." Jeni said and pulled the backpack from the scale, then dumped it on the ground.

"What are you doing?" Aurora gasped when Jeni zipped the backpack open and started pulling out clothes.

"What I should have done in your apartment, pack the bag for you. Now stand back, I got this sugar." Aurora covered her face with her hands when people stared while Jeni laid bare her most private clothes.

"Do you want the pink or black underwear?" Jeni asked matter of fact.

"Don't care." Aurora mumbled still covering her face.

"Excuse me sir. Do you think she would look better in the pink or black underwear?" Jeni asked when a man walked past. Aurora's heart stopped and she ripped her head up.

"Jeni...." Aurora's jaw dropped when she locked eyes with the guy, her thoughts disappeared like mist in the sun. His piercing blue eyes left her spellbound, and the world around her disappeared. Aurora's eyes follow his when he slowly turned his gaze to the two see-through bra's Jeni held up.

"She would look stunning in anything she wears. But I like the pink."

Aurora's eyes followed every movement of the guy's lips. Succulent kissable lips. Taking a deep breath, Aurora cleared her throat and then straightened herself.

"Thank you for your help sir." Aurora blushed. The guy gave a perfect smile. Aurora's heart skipped a beat. His earthy perfume with a hint of patchouli tickled her nose.

"Name's Chase." Chase said, then leaned forward and held

out his hand.

"Aurora." Aurora looked down when her hand automatically took Chase's. Chase nodded, then pulled her hand up and gently kissed the back of her hand, sending a shockwave through her body. The little sluts in her stomach woke up and alerted the rest of her body. Aurora's eyes flowed over Chase's body, taking in the strong broad shoulders, athletic but muscular arms, narrow waist and firm legs. Chase was about her age, maybe a year or two older. With his short black hair and muscles flexing under his T-shirt, Aurora's hormones kicked in overdrive. She had been attracted to men before. But Chase did something to her she had never felt before. A yearning to be with him burned deep inside her. Aurora sighed softly when Chase let go of her hand. Looking down, Aurora's face reddened. Her ripe rose buds could cut steel and announced their need for attention through her shirt. Quickly she folded her arms over her aching swollen twin orbs.

"Well, I will leave you then. Have a nice flight Aurora." Chase said, then reluctantly turned. Aurora gasped. Chase had the perfect ass. Aurora's breathing increased and she drooled over him. Chase's clothes could not hide his muscular Greek Spartan warrior physique or the fact that he was super fit and toned. The way he walked screamed confidence, as if the world could collapse around him, and he would not break a sweat. Aurora's body begged her to throw herself at Chase and kiss him, but her mind refused.

"Join us for coffee." Aurora blurted out. Chase stopped, then turned and walked back to Aurora. Turmoil showed on his face while he gave Aurora a once over. Something deep inside Chase awoke. Something he thought he killed a long time ago. *Aurora is breathtakingly beautiful, and it will do you some good to have a chat with a girl again. But my flight. You have time or get another flight. I work with loads of drop dead beautiful women clad in bikinis every day that throw themselves at me. All they want is just fun, why would she be different? Why will she not break my heart as well? All she probably wants is to party and have sex with some random guy on vacation, then go home and brag to all her friends about it. Maybe even*

use me to make a boyfriend that dumped her jealous. That will never happen again.

"I would love to. But I am late for my flight."

"Where are you flying to?" Aurora asked when Chase turned.

"Cambodia." Chase said over his shoulder and walked away. Aurora's heart dropped to the floor while she watched Chase disappear into the crowd. The last she saw of him was his perfect ass and arms. Arms she could fall into. Strong arms that could hold her all night with their naked bodies pressed together. Jeni touched her shoulder and Aurora jerked her head around.

"You okay Aurora?"

"Why did you book a ticket to Bangkok? I could have flown to Cambodia with Chase." Aurora snapped, then put her hands over her mouth. "I am sorry Jeni. I did not mean it. I don't know where that came from."

"Oh come here Sugar." Jeni said and hugged Aurora. "I am sorry about the flight. Maybe you will see him at Angkor Wat."

"You really think so?"

"It is the one place people go to when going to Cambodia. Chances are good you might see him again. Now help me lighten your bag so we can check it in."

Chapter 4: Time To Go

Travelers rushed passed Aurora where she stood holding a plastic bag containing her extra clothes, while Jeni pilfered an airport snack shop. Triumphant, Jeni joined her with a bag of trophies.

"Stuff this in your small backpack." Jeni said and handed the shopping bag over.

"What did you buy?" Aurora asked and peaked in the bag.

"Healthy snack bars for your flight, and baby wet wipes."

"Baby wet wipes? And what exactly am I supposed to do with that? Tissues are used for tears Jeni." Aurora joked.

"Duh. When you get to Kuala Lumpur, in Malaysia, you will stink. I know how you like to smell nice. So go to a bathroom, strip down, wash the stinky bits then change clothes." Jeni said while she rolled her eyes.

"Yeh, sorry, forgot it is a long flight." Aurora laughed.

"Okay, come." Jeni grabbed Aurora by the arm and pulled her along to an Apple store.

"An iPhone 7 plus, 128GB, Red edition." Jeni said when they entered the store.

"No, No wait Jeni. That is too expensive. The work will replace my phone. Well, if I have a job when I come back."

"Aurora. I am not going to let you run around Cambodia seeing temples without taking pictures and emailing me. The 3G coverage there is excellent, so you can call me on Skype anytime you need me. You can get a Sim card from the hotel I told you to stay at. They swap out Sims as backpackers come and go."

"Yes, but an iPhone 7 plus. I cannot afford it."

"I know. But I can. It is my present to you for finally going to Angkor Wat. I want you to take lots of pictures." Jeni turned to the sales technician. "Make that a 256GB one."

"Thank you Jeni. I don't know what to say."

"Just promise me you will have loads of fun. Okay now. Did you set your phone to automatically back up your data on iCloud?"

"Yes."

"Right, give your details to the sales guy, so he can set your phone up and download all your stuff while I settle the bill." Aurora moved over to the sales technician when he brought a box from the back of the store while Jeni moved to the counter. Expertly the sales technician helped Aurora set up her phone. With the store's lightning-fast internet they downloaded all her apps and backed up data in a few minutes. After setting up her private email address, Aurora quickly sent an email to Dorothy to inform her that she will be going to Cambodia and if Dorothy could please inform her if she heard anything at work.

"You all done?" Jeni asked when she came to stand next to Aurora.

"Yes, thank you."

"My pleasure. Now, here is the receipt for when you come back so that customs do not give you any hassle. Come let's go eat." Jeni turned to the store's exit then stopped when Aurora gave the sales technician a hug, bringing a smile to Jeni's face.

"Thank you for all your help." Aurora said and then let the guy go before following Jeni, who was making a beeline for her favorite restaurant at the airport. Both have had an enjoyed a number of meals in the restaurant when Jeni flew out for work. This time, the tables were turned. Jeni worked for a large software firm, and although she was a computer nerd, she was a punk at the same time. Probably what made her so irresistible to men. Not to mention her strong figure and solid double D natural breasts. Jeni chose a table near the corner of the restaurant and winked for a server when she sat down.

"Two ice waters with lemon and two chicken and mayo wraps please." Jeni ordered when a server came over. Jeni turned to Aurora, "And for you?" The waiter took a step back, and both girls burst out laughed. Realizing he had been fooled, the waiter joined their laughter and then left to fill the order. Silence hung between Aurora and Jeni until the server returned.

"Your orders." The server said and placed their food down. Jeni looked the server up and down.

"Aurora here is going to Cambodia to find a random guy to

shag to get over her boss who dumped her. I do not want her to go. Will you please shag her, so she can get over her dick boss and stay?" Jeni said with a straight face. Aurora snorted lemon water and almost dropped her glass. Tears ran down her eyes while she coughed up water drops. The server stood emotionless while he watched Aurora catch her breath, then turned to face Jeni.

"Actually, I am kind of hot for you." The server said and smiled at Jeni, who turned blood red, causing Aurora to burst out laughing.

"It is not just any man who can make Jeni blush." Aurora giggled and held her hand up, then hi-fived the server.

"Well now, straight to the point. My kind of guy." Jeni said and slipped a business card from her purse and handed it to the server.

"When do you come back from your trip?" The server asked when he took the business card.

"She is going. I am not." Jeni winked.

"How much time do you still have?"

"Just under an hour to get to the security checkpoints." Aurora answered.

"Food is on me. Aurora, enjoy your trip. Jeni, come and see me when she cleared security." The server said, nodded and then walked away.

"I am in love." Jeni sighed when held her hand to her heart.

"What about that fire fighter guy?"

"We broke up two days ago."

"What? And you did not tell me?" Aurora gave Jeni a fake cross look while putting her fists on her hips.

"I did not want to bother you with that with all you are going through. Besides, you know me. If I do not have a guy, I probably have eight." Both girls burst out laughing.

"Right, eat up. You have a long flight ahead." The sound of food being crushed filled the air for a few minutes, then Jeni stopped and looked at Aurora.

"Aurora. I could not help but notice how you reacted to Chase. He just looked at you, and you turned into a love struck

puppy.”

“I know. I could not think straight, all I wanted to do was throw myself at him right there.”

“I have never heard you ask any guy to join you for coffee.”

“Weird. I just felt so comfortable with him. I just lost myself in his eyes. Oh and his ass, man don’t get me started on his ass.”

“Wow. I have never heard you talking like that about any guy, not even Rick.”

“The moment he walked away it felt like my heart was ripped from my chest. I just wanted to run after him. It’s not logical right?”

“No, it is called being in love.”

Aurora burst out laughing and wiped the tears from her face. “Jeni, you cannot fall in love with one meeting.”

“Maybe not. But promise me. If you do happen to run into him in Cambodia that you will not shy away as with Rick and at least have some fun even if it leads nowhere.”

Aurora looked at the other travelers entering and exiting the restaurant, then at Jeni.

“Okay. I promise if we meet to have fun even if it leads nowhere. Now, shall we go get me checked in.”

Chapter 5: Blood Lust

Kuala Lumpur international airport, Malaysia

A sea of travelers passed Aurora without giving her a moment's thought. She was just a number. All her accomplishments and status as a manager, suddenly meant nothing. Aurora moved to a wall and leaned with her back against it, then closed her eyes. *Am I really ready to do this all on my own? Maybe I should go back and first see what happens at the hearing.* Aurora took a deep breath. *No. I am doing this on my own.* Aurora composed herself, then made her way towards the nearest bathroom. After a fifteen-minute wait, a toilet opened and Aurora jumped inside the cubicle before anyone could take her place. Inside, Aurora shook her head. *What is it about men that they can just walk into a bathroom and find no line waiting?* She locked the door, and then hung her small backpack on the hook attached to the door. Aurora pulled off her T-shirt and smelled an armpit. Turning her nose up, she stripped down, then took out the wet wipes and had a Nasa Space Station bath. After a short layover, she had a two hours flight to Bangkok. Aurora took the fresh set of clothes from her backpack and then dressed. Satisfied that she can pass as a human, Aurora placed the stinky clothes in a plastic bag and then stuffed it into her backpack. After zipping the backpack up, Aurora looked around the toilet for toilet paper. She always placed toilet paper over the toilet rim in public toilets. Aurora's brow furrowed.

"You got to be kidding me." Aurora thought out loud when she picked up a water hose with a nozzle on the end. Jeni had told her that toilet paper was not commonly used in Asia, but Aurora did not expect to be washing her bum so soon. Taking out one of the wet wipes, Aurora sanitized the toilet seat then sat down and let nature do its thing. A little bit lighter, Aurora shifted forward on the seat and then tried the water hose. Hot water shot out.

"Wow." Aurora gasped, then adjusted the water spray to clear her bum. Standing up, Aurora looked at the water running down her legs. *What now? How are you supposed to get your ass dry?*

Pulling out another wet wipe, she wiped most of the water off her legs and bum, then pulled her pants up. Shaking her head, she smiled. *I am not even in Cambodia, and the fun has already started.* With her flight being a connected flight bought as one ticket, her large backpack was automatically loaded for her onto the next flight, or so she hoped. Aurora did a bit of window shopping, then cleared security and found a coffee shop near her boarding gate that smelled inviting. Any coffee shop that sold Aurora's delight got her approval.

Aurora slowly turned the cup around in her hands, then licking the last off hazelnut and chocolate topped Caffè latte from her lips. *What am I going to do if I lose my job? Hell, what am I going to do if I have to work under Emily? All my life I pushed for the top to impress grandmother, yet she never was impressed with anything I accomplished. With her gone, why am I still so obsessed with reaching the top? For who am I doing it? I don't even know what I want in life and what will make me happy.* Aurora sighed and put the empty cup down, then stood and walked to her boarding gate. *Maybe I will find the answers in Cambodia.*



Suvarnabhumi, Bangkok international airport, Thailand

Dust and humidity hung thick in the air. Hooters beeped from all sides while scooters, tuk tuks and buses swarmed the streets. The smell of chicken, fish, sausages, and bread being roasted over open fires mixed with the smog of exhaust smoke. Aurora watched while travelers rushed past her to tuk tuks and cabs, all needing to be somewhere else other than the airport. *So this is Bangkok.* With a temporary visitor's visa stamp in her passport, she was ready for the next leg of her journey, eight hours to Siem Reap in Cambodia.

"You want tuk tuk to hotel?" A local asked next to her, his scooter making a put put noise as it threatened to die. The carriage he pulled reminded Aurora of an old horse-drawn carriage, only this one was drawn by a noisy and smelly scooter.

"Yes, this hotel." Aurora replied and showed him the name and address on her phone of the hotel Jeni book by accident.

"No no, no good hotel. I take you to better one."

"No. I planned this hotel. Take me there."

"Okay, your money." The driver said and picked up her large backpack and put it on the floor of the tuk tuk. Aurora hopped in and took the back seat. The tuk tuk had two bench seats that could seat three people each, and faced inwards. Aurora fell back in her seat when the tuk tuk launched forward. She was about to laugh at his pull away, when fear choked her. Nothing Jeni told her could prepare her for the swarm of cars, buses, motorcycles, bicycles, and tuk tuks that attacked them from all angles. It looked like she was in the middle of a beehive. Multiple times she fell forward and crashed into the seat in front when the driver had to make an emergency stop to avoid an accident. Twice she almost fell out of the tuk tuk when he swerved wildly out of the way of oncoming traffic, one being a bus.

"There you go." The driver said when he brought the tuk tuk to a screeching halt. Aurora almost jumped out and kissed the ground, but froze when she saw the hotel.

"That? That is not a hotel. That is a dump." Aurora exclaimed while her eyes took in the hotel that reflected her life and mood. It was a pit stop for the lonely and desperate.

"You want better?" The driver asked and jumped on his scooter.

"No. I am not staying, just getting a bus ticket to Siem Reap."

The driver just shrugged and helped her take her bag off the tuk tuk. After paying him, Aurora slugged her bag inside the rundown reception area. A mixture of sweat, urine, vomit, and stale food made Aurora gag while her eyes adjusted to the dimly lit interior with its depressing dark stained wood walls. A ceiling fan that turned so slow flies easily landed and took off, failed to lift the humidity that pressed down on Aurora and sapped the last of her strength. Aurora dropped her bags on the beer stained tile floor and approached the worn down bar counter that doubled as

a reception desk.

"Welcome. How many nights are you staying?" The receptionist's open smile brightened up the place a bit, and gave Aurora some comfort.

"Hello. Do you sell bus tickets to Siem Reap?"

"Yes."

"Awesome. How much." Aurora energetically opened her wallet.

"Do you want a room?"

"No, I want a bus ticket to Siem Reap."

"Cannot do."

"I thought you said you sell bus tickets." Aurora's voice had a hint of annoyance mixed with shock.

"I do."

"So why can't I get a bus ticket?"

"No bus," The woman smiled. "You want room?"

"Where is the bus?"

"Gone to Cambodia, come back early tomorrow, you go then. You want room?"

Aurora clenched her jaw. Well, as Jeni said, at least I have a reservation.

"I have a reservation." Aurora brought up the reservation on her phone.

"\$15. You pay now." The woman held out her hand. A small voice nagged at Aurora to do as the guidebook said, to see the room first, but she dismissed it. She was too tired to want to argue about a room. It is only one night, how bad can it be?

"Okay, one night, and a bus ticket to Siem Reap."

"\$35 dollars."

Aurora handed over the money, and then frowned when the woman gave her a piece of paper.

"What's this?"

"Your bus ticket."

Aurora looked again at the piece of paper. All that was written on the paper was, Paid One.

"This is my bus ticket?"

"Yes, bus come pick you up tomorrow at 7am, do not be late. Your room is on the second floor, no 3." The woman dropped a room key on the desk. "The W-Fi password is on the back of the key tag."

"Thank you." Aurora took the key and headed up the narrow wooden stairs behind the reception desk. With effort, Aurora reached her room. The stink and noise were less on the second floor, giving her some relieve. The door lock fought Aurora for a second, and then the room door creaked open. A moldy smell hit Aurora in the face when she stepped into the room. As the reception, the walls were dark stained wood. A bare incandescent light hung by a wire in the center of the ceiling and fought the darkness alone. Aurora put her backpack down on a red plastic chair to the left of the door, then locked the door. Quickly, she tested the double bed behind the chair. Clean sheets. An archway to the right of the room led Aurora to the bathroom with a shower next to the toilet. The partially tiled floor had a drain in the floor for both the shower water and the washbasin water.

This is it? Aurora took a deep breath and quickly splashed water on her face from the wash basin, then undressed. Being naked helped a bit for the heat. She rolled her clothes in a neat bundle and placed it on top of her bags. Exhausted, she dropped onto the bed, pulled a pillow closer and imagined she was hugging Chase. *At least Emily cannot get you.* While sleep washed over Aurora, the room came alive, there was fresh blood to be had.



Four hours later, Aurora slowly opened her eyes. For a moment, she lay frozen while her eyes struggled to focus on something small that moved towards her lips on the pillow. Aurora's eyes focused on the object. Her brain argued reality for a moment, then accepted the horrific truth. A bed bug was on its way to give her a kiss. Aurora ripped her head up, then ran her eyes over her naked body covered in bed bugs. A shiver ran through her and

goosebumps formed on her skin. All around her on the bed were bed bugs crawling around as they waited in line to feast. Some had paid the ultimate price after having drunk her blood when Aurora rolled over them in her sleep. Red stains on the white bed sheet marked their graves on the battlefield.

"Shit shit shit." Aurora yelled and jumped off the bed then brushed as much of the bedbugs off as she could while bolting for the shower. Ice-cold water hit Aurora's body, almost stopping her heart.

"Come on. Is it too much to expect warm water?" Aurora yelled while she slapped a few bed bugs off her legs. Bracing the cold, she washed herself all over, then let her hair hang down while the water ran over it. Aurora cringed when bedbugs streamed out of her hair. When she had most of them out, she rushed to her main backpack and pulled out a small bottle of shampoo. She ground her teeth while bed bugs crawled over her back and legs. Rushing back to the shower, she washed her hair multiple times as well as herself. When the shampoo bottle was empty, she finally stopped.

Aurora stood shivering from shock and the cold. No towel decorated the bathroom. *Right Jeni, most hotels have towels, except the one I stay in.* Her teeth clattered and Aurora hugged herself then rushed over to her large bag. She pulled out a T-shirt, then rushed back to the shower. She stood on the tiles and looked for any enemy movement around her. Finding none, her strained nerves relaxed. Aurora dried herself as best she could with the T-shirt, and then stood undecided as what to do. *Thank goodness I at least followed one tip from the guide book and placed my bag on the chair.* As the chair was plastic, the bed bugs could not reach her bag and claim it. Aurora stared in horror at the blood-sucking critters while they patrolled the bed in search of her body. The hair at the back of her neck stood up, and a cold shiver ran down her spine. *What now?* As if on cue, her bladder alerted her as to why she had awoken in the first place. Aurora hung the T-shirt where a towel should hang, and then sat down on the toilet, thankful that there at least was a proper toilet and not just a hole in the ground she

heard was common in cheaper places in Asia. Aurora closed her eyes and relaxed her body. Seconds later her bladder started to empty then stopped. Aurora's eyes shot open and she ripped her gaze down. A massive cockroach at least 8 inches long climbed up between her legs. Aurora's heart thrashed in her chest.

"Shit." Aurora shouted and jumped up. For a second everything was upright, then the ceiling came into view when she slipped on the wet tiles. Aurora landed hard on her bum. Undeterred, the cockroach continued on its path over her right inner thigh. Aurora slammed it off her thigh and sent it skidding across the bathroom floor. To her horror, as soon as it stopped, it came scurrying back for more naked body hugging.

"No you don't." Aurora yelled and jumped up, then grabbed the toilet water hose. She blasted the cockroach into the corner and held it there for a few seconds, until it took flight. With a screech Aurora ducked, but it was too late. The cockroach landed in her hair and went wild. Without thinking Aurora grabbed the cockroach in her hair and crushed it. Cockroach guts ran over her head and hand. Nausea rose up in Aurora. Her stomach heaved and she spilled all she had. Leaning against the wall, she gasped for air while her stomach tried to force out that what was not there anymore. Just as she regained control of her body, she glanced at her hand. The partially crushed cockroach was still stuck to her hand, with its legs wriggling. Aurora flicked it off at the same time as she bent double and coughed up what she swore was part of her stomach. When she finally caught her breath, Aurora was on her knees, her energy depleted. *Why did I ever come here?* Slowly, Aurora stood, then washed the leftover guts from her hand and hair. She was emotionally and physically drained. Her fight was almost gone. Slowly, she sagged down in the corner of the shower and pulled her knees to her chest. Tears ran in rivers down her cheeks. *I miss the security of my office, my warm apartment, and my silk bed bug free bed sheets. I miss my routine and knowing what the day will bring. I miss knowing where I am going. I know South-East Asia is different from Manhattan, but this is not different. This is hell.* When the last tear had dried on her face, Aurora looked up at her

backpack on the chair. *There are flights going back every few hours. I can take a taxi to the airport and be back in my bed in a day.* Aurora stood and splashed water onto her face. She gave herself a smile in the mirror. *You really are a mess Aurora.* For a moment, she dropped her gaze to the washbasin, and then looked herself in the eyes. *I have never given up on a promise I made myself. I promised myself I will see Angkor Wat 22 years ago, and it is time I fulfill that promise. Not even grandmother's ghost will stop me this time.*

Aurora glanced at the bed while she walked to her backpack. Bloodstains gave evidence of the slaughter that occurred there, while a few enemy scouts still crawled over the bed in search of her naked flesh. A shiver ran down Aurora's back. Carefully she inspected the clothes on top of her bag for invaders, and then dressed in the shower. Fully dressed, she moved her bags and the chair into the shower. Sitting on the plastic chair with her legs pulled up, she connected to the local Fi-Wi with her cellphone, and then called Jeni on Skype. One thing you could be sure about Jeni, was that her Skype on her cellphone was always online, except when she was in a meeting or with a guy. Three times Aurora tried, but got no answer. *Oh Jeni, I need you, and now you are partying. Most probably with the server from the airport.* Aurora opened her email to send Jeni a quick note saying she had arrived in Bangkok. Two emails stopped her dead. Aurora's eyes widened and her heartbeat quickened. The first was from Dorothy. Emily had a meeting with Barbara, one of the board members. Emily logged a formal complaint against Aurora. Aurora bit her lip. *I will need to call Barbara when I get to Cambodia and state my case.* Aurora's hands trembled while she read the second email, being from Rick. He was sorry about what happened. He had feelings for Aurora but thought she cared nothing for him when she turned his dinner date down. He and Emily had a fight, and broke up. He had tried to call Aurora, but her phone was off, so he emailed her. *No, I do not need this now.* A tear formed in Aurora's eye and she switched her phone off. Leaning back in the chair, Aurora closed her eyes. *Angkor Wat is only a day away. I cannot give up now. I have to find the exact spot. I have to know. Besides, Chase, may be there.*

Chapter 6: The Long Ride

Take me down from Genevive rocked the hotel room while Aurora's cell phone vibrated. With a grunt, she opened her blood shot eyes and silenced the alarm. 6 am. During the night, her body went partying without her knowledge. She had drifted in and out of nightmares, with giant cockroaches biting her head off and swarms of bed bugs crawling all over her and ripping her to pieces until all that was left was dry bones. A throbbing headache made her grit her teeth when she stretched her sore limbs. Pins and needles shot through every muscle when she stood. Slowly, she splashed cold water over her face before taking a hard look in the mirror. *Getting to Angkor Wat my way is not as easy as I thought. This is not New York.* Too tired and stiff to worry about changing clothes or taking a shower, Aurora removed most of her makeup, then did a light touch up. *You really look like shit. Yeh, but I am still standing.* Aurora smiled at herself, proud that she did not give up. Quickly she packed everything away and then opened Skype on her phone. A message from Jeni said to call when Aurora could. Aurora pressed the button to let the call connect. Not wanting Jeni to see her so messy, she deactivated the camera function.

"Hi Aurora. Sorry I missed your call. How is Cambodia?"

"Hello Jeni. I am still in Bangkok."

"Why?"

"No bus. I spend the night in the hotel you booked me."

"See, I told you it would work out. You did not even have to run around looking for a room. Anything interesting there that wants to ravage your body?" Jeni laughed.

"Oh believe me, things here are all over you."

"Anything better than Chase?"

"Oh no. His perfect ass and come to bed eyes will forever be burned into my memory."

"Well, at least you can image your hands are his instead of Rick's next time you take a bath." Jeni teased.

"Hey."

"Just saying. Anyway. What are your plans now Aurora?"

I have half an hour to run down and get breakfast then catch my bus at 7. I should be in Siem Reap by tonight."

"Okay. Let me know when you checked into your hotel."

"Will do. Bye." Aurora cut the call short. It was hard seeing Jeni on Skype and not being able to hug her. After Aurora's parent's death, her grandmother raised her until she passed away when Aurora was 25. Aurora had met Jeni in the hospital coffee shop while Aurora's grandmother was in her last days. Jeni's dad was in the hospital for terminal cancer. They formed a sisterly bond and was perfect opposites in life but the same inside. Jeni would get Aurora out of her apartment, and Aurora would put the brakes on before Jeni destroyed herself partying. Deep down, Aurora knew she and Jeni had the same problem. They both thought they were not good enough. Aurora tried to prove to the world she was by climbing the corporate ladder, while Jeni tried to prove the world was right by destroying her life one party and boyfriend at a time. Neither could admit the painful truth to themselves, the ones they loved lied to them. Aurora had gotten used to Jeni always being there. Now, she had to face the big scary unknown world all on her own, with very little planning. It hurt, it sucked, but she wanted to do it. She needed to. Aurora felt like a failure for not completing a promise and dream she had for so long. She needed to fill an emptiness inside her. Aurora gave one last look at the bed. Only the blood stains remained. The enemy had retreated to the cracks in the wooden walls where they waited for their next unsuspecting victim. She slung her large backpack over her shoulders, grabbed her smaller pack, and then headed downstairs.

"Morning. Do you serve breakfast?" Aurora asked the same lady who checked her in the day before.

"Yes, included."

"Included in the room?"

"Yes, you want breakfast?"

"Yes, please. Can I have the menu please?" Aurora's spirit lifted a bit.

"No menu."

"Okay. What's for breakfast?"

"You sit down. I bring." The lady said and pointed to a couch with a low table in front of it, a distance from the reception desk. Aurora nodded, and took a seat. Aurora took out her iPad mini, connected to the internet and then opened up an online hotel reservation application. From an email Jeni had sent with all the information she needed, Aurora found the place Jeni stayed in when she was in Cambodia. Quickly Aurora searched for the name and was delighted to find pictures of the rooms on offer. The place was a combination of a hotel and dorm, very popular with single backpackers. Aurora frowned when she looked at the pictures. The room looked stunning compared to her first experience, but was only priced at \$12 a night. *Is this a scam? Well, I will book one night and see how it goes. It cannot be worse than what I had.* Aurora selected a single room with air conditioner, and made the booking. The booking was pay on arrival, and made her feel a bit more comfortable about the booking.

"Breakfast." The reception woman said and placed a plate with scrambled eggs, a baguette, and a cup of black coffee in front of Aurora. It smelled fresh and Aurora's stomach clapped hands.

"Thank you, do you have any milk and sugar?" The woman gave Aurora a sideways look, frowned, and then went to the kitchen. Moments later, she came back with a small metal pot that contained condensed milk.

"Milk and sugar, in one, no fridge." The woman smiled.

"Thank you." *Well, this is a first.* While Aurora chewed a mouthful of scrambled egg, she poured a teaspoon's worth of condensed milk in her coffee, and then gave it a nice stir. The aroma that filled the air was mouthwatering. Not even Starbucks coffee came close. When she took a sip, she was in heaven. *I do not know what this coffee is, but it is awesome. A slight caramel taste, mixed with the kiss of love.* Aurora quickly finished her breakfast, and then decided to get another of the guidebooks from the same author that wrote the backpacking book. Not taking any chances, she selected the larger guide book with over 65 temples and over 380 images. It was the images she was after. She hoped that maybe one

image was similar to the place she was looking for. She was just in time in downloading the eBook when the reception lady shouted. "Your bus, go."

A dirty old double decker bus stopped with creaks and rattles in front of the hotel. Aurora grabbed her bags, threw a good buy over her shoulder and ran for the bus while she fished out her official receipt. A conductor about half her age came up to her, took the paper, and to her surprise nodded his head when he took her large backpack. He opened a side flap, and Aurora cringed when he threw her bag in the hold that was already overfull. He bumped and shoved her bag a few times to make space. Satisfied that the bag partially fitted, the guy closed the flap. Turning around, he bumped against the flap repeatedly with his bum until the hatch took. Aurora was glad she did not have anything that could break in the bag. *I hope the flap does not open along the way, and my bag falls out.*

Aurora gave one last look at the flap, and then followed the conductor onto the bus. Aurora froze when she got to the top deck. The bus was packed, even the aisle was stuffed with boxes and goods. Her jaw slightly dropped. Two wire cages containing chickens sat on top of the boxes down the aisle. Unsurely she turned to look at the driver. He motioned for three locals sitting on the first bench by the door to make space. All smiles they made room for Aurora, not at the least inconvenienced. However, even with Aurora's slender figure, it took a bit of shuffling to fit.

"Sorry sorry." Aurora whispered. She felt like being placed in a sardine can. The young conductor climbed in, pulled the door closed, and then fastened it to the hand railing with a rope. As they drove away, the door flapped open and close a few inches while it pulled against the rope. Aurora's heart stopped when the conductor leaned against the door with his back and started a conversation with the driver, who was having a conversation with multiple people as he had one cell phone pressed against his left ear with his shoulder, while holding another to his right ear with his right hand. The conductor heaved to and fro while the door pulled slightly open and shut. Aurora's brain called her eyes liars.

12 minutes later, the bus came to a sudden stop. Aurora looked out the window and her eyebrows knitted. There was no bus station around. About 15 people stood, including two of the women next to Aurora, and exited the bus. Aurora watched while they disappeared into various small shops along the road. *This is how they go to work every day? And I complain when a cab takes a minute longer to show up than expected.* Aurora looked at the local woman who remained next to her. She was in the winter of her years. With a shudder, the bus pulled away again, just to drop more passengers off every 20 or so minutes. Now and again, a few new locals climbed on, haggled a bit with the conductor over the price, and then took a seat. The further they went from Bangkok, the more infrequent the stops were, until it was smooth riding. Aurora popped her ear buds in and turned the volume up, then closed her eyes.

"20 Minutes." Aurora shot up when someone grabbed her arm. The conductor stood in front of her. "20 minutes." He repeated. Aurora quickly scanned the bus. She was the only one left. Outside, the other passengers stood in line to buy bananas, mangoes and other fruit from a roadside stall. Next to the fruit stall someone fried something on a grill Aurora did not recognize. She stretched herself out, then stood and headed over to the fruit stall. With three people in front of her to the fruit stall, she recognized what was being fried on the grill. They were frying giant tarantulas. Aurora went cold, and the blood drained from her face. Her eyes focused on the bowls next to the grill. Deep fried cockroaches and crickets. Nausea shot up through her body. Locals bought the cockroaches and crickets by the handful. They scoped them up, and threw them in plastic bags, then crunched on them like they were popcorn. The world around Aurora started to spin. Stumbling away, Aurora made for the back of the bus. Cold sweat covered her body and she gagged for air. She leaned against the bus and closed her eyes. Desperately she tried to think happy thoughts. Slowly, the nausea faded. By the time the conductor called, *back on the bus*, her legs had just enough power to get her to her seat. Crunching sounds came from behind Aurora and

goosebumps covered her skin. The hair at the back of her neck stood, and a shiver ran through her. Aurora kept her eyes nailed to the road in front until the bus pulled away from the critter grill.

As before, the elderly woman sat next to Aurora. The smell of fresh bananas filled the air while the lady ate a few from the large bunch she had bought. Aurora gave the bananas a sideways glance. *I can so do with one of those now.* Aurora's stomach announced her thoughts and she looked away. The old woman squeezed Aurora's leg causing her to jerk in her seat. Aurora snapped her head around, and stared at the two bananas the women held out to her. Her cheeks turned pink and her jaw slightly dropped. Quickly Aurora pulled out a \$10 note but the woman just shook her head. She pushed the bananas and Aurora's money to Aurora. A lump formed in Aurora's throat, and her eyes welled up. *What makes me deserve such kindness?* The bananas went down as not even the best meal in Manhattan could, almost rivaling chocolate-chip ice cream.

"You are searching for love?" The women asked.

"I, I don't know what I am looking for. I am lost."

"No, you only think you are lost because you have been told you are lost. The path is right in front of you."

"And where does this path lead." Aurora tried not to smile. This conversation is getting mysterious. I wonder if she is going to pull out a crystal ball.

"To what we all want, love."

"I left that chance in New York." Aurora sighed.

"Love is all around you. But you have to love yourself and believe you are worthy of love before love will come to you."

Aurora looked out of the window. *Great, I am never going to marry.* A bit more rested, Aurora spent the time to the Poipet border between Cambodia and Thailand admiring the countryside. Cornfields, large rice fields and open countryside passed by. Aurora was god smacked when she watched how locals stood knee-deep in mud while they pulled out rice plants. The country houses were mostly pole frameworks with banana leaf strips woven to make panels. *How many bed bugs can hide in*

those panels? A shiver ran through Aurora.

With creaks and rattles the bus shuddered to a stop at a small roadside restaurant near the Poipet border. Aurora and five other foreigners were ushered to a restaurant where they all took a seat. A fridge that contained sodas and water grabbed Aurora's attention, and she headed for it. Grabbing one can of Coca-Cola and two bottles of water, she approached a man at the entrance of the restaurant where he filled out forms.

"80 Baht. You have Cambodia Visa?" The man said after giving her a quick glance.

"No."

"You need to buy Cambodia Riel. You can exchange your US dollars here."

"That's a lie. US dollars are accepted freely in Cambodia." Aurora's comment made the guy look up and study her for a moment.

"You are a smart one. You want help with a visa and a taxi to border?" Aurora looked at the border post that was almost half a mile away. It would take a lot to carry her large backpack that far.

"How much?"

"\$10, drinks and taxi included." The man said without looking up while he filled in forms for the other foreigners. It was a service she had read about. They take the guesswork out of filling in the visa forms for you, for a small fee of a few dollars. You could do it yourself, but they often had a way of skipping the lines and getting your visa done faster.

"Deal." Aurora said and sat down, then handed over the money and her passport. The guy quickly filled in the immigration forms for Aurora, handed it to her, then pointed to a local waiting by a scooter.

"That is the taxi?" Aurora gasped

"You want to walk?"

"No no, I just never rode on a motorcycle before."

"Easy, just do not fall off." The guy mumbled without looking up. Aurora shook her head, then slung her large backpack

over her shoulders and slugged it to the scooter. She put her small backpack between her and the driver, then climbed on the back with help from the driver. He had no problem grabbing her body and dragging her on the back of the scooter, then raced away. Aurora had no choice but to hold the guy tightly around his middle. Aurora smiled. *He surely must enjoy having foreign girls hug him out of fear by the way he rides.* However, in Aurora's case, excitement flooded her veins. The air was blowing her hair all over while they rushed along. She felt free and alive. *I am so going to hire a scooter.* The driver stopped the scooter in front of a building marked, Visas.

"Over there." He said and pointed to the building. To Aurora's surprise, the lines went fast and in a few minutes she had a Cambodia visa. An even bigger surprise was that the same guy on the scooter waited for her outside. He did not have enough of her holding him and gave her a lift to the arrival's building further down the road. Aurora took her place in the lines and got her paperwork ready. A local officer came up to her, gave her a small form to fill out, and glanced at her visa and passport. Nodding his head, he moved on. Aurora was glad she brought a pen. Her mind drifted while she filled in the arrivals form. *I wonder if Chase will really be at the temples. I was so stupid not to ask him his email address. Why can't I stop thinking about him?*

"Next." Aurora jumped. She was next in line and was holding her line up. Quickly she moved forward and handed the officer her paperwork. He gave her passport a quick once over, looked at her visa, and then scanned the bar code on it. Satisfied that all was correct, he pointed to a fingerprint scanner. Aurora had not even noticed it. *Wow, they have a modern system here.* After capturing her finger prints and picture, the officer handed her back her paperwork and indicated for her to move along a passage that led past the building. Following the other foreigners like a nice sheep, she came to a waiting area. Within minutes, the young conductor located her, and helped her with her bag to the bus that waited nearby. Aurora's shoulders hung when the old woman was not on the bus. The last section to Siem Reap went by with

Aurora reading romance novels on her iPad mini. At the bus stop in Siem Reap, she took a tuk tuk and directed him to the hotel. Local houses and then businesses flew past while they passed through the heart of Siem Reap and then out the other side. Aurora looked around when the area became more rural. *I hope he is taking me to the right hotel, if a hotel at all. Good thing I know karate and Cambodians are small.*

Minutes later, they pulled into a dirt parking area of a hotel. Scores of backpackers walked passed the tuk tuk on their way to or from the open reception area a short distance away.

"Your hotel." The tuk tuk driver said and pulled her backpack from the tuk tuk, then placed it on the ground next to him.

"Thank you." Aurora paid the driver and then slung her backpack over her shoulders. The straps dug into her narrow shoulders. *I would never have been able to carry this bag if Jeni did not take half of my stuff home for me.* Slowly, she made her way past a number of bamboo couches and low tables where backpackers were enjoying drinks, food and good conversation. The smell of quality fast food was a welcome change from the previous hotel.

"Hi, I have a booking for one night." Aurora said when she dropped her bags at the reception desk.

"Hello. Passport please." Aurora was taken back for a moment, but handed her passport over. The girl took Aurora's name from her passport, then scanned a list in her book. When she found the booking, she turned around and made a photocopy of Aurora's passport on a small printer and scanner behind her.

"\$12 please." The girls said and handed Aurora back her passport.

"Can I see the room first?"

"Yes, no problem." Her casual answer shocked Aurora. The girl motioned to a guy almost smaller than her that stood ready nearby. They exchanged a few words in local Khmer, and then she handed him a key. Turning to Aurora, she continued. "\$1 and he will take your bag to your room." Aurora eagerly nodded and the guy effortlessly slung the bag over his shoulder. Aurora gasped

when the guy almost jogged away with her bag, forcing her to run after him. *Is it just me that is a pansy?* From the back of the main building came pop music, and Aurora could not help but swing her hips while the guy led her past a garden and then to the right to another building. From the paint and look of it, it must have been newly built. Two floors were done with the third one not yet complete. Aurora followed the guy up to the second floor, and along a walkway that served as a balcony, to the last room. The guy opened the door for her, and let her enter first.

"Wow." Aurora gasped. The room was just as in the online pictures. Aurora's shoes squeaked on the clean white tiles when she moved over to the wood base double bed with its matching wooden dresser. The white sheets smelled like lavender when Aurora picked up the pillows and mattress.

"No bedbugs." The guy's comment drew a laugh from Aurora. Passing the bed, Aurora gave the bathroom with its floor to ceiling tiles a once over. The toilet and shower were separated by a glass sheet, the shower had an instant hot-water heater that worked, and there was toilet paper. Returning to the bedroom, Aurora tested the air conditioner and smiled when cool air flowed over her. A TV on the dresser flanked by a flower pot and a kettle as well as a soft fleece blanket on the bed completed the room. Aurora's heart rejoiced, and she glowed from happiness. *This is perfect.*

"You take?" The guy asked.

"Yes." Aurora forced herself not to hug the guy and tried not to seem over impressed. She followed the guy out, watched him lock the door and took the key from him. He led her back to the reception and held out his hand. Aurora handed him \$2 and could not help but smile when his eyes lit up.

"Can I have the same room for a week?" Aurora asked the girl behind the reception, who quickly scanned the reception book.

"Yes."

"Same price per night." Again, the girl's eyes dropped to the book.

"You pay in advance?"

"Yes."

"Okay." The girl ran her fingers over a calculator and then showed it to Aurora, who nodded and took out the money. Upon taking her money and checking it three times for being fake, the girl wrote a receipt that had the hotel's name on top and the check in and check out dates.

"Do you have cellphone Sim cards?" Aurora asked while she scanned the fridge behind the reception desk. The food the other backpackers were eating smelled delicious. However, after a long ride with a bus door half open, she had more dirt than teeth in her mouth. She was sure her face was a mess, but frankly, did not give a damn.

"Yes. How much airtime would you like?"

"Not much, I more need internet data."

"We have free Wi-Fi in all the rooms. The password is at the back of your room key tag. There is cell reception at the temples. Will 2GB internet data be enough for your stay here?"

"Yes please. And can I please have two large bottles of water and three snicker bars?"

The receptionist nodded, ran her finger over the calculator again, and then showed it to Aurora. When Aurora took out the money, the receptionist pulled the water and snicker bars from the fridge.

"Can you help me set my phone up?" Aurora asked when the receptionist handed over a SIM card and slip with the code to load internet data.

"No problem." The receptionist called over the same guy who helped her with her bag, then pointed to Aurora's phone and Sim card. 10 minutes and another \$2 later, her phone was connected, and she could use the internet and make Skype calls on it. Walking back to her room, Aurora ate one candy bar while disco lights danced from the second floor of the back of the main building and shot beams of color around the garden. Music mixed with young people having fun filled the night. Aurora stopped for a moment when four backpackers in their early 20s, and without shirts called to her and then waved at her. The guys where skinny,

young, drunk and horny. Aurora waved back and then continued on to her room. *Maybe tomorrow night.*

Back in her room, Aurora finished half a bottle of water, another snicker bar, and then stripped down naked. Standing in front of the air conditioner, she let the cool air flow over her. It helped with the pounding headache. Her rose buds reacted to the stimulation, and Aurora tipped her head back and closed her eyes. Aurora ran her hands over her swollen mounts. *If only Chase was here to warm them up.* With a sigh, she walked towards the shower. The soap was a local brand that smelled of lotus flowers. Dirt colored the water red. Aurora swore she had half the road in her hair. When the water finally flowed clear, she stepped out of the shower. A white fluffy towel glided over her skin and soaked the water up. Aurora adjusted the air conditioner to just break the heat, then dropped down onto the bed. Sandman was already waiting for her before her head hit the pillow. In her dreams, she heard Chase's voice, and pulled a pillow tightly against her naked body. Imagining it being him, she kissed the pillow.

During the night, Aurora awoke once and pulled the fleece blanket that was folded up at her feet, over her. The soft fluff felt wonderful when it glided over her skin. Aurora made a quick check around her, and after finding no bedbugs, closed her eyes.

"Good night." Came from the room next door. Aurora's eyes shot open and she bolted from her bed. *I swear it is Chase's voice.* Standing by the window next to the door, she listened intently while a door closed next door. Footsteps disappeared down the walkway. Quickly Aurora opened her room door and peaked out. A guy with shoulder hair and a pony tail, totally drunk, staggered towards the stairway. Her shoulders sagged. Closing the door again, Aurora switched on the lights and checked the time. Just after 11 pm. With the time difference, it was just after 10 am in New York. Aurora pulled out her laptop from her small backpack and made herself comfortable on the bed. Sitting cross-legged with the laptop on her bare legs, she activated Skype. Aurora was delighted to find a strong signal and video dialed Jeni out of habit. Aurora yawned and stretched her arms when the call

connected.

"Wow." Came over the laptop's speakers in a male voice, causing Aurora to rip her eyes to the screen. Jeni was at her desk at work. A guy stood next to Jeni and drooled over Aurora's naked breasts.

"Shit, pervert." Aurora yelled and grabbed the fleece blanked, then covered her chest.

"Move." Came Jeni's stern voice over the speakers and Aurora watched the guy reluctantly shuffle away.

"Well girl, you sure know how to make an entrance." Jeni laughed, causing Aurora to giggle and turn red. Aurora's heart raced, and she bubbled from excitement and energy. Feeling safe to tell Jeni the tale, she gave her the full-on details of her bed bug and cockroach experience. Jeni almost spat cola over her computer when she burst out laughing.

"I am glad my misfortune entertains you." Aurora giggled, then smiled when two guys walked from opposite directions behind Jeni's desk while staring at her monitor. Both obviously hoped to get a second show.

"Jeni duck." Aurora shouted then ripped the blanket down and pushed her chest forward. Jeni cleared the path and gave the guys a full view of Aurora's gorgeous breasts. Both men's jaws dropped until they walked straight into each other. One guy had two cups of coffee and spilled it all over the other guy's documents. Aurora and Jeni burst out laughing when the two men started to argue and blamed the other one of not looking where he was going.

"That was so naughty and unlike you." Jeni said when Aurora pulled the blanket up again.

"I know. It just happened." Aurora said, her head buzzing with excitement and her body on fire.

"So, what are you going to do tomorrow?" Jeni asked.

"I thought of just kicking back at the pool after breakfast."

"You going swimming?" Jeni gasped.

"No, don't be silly. I bought a large travel guide and want to see what temples I like."

"You still looking for that spot? You hoping to find it in a picture in a travel guide?"

"Yes."

"I hope you find it and peace Aurora. Now. Are you at least going to wear a bikini to the pool?"

"Yes." Aurora smiled.

"Nice, knock them out okay. Listen, I got to go, love you."

"Love you to." Aurora replied when Jeni waved a kiss at her and ended the call. Aurora closed her laptop and then flicked off the lights. She climbed into the bed, pulled the fleece blanket over her, and then curled up with a pillow. Aurora bit her lower lip. *I have to find the spot. I cannot come all the way to Angkor Wat and not find it.*

Chapter 7: Death

Monks chanting and bells ringing woke Aurora before the sun was up. Aurora stretched herself out on the bed and yawned. She moaned when she checked the time on her cellphone, just before 4 am. *Ah man, this is unfair. What now?* Aurora bolted upright. *It is just before 3pm in New York. Barbara will still be at the office.* Sitting cross-legged in bed, Aurora dialed Barbara's office number using Skype. Barbara's secretary took the call and put her through.

"Barbara good day."

"Good afternoon. It is Aurora."

"Aurora. I was not expecting a call from you. Seeing as you seem to hate me." Aurora was taken aback and for a second lost her thoughts.

"Why would you think I hate you? I thought you hated me for spilling wine on your sued leather boots at your house at the Christmas party."

"No Aurora. I do not hate you for that. In fact, I always thought of you as the daughter I wished I had."

"But but you were so mad and said you will have me fired."

"Yes I was mad because I thought you were drunk. And yes, I tried to have you fired."

"I don't understand. Why did you not have me fired?"

"Because when I got the surveillance videos from my home security system to use as proof to present to the board, I noted something and changed my mind."

"May I know?"

Barbara took a deep breath. "Aurora, promise me you will not over react."

"I promise."

"The video clearly showed that Emily pushed you from behind into me. It was a calculated move. You also only had half a glass of wine the whole evening. You were not drunk, and it was not your fault for spilling wine over me." Aurora's blood turned to red hot lava, and her eyes threw flames. "Aurora, you still there?"

"Yes. Sorry."

"Look. I know this is a lot to handle. I know you did most of the work for the project. However, when we checked, Emily's signature was on all the documents. From the database logs it seemed you did no work at all. What is more, Emily showed me an email from your computer to her saying that she must do the presentation as you cannot handle it. It was dated last week Wednesday, the same day she changed the hotel function to Saturday. She called the clients and changed the date. I do not think she ever tried to get a hold of you on Saturday. Rick just took her word."

Aurora almost dropped the phone. Her throat closed off. For a few seconds, she was speechless.

"So you are saying that Emily planned to take the project, so she can get the promotion? That she somehow had the server logs altered. But then she should be fired."

"It is not as simple as that Aurora. Due to you punching Rick and also verbally abusing Emily. Ultimately, we have to keep one of you. I am strongly behind you Aurora. But I am one of eight board members, and the only female. I have been looking for a reason to fire Emily for a long time. And knew she was up to something. However, you made it very difficult for me. I am sorry. I will do my best. However, the board has already decided we cannot afford to keep both of you because of the incident as well as that we fear there will be future problems as both of you seem to have a liking for Rick."

"Is there anything I can do until the board meeting to help my case?"

"Don't do anything stupid."

"I think I did all the stupid I could." Aurora faintly laughed, drawing the same from Barbara.

"Look Aurora. Get some rest, have some fun, and leave this with me. I think I have a strong case for you. You may get a written warning, but I think I can convince the board not to have you fired. Dorothy alerted me by email that you are in Cambodia and passed on your number there. I will personally call you if anything

changes before the hearing.”

“Thank you.” Aurora ended the call and then set her alarm for 8am. After turning off the lights, she snuggled up in bed. Knowing that she had a very influential board member on her side that thought of her as a daughter, filled Aurora with hope and joy. *See grandmother. I am not useless and people do love me.* Sleep came fast for Aurora.

A few hours later, music filled the room. Aurora reached over and silenced the phone, then sat up in bed. Rubbing her hands together for the excitement the day was to bring, Aurora stood and grabbed the half-finished water bottle. Emptying the bottle in one go, she popped it in a trash can next to the dresser and then headed for the toilet. Standing cross legged, Aurora carefully lifted the toilet seat to make sure there were no uninvited guests. Finding it safe, she dropped down and let go. She was thankful that the room had toilet paper as well as a hose. Aurora chose the paper option, the whole hosing your ass thing just was not for her. Aurora chuckled when Sandra Bullock’s movie with Sylvester Stallone popped into her head. He had to use three shells and could not figure them out. In the end, he cursed the computer that gave him paper fines. Sylvester gladly took it and wiped his sexy ass with it. After a quick shower, Aurora combed her hair and applied cherry scented lip-gloss. She had a natural beauty about her that allowed her to turn heads without makeup on.

Aurora selected a sexy two-piece pink bikini and then pulled a T-shirt and shorts over it. Going barefoot, she grabbed her iPad mini and wallet, then headed out. When she opened the door, Cambodia welcomed her. It smelled fresh, far different than Manhattan’s smog. Aurora took a lungful in, then leaned on the hip high brick wall of the walkway. The sun was already a distance on its path across the sky. Next to the hotel were a few local brick houses. In the distance, rice fields and green tall trees filled the countryside. Aurora smiled. *With Rick and Emily not together, and Barbara set on getting Emily fired, maybe my dreams can come true.* Aurora’s day was only getting brighter. Aurora’s heart filled with joy, and she closed her eyes and let the sun hug her. Aurora tugged

the room key and her wallet in her pants pocket, and then made her way to the lower floor and the garden with her iPad tugged under her arm.

She was about to turn left to go around the garden towards the reception where she saw people eating the night before when something on the second floor in front of her caught her attention. Stopping dead, Aurora watched the four young guys from the previous night joking around in the same area the disco lights came from when they waved at her. Although the guys were kind of hot, none having shirts on, they were a bit skinny and about 20. Aurora wanted a man, not go baby snatching. In the daylight, Aurora realized her assumption about the section was wrong. Half of the building had windows that must be rooms, but the last half of the second floor to the right was open with only support pillars here and there. Music still came from the area, but at a lower volume. What interested Aurora more was the pulley system with its attached basket.

The basket would go down and disappear through a window in a building to the right, then come out with plates full of food and slowly be pulled at an angle to the second floor where a local would remove the food, replace it with dirty dishes and then sent the basket down again. *I have to go check that out.* Aurora continued towards an archway in front of her, and found the stairs that lead to the bar area. When Aurora reached the second floor, the four guys stopped dead where they were playing pool at a table to the right. Aurora ignored their looks and made her way past a number of woven bamboo couches and low tables to a bar area at the back where two fridges proudly displayed a number of local and imported sodas and drinks.

Aurora was about to ask if they served breakfast, when she noted a stack of menus on the counter. Taking one she had to smile at the menu. Although it was in English, each dish had a small color picture next to it of what the dish actually was. *Jeni was right. What I would call something, is not what Cambodians call it.* The proof was in the pizza section, which showed pictures of baguettes with various toppings on. Each menu item had a number next to it.

"I would like a fruit salad with yogurt, topped with honey, and green tea please." Aurora commented when she replaced the menu.

"\$3 dollars please." The guy behind the counter said and wrote two numbers on a small slip of paper then handed it to a second guy next to him. The second guy walked over to the pulley system. When Aurora paid, the pulley operator attached her order to a spike on the basket and sent it down to the kitchen below. Aurora turned to take a seat and caught the four guys gawking at her ass. On a couch and beanbag next to the pool table were two girls who gave her a jealous look. Aurora walked past the bar counter to a number of tables that was right next to the open wall, further into the area. Taking the last table, she was out of the view of the girls and guys. Aurora made herself comfortable and then opened the temple guide book she bought. The book had over 65 attractions, yet with its over 380 included images, it was easy to pick the temples she wished to see.

Aurora scanned the images and barely looked up when her food arrived. The portion was far larger than she expected, including the tea that was in a half liter beer jug. By the time Aurora had finished her breakfast, she was thoroughly full. She had made a short list of the first temples she wanted to see the next day, starting naturally with Angkor Wat. Casually she paged through the images of Angkor Wat then froze. *This is it. This is the spot.* Aurora almost dropped her iPad. Desperately she paged back and then a few pages forward. Her heart hammered in her chest. *Crap. There is no description for the image of exactly where in the temple it is. But at least I know now that it is at Angkor Wat. How hard can it be to find it?* Aurora devoured the information given about Angkor Wat and then sagged back in her chair. Slowly Aurora read a few lines again. *The outer complex spanned an impressive 1.5km (0.93 miles) long x 1.3 km (0.8 miles). The main temple base is 330m long x 255m wide with the central structure five stories high.* Aurora put the iPad down. *Maybe it is going to be a bit harder to find the spot than I thought. Well, I have come this far. I will not give up. I will find it.* Aurora froze. *What if I do not find it by the time I need to fly back? I*

cannot miss the hearing. Aurora took a deep breath. *No, tomorrow I will find it.* Aurora wanted to immediately race to Angkor Wat, but with most of the morning gone, it would not be the perfect day she planned. She wanted to spend the entire day at the temples.

With nothing else to do but read some romantic books, Aurora decided to read next to the pool. The four guys gave her a sideways glance, but mostly ignored her this time, probably deciding that since she is not interested in them, she is not worth their time. After taking the steps down, Aurora went through a second archway and stood in front of a large swimming pool. She walked along the left and around the swimming pool to a bar behind it. Next to the bar was a tiled area with lounge chairs and umbrellas.

Aurora bought a bottle of water from the bar then made her way to the last lounge chair, furthest from the bar. She stripped down to her bikini, and then pulled a lounge chair forward to allow her head to be in the shade and her body in the sun. After making herself comfortable, she immersed herself in her latest novel. She was a woman traveling on horseback through Texas in the early 1900s to a farm her father left her in his testament. A rattlesnake had scared her horse, and she was thrown off and hit her head against a rock. When she came to, she was staring into the eyes of a mysterious stranger who patted her head with a wetted hanky. She was about to thank him when laughter and water splashing ripped her from her story. Annoyed, she watched the four guys jump into the pool, then get out and try to throw each other in the pool. Shaking her head at them, she went back to her story.

"Hey sexy, wanna have a drink?" The voice pulled Aurora from her novel and made her look up. One of the guys was standing in front of her, and tried to show off the little muscles he had. He was not fit, just what Jeni would call, skinny fat. He was thin, but had no muscles, just skin, fat, and bone.

"I am good thank you." Aurora replied, then ignored him and started on the novel again.

"What you reading?" From his voice, Aurora could tell he

already had a few beers in, if not still being hung over from the night before. He was starting to irritate her, and she decided it best not to entertain him. Aurora kept on reading. She managed a page and assumed the guy had left when suddenly he grabbed her left arm and pulled her out of the lounge chair.

"Come dance wit..." the guy gasped for air and dropped to the floor when Aurora landed a right punch in his sternum. His mates burst out in laughter when he slowly got up and staggered to them.

"She is a wild one. I love her." The guy said to his friends when he got his breath back. After making sure the guy took a bar stool by his friends, Aurora sat down in her lounge chair and made herself comfortable. Her sexy cowboy hero called to her. The cowboy gently brushed her hair out of her eyes and asked if she was okay. Aurora was about to reply, when the iPad was ripped out of her hands. Three guys lifted her out of the lounge chair and carried her laughingly to the pool.

"Noooooo." Aurora screamed loud enough for Jeni in Manhattan to hear. She kicked and screamed, but the guys thought it a joke and jumped into the deep end of the pool with her. Her head was pushed under water, and her heart stopped. Everything turned into a mess of legs and arms while all three guys tried to accidentally touch her body. In the process, they held her underwater. In an instant, the swimming pool disappeared and Aurora was back in her parent's car. She was a helpless drowning four year old. Aurora gagged on water, both in her dream and in real life. Fear choked her and her heart almost burst through her chest. Even though the pool water was warm, her body went ice cold and lifeless when it remembered dying. Last time, a passerby had jumped in and pulled her out and gave her CPR, bringing her back to life. This time, there was no passerby. Fear totally overtook her mind, and she sank to the bottom of the pool. *So this is where my life ends.* Just as she closed her eyes, a powerful arm encircled her waist. Aurora was pulled from death's grip and dragged out of the pool. She gagged and coughed up water while someone bent her over. Her mind was spinning, and her ears were full of water

and rang. Faintly she could hear someone telling her to spit the pool water out. Her savior still had his warm hand on her stomach and suddenly pressed down hard on it. Aurora heaved and then gave the pool water back. When she stopped throwing up, the guy lowered her to her knees.

"Teach you for punching me." A skinny guy laughed. Aurora looked up and was just in time to see him go down when her knight went to war for her and battled the guy, flooring him with a right jab. Two of his mates jumped forward but her knight stood his ground and took them down as well. Like three slain dragons, they lay out cold on the floor. Water dripped from her knight's naked broad shoulders down his muscular back to his gorgeous ass. *O, get your horse and take me now.* Aurora's head span. Her knight slowly turned around.

"Are you okay?" He asked.

"You." Aurora managed before darkness claimed her mind.

Chapter 8: Where Is He?

The sun was two hours past its zenith when Aurora awoke in her hotel bed. For a moment, her mind was a mess, then everything came back to her. She lay on her side in the recovery position with the fleece blanket pulled over her. Aurora quickly lifted the edge of the blanket and signed with relieve. She still had her bikini on. *At least, no one went exploring when I was out. Not that I would mind if he did.* Him! Aurora shot up in bed and instantly her head span. With a moan, she dropped back.

"Are you okay?" A female voice came from behind. Aurora jerked her head around. A local Cambodia girl in her late teens sat in a chair by the door. The girl gave her a concerned look then continued. "I am Nana. The doctor said you should be fine, but I must call him if something is wrong. Should I call him?" Nana held a cellphone ready. Aurora shook her head and slowly pulled herself up. Propping the pillows against the headboard, she leaned back into them.

"My head hurts and my throat is sore. That is all."

"The doctor said it would. He said you must take those." Nana pointed to a paper bag on the dresser.

"How did I get here?"

"Your boyfriend carried you up. He is sexy." Nana smiled.

"My boyfriend?"

"Yes. The guy who pulled you from the swimming pool and punched those guys. He is so hot."

"Oh him, yes he is. But he is not my boyfriend."

"Looked like it by the way he looked at you and did not want to leave you. He paid me to wait until you woke up. You are beautiful."

Pink circles formed on Aurora's cheeks, and she pulled the fleece blanked over her chest.

"My mum says I talk too much and do not think before saying something." Nana laughed.

"Well, I would like to talk to you. But first, where is Chase? I would like to thank him."

"Your boyfriend?"

"Not my boyfriend."

"Not yet." Nana giggled. She was barely over five feet and slender. Many foreigners mistook her for a child.

"Okay, not yet my boyfriend. So where is he?"

"He stays next door. But he is not there now. He said he needed to go to Battambang."

"Battambang?"

"Yes, another town."

"Oh. And how far is it?"

"I don't know, but it is just before the border."

"The border?" Aurora's eyebrows dipped, and she chewed her lower lip.

"Yes, to Thailand."

Aurora sighed. I thought I heard his voice last night. At least, I am not going crazy.

"It's okay. You can kiss him tomorrow. He said he will come see you tomorrow morning when he comes back." Nana giggled.

"Are you old enough to talk about such things?"

"I am nineteen, and I have a boyfriend. But he is not as sexy as yours. However, he is an amazing kisser." Nana closed her eyes and puckered her lips.

"That's always a strong point in a relationship." Aurora laughed.

"So are you okay or do you want a doctor?" Nana asked, then stood.

"I am okay."

"Do you want any food?"

"I am okay. You do not need to serve me."

"Yes I do. He paid me."

"How much exactly did he give you?"

"\$100." Nana energetically said. Her eyes lit up, and she did a twirl. "It is two month's salary for me cleaning the hotel's rooms. Now I can buy the dress I was saving up for."

Aurora smiled when Nana did another twirl. Aurora was

about to get out of bed, then froze. *Where are my iPad and wallet?* She jumped out of bed and gave Nana a fright when she started to search the room.

"What is it?" Nana gasped.

"My iPad and wallet." Aurora blurted out. Her eyes failed to find the items on the dresser, and she ripped the fleece blanket from the bed. She stopped dead when she noticed Nana giving her a, are you kidding me, look.

"He put it in the top drawer of the dresser."

"Right." Aurora commented and pulled the drawer open. She did not hide her relieve in finding her wallet and iPad.

"How is it in the big city?" Nana asked when Aurora pulled out \$10.

"Is this enough for two sandwiches and sodas?" Nana nodded yes. "Nana will you please get me a toasted chicken sandwich and a can of Coca Cola, and for yourself something? Then join me and I will tell you about the big city." Nana eagerly sprinted forward, took the money and was out of the room in a flash. With Nana gone, Aurora got her laptop out and started it up. She put a T-shirt and shorts over her bikini and then dialed Jeni. It may be 1 am in New York, but this was too important news to wait.

"What, no sexy show girl." Jeni laughed when the video Skype call connected.

"He is here." Aurora blurted out.

"What? Who?"

"Chase. The guy from the airport." Aurora yelled energetically and rolled her eyes then dropped back onto the bed while clutching her heart.

"Mr. sexy ass that has bad taste in bras?"

"Hey, I love my pink bra. Oh and don't get me started on his ass." Aurora laughed and sat upright again.

"And? Where in New York does he live? Are you going on a date? Did you kiss him yet?"

"Don't know, not yet, and no."

"Okay, you better explain. I can forgive you for letting him

slip through your fingers once, but twice. Don't make me come down there." Jeni warned.

"He saved me."

"What?" Jeni changed her position in bed and was all attention. Aurora told Jeni everything that happened the morning, including Nana and that Chase was away to some town and would check in on her in the morning.

"Oh hell. That's so romantic and then scary about the pool, but romantic that he saved you. And mysterious that he had to leave you to go to some town. It is a romantic mess. You should write a book about it." Jeni sighed and brought her hands to her heart and made as if she was in love. Just then there was a knock on the door. Aurora got up and opened it for Nana. Aurora introduced Nana and Jeni to each other and let the two talk a bit while she ate her sandwich. During the conversation, Jeni transferred the call from her cellphone to her laptop and angled her laptop over Manhattan. From her apartment on the 15th floor, she had a very good view. After a lot of questions, Aurora said good night to Jeni and allowed her to get back to sleep.

"She has a lot of money?" Nana asked.

"She has. She is very good at what she does."

"And you?"

"I am not sure I still even have a job." Aurora laughed, causing Nana's eyebrows to drop. She took Aurora's hands and turned them palms up. Aurora gave Nana a sideways glance while Nana studied her palms. Nana ran her small fingers over the grooves of Aurora's palms.

"One day you will have more money than her." Nana said then dropped Aurora's hands. Just before Aurora could comment, Nana continued. "That is if you do not make the wrong choices and screw your life up and get yourself killed." Aurora's jaw dropped. With a smile as if what she said was nothing, Nana started eating her sandwich. Aurora was speechless for a time, then her face brightened when an idea flashed through her mind.

"Nana. Have you been to Angkor Wat a lot?"

"A few times, why?" Nana watched Aurora opened an

eBook on her laptop and search through a number of images.

"Do you know exactly where this image was taken in the temple?"

Nana studied the image for a few seconds.

"I don't know exactly where. But it must be from the top level. That is the only place you will get that view. However, I do not know for sure if it is a view from Angkor Wat. Many temples are high and could give a view like that. I have not been to them all."

"Don't worry, the guide book says it is a view from Angkor Wat."

"Why do you want to go there? I know a far better place."

"Like where?" Aurora evaded the question.

"There are over 700 temples scattered all around Cambodia. Many not known to tourists. A small one is actually on my uncle's land. It is only a single-story structure, more like an old Buddhist library, but it is mostly intact and have vines growing all over it. At night the moon and stars shines through the open roof. There is a blanket there. I go there to think when I want to be alone, or to make love with my boyfriend. No one will disturb you and Chase there. It is private ground. You have to enter through a locked gate."

"Uh, well thank you. But I did not really have that in mind."

"Right. I can see you are too shy to ask where my special place is. Turn right when you exit the parking of the hotel. Follow the road for 5km until you see just rice fields. There is a side road to the left right next to a broken-down bus. You cannot miss it. Kids use it as a playground. Follow the side road for around 10km until you come to a fenced off land. None of the other properties are fenced off being rice fields. There is a large sign saying private keep out on the gate. The gate is locked, but the lock is old and just to keep tourists out. Just give it a good kick. Follow the road leading into the grounds for around 400 meters. It is narrow but easy to follow with a scooter. The temple will be on your right. As I said, there is a thick blanket in the corner of the temple."

"Well, thank you. I will surely keep that in mind. Now,

since you are to babysit me. What is there around here to do?"

"We can go play pool." Nana suggested.

"Uhm, I am not really in the mood to bump into those four guys again today. They seem to love the pool table."

"I know exactly what you need. Get your shoes and wallet and follow me." Nana jumped off the bed and made for the door while Aurora grabbed her wallet and flip flops she had stuffed in her backpack. Locking the door behind her, she followed Nana down to the parking area and then a short distance towards town. All along the way, they passed local Khmer roadside restaurants, backpacker places and massage parlors. Aurora read one of the signs. \$1 = 15 minutes, \$4 = 1 hour. Aurora smiled. *Yes, and \$10 = love you long time.* As one cue, Nana ducted into one of the massage parlors.

"Come, my friend works here. We can get a special full-body massage for cheap."

"I am not into that kind of thing." Aurora protested. Nana froze, then burst out laughing.

"This is Cambodia, not Thailand's cowboy town. It is illegal and frowned upon here to mix sex and massage." Nana took Aurora's hand and led her up a set of stairs to the second floor. The room had 12 mattresses on the floor, six on a side with a small passage in between. Curtains could be drawn to give privacy around each mattress. Soft instrumental music with water running as a backdrop filled the room. In a corner incense burned that was unfamiliar but relaxing to Aurora. Nana had a short conversation with one of the girls, then pointed to a mattress. "You can take that one. Strip to your bikini, my friend will help take your mind off all your worries."

"And you?" Aurora asked.

"I will be in the one next to you."

"Okay." Aurora stood on the mattress and stripped to her bikini, then lay down. Nana pulled the curtains closed. A short while later a girl barely bigger than Nana showed up and introduced herself, then rubbed sandalwood and yang-yang massage oil on Aurora's back and started to work the kinks out of

her muscles. Aurora closed her eyes and wished it was Chase giving her a massage. After a few minutes, she was almost asleep while trained hands worked the pressure points in her body. An hour later, the girl stood and left Aurora, now in total bliss. A few minutes later, Nana pulled part of the curtain away.

"How you feeling?" Nana asked.

"I can stay here the whole day." Aurora purred.

"I knew you were going to love it. You want a cookie?"

Nana pulled a round cookie from a pack and handed Aurora one.

"Thank you." Aurora said and took a big bite. Halfway through chewing she froze and stared at the cookie.

"What is in this cookie?" She asked with her mouth full.

"Chocolate chips and chopped up crickets and cockroaches." Nana ducked when Aurora spewed out the half eaten cookie. Shaking her head, Nana munched down on a cookie.

"That is so wrong." Aurora said. Horror filled her face when Nana popped another cookie in her mouth.

"You are weird Aurora. In Cambodia, it is like candy."

"I would much rather prefer a chocolate-chip ice cream." Aurora countered.

"You want some? I know a great place nearby."

"Definitely. I have to get this taste out of my mouth."

Aurora stood and pulled her shorts and T-shirt on. She followed Nana downstairs and paid the bill, giving the massage lady double what she asked for. Nana led them to a small shop where they got home-made chocolate-chip ice cream. Aurora was ecstatic. Haagen-Dazs did not even come close. After their ice cream, Nana showed Aurora the famous Pub Street in Siem Reap as well as one of the markets. Aurora and Nana bonded and shared their lives. By the time they got back to the hotel reception it was after 8pm. Nana joined Aurora for a Cambodia special baguette pizza. It was after 9pm when they said good night.

"Aurora, come find me tomorrow night. I want to know if Chase is a good kisser."

"You really do say what pops into your mind." Aurora laughed.

"Night." Nana smiled and walked to her staff room that was in a separate building at the far back of the property.

"Night Nana."

Aurora made her way back to her room and then took a quick shower before she curled up in bed. *This was the best day ever. And tomorrow will be perfect. Chase had better be a good kisser.*

Chapter 9: Seeking Answers

Monks chanting their morning ritual slowly pulled Aurora from her dreams. For a moment, she lay with her eyes closed while listening to the bells and male voices that mixed into a delightful symphony. With a moan, she opened her eyes then rolled onto her side and pulled a pillow closer, and then hugged it. She loved sleeping with something to hold or just next to her. It made her feel more protected. *Ah, if my knight with his broad shoulders and amazing ass was here he could lift me up in his arms and carry me to his castle.* Aurora hugged the pillow tighter. Someone knocked on the room door. Adrenalin shot through Aurora, and her heart hammered in her chest. *It's Chase. It's Chase. He's back.* A second knock jump started her body, and she flew out of bed. Frantically she scanned the room for clothes. *Shit shit, where is a bra? I cannot find a bra.* Aurora bounced on one leg while she tried to put her shorts on. A third knock sounded from the door.

"Just a moment." Aurora gave up on finding a bra in the overstuffed backpack and threw a shirt on. Quickly she tried to make her hair look sort of in control. With a take me to bed now look in her eyes, she ripped open the door.

"Oh, it's you." Disappointment filled Aurora's voice. Nana smiled back at her.

"Wow, you must really like Chase." Nana giggled and pointed to Aurora's shirt. Aurora turned scarlet when she looked down. Her tight rose buds were almost cutting holes in her T-shirt and longed to be suckled. Quickly she crossed her arms over her chest.

"I could not find a bra in time." Aurora countered.

"Right, that's what I say to my boyfriend as well when I want sex." Nana laughed.

"Sorry I..."

"You were expecting him. I know. He is not back yet. I came to see if you are okay." Nana giggled, cutting Aurora off.

"I am fine. Thank you for checking in on me."

"Okay. I have to go to work now." Nana turned and walked

away. Aurora shook her head. *Strange girl, but a nice friend.* Aurora closed the door again, and threw herself on the bed then yelled into a pillow. "Aahh, where is a man when a woman needs one?" She rapidly kicked her feet against the bed and punched the pillow to get rid of her frustration. Satisfied that she released enough sexual tension in her body, she stood and went to the shower. She needed a cold shower. With the strict dress code at the temple, Aurora dressed in a long denim, hiking boots, and a button-up cotton shirt with elbow length sleeves. Cherry scented lip-gloss, a bit of perfume, and a brush through the hair took care of the final touches.

Aurora grabbed her wallet, cell phone and a baseball cap, then headed out. She locked her room door, then glanced at Chase's room door. *Am I going to wait for him? It would be nice to see the temples with him. But what if he does not return? Am I going to give up on my dream of seeing Angkor Wat by waiting for a guy I know nothing about? He may be a total loser.* Aurora balled her fists and ground her teeth. *What is it about Chase that makes me not be able to forget about him?* She took a deep breath, flipped her nose up and squared her shoulders, then made her way to the restaurant. Reaching the restaurant, Aurora looked around. The four guys were not playing pool or hanging around. A second set of stairs that lead to the roof caught Aurora's attention. *I wonder where that leads to.*

"Morning. Would you like to have something to eat?" A server asked.

"Yes please. Cereal with fruit mix, topped with honey, and green tea please. Oh, and where does this lead?" Aurora pointed to the stairs.

"The sun deck. There are a few tables and chairs and two couches on top. People normally watch the sun rise from there. However, the view from there is worth it throughout the day."

"Can I order food there?"

"Of course, I will bring it up for you. It is \$3." Aurora paid the server, then headed up the stairs. Reaching the top, she passed a number of tables and made herself home in a bamboo woven

couch, then marveled at the breathtaking view of the Cambodia countryside. From her vantage point, she could see more of the rice fields and banana trees in the distance. *Okay, as I am going by myself to the temples, it is back to my original plan. See Angkor Wat first, then if there is still time, see the mountain temple, Phnom Bakheng. Mm, maybe have lunch at the temples, then definitely go and see Baphuon, and the Elephant Terrace. Oh, and I have to see the sunset at Angkor, seeing as I missed the sunrise over it this morning.*

"Your breakfast."

"Thank you." Aurora smiled and then immediately started eating. There was no time to lose now that her day was planned to perfection. Aurora scoffed her breakfast down, and then stood. She gave one last look at the spectacular Cambodia countryside and then made her way down to the reception area. A number of backpackers were coming and going, making the reception area crowded. Four times she was shouldered by a backpack before she cleared the reception area and stood in the parking lot.

"You want tuk tuk?" A local asked a short distance away and climbed off his scooter.

"How much to Angkor Wat?"

"You go whole day I take you all over \$25." Aurora contemplated the offer, then decided against it. There were loads of tuk tuks and motorcycle taxis at the temples. She much rather preferred to go on her own time.

"How much just for a ride to Angkor Wat?" The guy thought for a moment.

"\$10."

"Deal."

"Hop in." The guy jumped on his motorcycle and started it. Aurora gave one last look around the reception area and then in the direction of her room. *I wonder where Chase is.* Letting him go, she jumped in the tuk tuk. After making sure Aurora was properly seated, the guy pulled away and maneuvered down the small side road into the main road. Traffic was already dense, and the going was slow. Luckily, they only had 7km to ride to get to the main entrance. All along the road were roadside restaurants, hotels,

backpacker dorms, and the occasional massage parlor. *I am so getting a massage when I come back. I wonder whether Nana will be able to join me again. I love talking to her.* The tuk tuk driver turned left at a traffic light into the main road running through Siem Reap. With the road being larger, the driver sped up. Aurora's eyes glistened when she spotted a KFC. The road contained more businesses, with convenient stores, upper market restaurants and boutiques as well as a small shopping Centre. Soon they pulled into a parking area where the driver directed her to the ticket booths. Aurora took her place in one of the lines.

"How many day visit?" The girl in the ticket booth asked when it was Aurora's turn.

"Three days please."

"Stand on the markings please." The girl pointed to painted footprints on the ground. When Aurora took her place, the girl took her picture with a computer web cam, then held out her hand.

"\$62 please." Aurora handed over the money, and then took her photo id ticket. On cue, the tuk tuk driver stopped next to her in line with the exit for the parking area. Aurora energetically jumped in, and they zoomed out of the ticket area and back into the main road. Excitement bubbled up in Aurora. She loved the wind through her hair while dense forest passed by. Although the road was tarred, it still felt like a jungle. Large tall trees lined the road and made an honor guard for her. A few minutes later, they turned left at a T-junction where their road dead ended into the side of the moat of Angkor Wat. The majestic temple came into view, and Aurora gasped. The driver stopped right by the main entrance. Although still in the distance, Angkor Wat was magnificent and captivating. A marvel in both building style and achievement.

"You want me to wait?"

"No. Thank you." Aurora said and climbed out, and then paid the driver. He wasted no time in searching for tourists to take back to Siem Reap to make his trip double worthwhile. Aurora climbed the steps leading to the top of a 200 meter bridge that spanned the moat surrounding Angkor Wat. Her heart rate

quickened. Water gently lapped against the sides of the bridge. In the distance, the five massive towers of Angkor Wat called to her, and her feet answered. Birds sang love songs, and Aurora took the fresh scent of nature deep into her lungs. She passed the outer wall and stepped onto the 350 meter causeway that gave her a direct path to her dreams. Aurora passed two library buildings and two large ponds that flanked the causeway.

The closer Aurora came to Angkor Wat, the more she fell in love with the place. A mysterious energy radiated from the land and mystical temple that soaked into her very soul, uplifting her. For the first time in her life, she truly felt alive and happy. *Strange that it took a 1000-year-old temple to tell me where I belong.* Aurora glowed, radiating love and excitement. Dedicated to her quest, she was oblivious to the number of men she stopped dead in their tracks while she made her way to the outer courtyard. Aurora put her hand on her chest. Her heart was hammering away. *I am close. I can feel it.* Aurora walked around in the outer courtyard and marveled at the smaller temples and library buildings where monks years before gave wise counsel to the masses as well as hold prayers.

Having circled the outer courtyard, she climbed the steps to the inner courtyard wall. Nearly 2000 apsaras decorated around 600 meters of the inner wall in bas-reliefs, depicting ancient battles and myths of creation. Aurora slowed down at the turning of the sea scene to study it in more detail. With her heart in her throat, she finally pulled enough courage together and crossed the inner courtyard and made her way directly for the steps that led to the center of the main temple. Aurora stopped for a moment at the bottom of the steep wooden steps built to assist tourists. *It is now or never.* Filling her lungs to the fullest with unpolluted air, she took on the stairs. Each step was a fight both in steepness for her body, and in fighting her mind. Part of her wanted it over and be free, and part of her wanted to stay shackled to her past. The stairs led to an archway that opened up in a small courtyard. Four towers guarded the corners while a massive central tower stood exactly in the center of the temple. Aurora walked along the edge

of the top level in a roofed corridor to the first corner, then cut across the courtyard to the Buddha statue at the center. She had to pay her respects first. Although not Buddhist, Aurora bowed her head and brought her palms together by her forehead in respect, a sign only given to the Buddha.

"Himfp." A male tourist snorted next to her and unimpressed pushed past and shouldered Aurora.

"You don't need to be Buddhist to find his teachings of love and respect inspiring." Aurora snapped.

"He is a glutton, a fat Buddha." The man snapped back.

"Only in Chinese tradition and it is a sign of prosperity. The original Buddha and all the original images in Cambodia are slender. Have a closer look at the statue."

"He is lying down and is lazy, just begging all day." The man yelled and then stormed off. Aurora shook her head at the man and turned back to the Buddha image. *Wow, and I thought I had issues.* Giving another bow to the Buddha image, Aurora walked back to the corridor and resumed her walk. All around where openings the size of modern double windows in the walkway walls to allow light to enter through. From the top, the entire temple grounds were visible, as well as much of the nearby temples. At each opening, Aurora paused for a moment to take in the scenery. Another opening and another view passed by. *No, this one is also not it. Where is it? Where is the spot?* Aurora stopped dead when she faced the main entrance of the temple grounds. *This is the place.* A knot formed in her throat, and her heart raced. From her vantage point, she could see the causeway that lead to the main entrance clearly. The stone was rough under Aurora's hands when she held tightly onto the edge of the stone opening. *I found it. This is the view in the background of the picture of mom and dad. This is where they first met and shared their first kiss. This is where grandmother said mom told her she would go when she dies.* Raw emotions tugged at Aurora's heart. *I miss you mom and dad. I wish you were here.* Aurora wiped away the tears. *Did you touch this stone mom? Is my hand where yours once was? Are we touching? Are you here?* Aurora swallowed hard and took a deep breath. *I did it. I fulfilled the*

promise I made myself when I was six. The day grandma gave me the first picture taken of you and dad together, taken by a stranger passing by. GRANDMOTHER. *Oh mom why did you leave me with her? Did I not deserve to have you raise me? Am I really as bad as grandmother said I was?* Aurora gripped the stone until her knuckles turned white while the tears flowed freely. Her body shook while emotions poured out.

A calm filled Aurora and stopped the tears. She wiped her eyes on her sleeves and then took a deep breath. I love Manhattan, but I never belonged there. That is why I never was happy there. I have seen so little of Asia, and it has been hard on me. Yet, I love it. I want to live here. Sadness filled Aurora's heart. There is no work for someone of my skills here. If I move to Asia, I would need to give up everything. And where will I live, what work will I do? A chill ran down Aurora's back. No grandmother, I will find a way. I will be happy. If I keep my job and work hard for 10 years and save every cent I can, I will have enough to keep me afloat for a long time here. I have to convince the board not to fire me. Even if I have to work under Emily, I will not give up. An earthy perfume with a hint of patchouli finally grabbed her attention, and Aurora span around.

"Beautiful view." Chase smiled.

"Where were you?" Aurora blurted out. Her cheeks reddened when she realized how silly the question was.

"In Battambang. The taxi had engine troubles on the way back. I looked for you at your hotel room and then at the restaurant but could not find you."

"How did you know to look for me here?"

"Angkor Wat is the first temple tourists come to visit. And the top level is a must see. If there was any place to find you, it was here. I have actually been here for an hour walking in circles around the top looking for you." His answer melted Aurora's heart, and a slight swelling occurred in her rose buds. Chase came to stand next to her and peered out over the inner section of Angkor Wat. Aurora turned to face the same direction before commenting. "I ate breakfast on the sun deck."

"The one place I did not look."

"Have you been standing here for a while?"

"Long enough."

"Why didn't you say something?"

"You seemed to need a moment alone."

"Thank you. And thank you for saving me in the pool yesterday."

"It was my pleasure."

Aurora looked at him, and their eyes connected. For a moment, the world disappeared when his deep-blue eyes pulled her in. Aurora's creamy flesh swelled until it was warm and tingling. Before she got drunk on his intoxicating stare, she broke the connection and looked over the countryside again.

"So have you seen enough of Angkor Wat to go see some other temples?" Chase placed his hand on her shoulder. Electricity shot through Aurora at his touch, and her heart rate increased several levels.

"For now. I want to see the sunset over Angkor Wat later. I had planned to go see Phnom Bakheng, the state temple of the first capital at Angkor."

"Then there is not a moment to lose." Chase grabbed Aurora's hand and pulled her towards the stairs.

"What's the rush? The temple is not going anywhere." Aurora laughed.

"We have to hurry, there is still time."

"For what?"

"You will see. Trust me, you will love it."

Excitement filled Aurora, and she felt like a kid on her way to Disney world. Quickly they made their way down the stairs to the inner courtyard. They jogged to a back entrance of Angkor Wat where Chase had parked his BMW R1200GS Adventure motorcycle. Chase held out a helmet to Aurora, and then helped her fit it. He climbed onto the motorcycle and fitted his helmet, then turned to face her.

"Jump on Aurora." Without hesitation, Aurora jumped onto the back seat. Chase reached behind him and grabbed her

hands, then brought her arms around his middle and placed her hands together. When Aurora gripped him around his waist, he started the motorcycle and pulled away. The powerful engine launched the motorcycle forward with force, and Aurora tightened her grip around his waist. A smile formed on Chase's face. Adrenalin rushed through Aurora when Chase picked up the front wheel. A distance later, he dropped the wheel again and gave more throttle. Behind him Aurora yelling at the top of her lungs with joy. Chase expertly negotiated the motorcycle down a narrow dirt path that was littered with leaves. The treetops touched and created a narrow tunnel of natural green wonder.

After a few minutes, the path opened up, and they joined the main tarred road that passed the main temples in the park. Trees flashed by for a distance before Chase slammed on the brakes and pulled off the road. Aurora's hands shook from excitement, and she gave Chase a squeeze before she let him go and climbed off. Aurora pulled the helmet off then froze. In front of her were four elephants. *No way*. Aurora's jaw dropped. Chase took the helmet from her and locked it with his helmet to the motorcycle then went to purchase tickets. One of the elephants slowly walked over to Aurora, and her heart stopped. A large riding basket was fastened to the back of the elephant, capable of carrying two people. The elephant trumpeted and then lowered its trunk. Gently it ruffled Aurora's hair.

"You can stroke her if you want." The elephant's handler said when he came to stand next to Aurora. Nervously Aurora lifted her hand and touched the elephant's trunk. Slowly, the elephant moved forward and then dropped its head. Aurora gently ran her hand over the elephant's head, who gave Aurora a gentle nudge.

"She likes you." Chase said when he came to stand next to her.

"This is so amazing." Sparks ignited in Aurora's eyes.

"I know. I wanted to ride one, but you have to be two people to balance the basket out on the back. We just made it. This is the last ride up for the morning. Come, let me help you up."

Chase took Aurora's hand and led her to a large wooden platform nearby. Stairs took them to the top where they were at the same level as the elephant's back. The handler led the elephant to the platform, ran up the steps, and then climbed onto the elephant's back. He made himself seated directly on her neck with a foot behind each ear.

"Get on." He motioned to Aurora. Chase held her hand, and she climbed over the ankle high side of the basket. Just as she put one foot on the basket, the elephant moved away a little, causing Aurora to be balanced in midair.

"Jump forward." Chase said.

"The distance is too much." Aurora countered. Aurora gasped when Chase grabbed her by the ass with both hands and pushed her forward. As if in planned, the moment Aurora had both feet in the basket, the elephant moved back to allow Chase to easily climb on. Aurora and Chase sat down in the basket with their feet dangling in the air next to the elephant's sides. Aurora gave the elephant a sideways glance. *You moved on purpose.* As if the elephant could read her mind, it lifted its trunk and pushed Aurora against Chase.

"Hey, watch it." Aurora waved a finger at the elephant who let out a trumped.

"You need to sit closer together to balance the load directly on her back, else it hurts."

"Okay." Chase said and wrapped his arm around Aurora and pulled the two of them tightly together. Aurora pressed her lips together and gave a slight smile. *Smooth Chase, real smooth.* The closeness of his hard body caused her rose buds to swell and harden. Her heart quickened, and her breathing followed. Chase's body was too close for comfort and ravaged her senses. Aurora had to contain herself not to grab Chase and kiss him. The leaf covered dirt path was lined with dense vegetation, giving the feel of being in a remote the jungle. Gently the basket rocked to and fro while the elephant slowly made its way up the mountain. Now and again a moat that surrounded the mountain was visible below to the right as well as another temple. Aurora leaned her head on

Chase's shoulder, and he gave her a gentle squeeze. After 15 minutes the large half pyramid shaped Phnom Bakheng temple came into view. A few small library structures were situated on the top level.

The handler brought the elephant to a similar wooden platform as they used to climb on. Chase stood and climbed off. He held his hand for Aurora, and she eagerly took it and stepped into the spot where chase had sat. Aurora was about to step off when Chase grabbed her by the waist and effortlessly picked her up and swung her around to the right, then gently sat her down. Still holding her by the middle, he looked her in the eyes.

"Did you like that?" The little sluts in Aurora's tummy dived to the apex of her legs and stirred things up. Aurora swallowed hard.

"That was fantastic. Thank you." Aurora licked her lips. Her creamy flesh throbbed, begging to be cupped and her rose buds announced themselves through her shirt. *Oh Chase, kiss me now. Just kiss me and take me.* Chase dropped his hands from her sides and gently touched her upper thighs before taking her hand.

"Come, you have to see the view from the top." Chase said and led Aurora down the platform and to the stone steps on the side of the temple that led to the top. Aurora was speechless. *Is he playing with me? Does he like me? What the hell is going on? Is he scared or shy? Aahhh, I hate not knowing? Maybe I should just kiss him and see what happens. We are grownups, and both know this will not lead anywhere serious and is just fun while we are on holiday.* Chase helped Aurora up the steep steps to the top-level several stories higher, then showed her the best spot to view the surroundings. When Aurora came to stand next to Chase, their hands touched. Without a word, Chase took her hand and held it, sending Aurora's emotions spinning. *Okay, so he is a bit shy on the kissing thing, I can work with that. Oh hell, Jeni would have ripped Chase's clothes off and jumped him right now.* Aurora pressed her lips together and suppressed bursting out in laughter.

"See that temple there to the South?" Chase asked.

"Yes."

"That is Phnom Krom, and over there is Angkor Wat. Behind us to the north is Phnom Khulen and Phnom Bok."

"Phnom Khulen. Is that not where the Kulen Mountains are with the massive waterfall and the lingas?"

"That's correct. That is where the Khmer empire began in 804 CE when King Jayavarman II proclaimed himself a God-King and declared the independence of Cambodia from Java."

"Oh I would really love to see that." Aurora said and leaned against Chase. Aurora gave Chase a sideways glance. You are so perfect. I love just being near you. Is there a chance that this could work between us? I wonder where he works and lives in New York. He did get on the flight there. Maybe if we work together and save up, we can find a way to both come and live in Asia.

"Are you hungry?" Chase asked, snapping Aurora from her thoughts. For a moment, she was lost for words.

"Yes."

"I know the best restaurant in the park."

"Lead on."

Silently they made their way down the temple with a different set of steps, and then walked all around the temple to the front. The elephant was already gone. Bird songs filled the air while a gently breeze played with Aurora's hair while they slowly walked through the jungle like path to where Chase's motorcycle was. Aurora had 1000 questions to ask, but held back. *Lunch is the perfect time to get my answers and see if this is just going to be a fun few days or have a chance of being something more permanent.* Aurora waited for Chase to climb onto the motorcycle then jumped onto the back. She squeezed Chase tightly around his middle and rested her helmet on his back. Chase placed his hands over hers. A shiver of delight pulsed through Aurora. Letting go of her hands, Chase started the motorcycle and pulled away.



Constellations erupted in Aurora's eyes, and her head was on

cloud nine when Chase brought the motorcycle to a stop at a restaurant close to Angkor Wat. Her heart fluttered while they walked hand in hand to the outside seating area and took a table. Aurora made sure she got the chair that faced Angkor Wat. A server introduced himself and then placed menus on the table for them. Aurora took one look at the menu and pushed it to the side.

"Have you decided already?" Chase asked, his eyebrows dipped.

"Yes. Chicken salad with avocado slices and feta cheese, and water."

"That sounds delicious. However, I think I am going with the salmon option." Chase motioned for the server to take their order and then gave him their choices. Aurora played with her thumbs. *You have to ask Aurora. You will not know where this is going until you ask.*

"How long are you in Cambodia for?" Aurora broke the silence.

"I had planned to fly out in two days."

Aurora almost swallowed her tongue. Oh no. That's too short. Well, then we will just have to make the best of the time we have. And maybe we can continue in New York. I wonder if he is a fireman with those muscles. He can definitely carry me out of a hot fire. Or maybe he is a buffed banker or investor who likes to go to the gym like Rick.

"Okay, so what do you do then with most of your time?" Aurora smiled.

"I am a technical scuba diving instructor in Thailand." Aurora's heart stopped. Slowly, she opened her mouth, then closed it again. Aurora tried as best to hide her shock and disappointment. *Oh life is cruel. Well, that settles it. It is just fun for a few days then.* Aurora remained silent until the food arrived. She commented on the surroundings and how she loved it in Asia, being so different than New York, while eating. With her salad finished, she finally brought the subject of work up again.

"Your work sounds technical." Aurora forced a smile.

"It just means I can teach people to go deeper and for longer

than people normally do." Aurora licked her lips. *Hell, you can do deeper and longer on me any day.*

"You are pretty handy in a fight for a technical guy who blows bubbles in the ocean all day." Aurora teased.

"Used to be in the marines."

"A seal?"

"Oh hell, don't ever let a seal hear you think he is a marine."

Chase laughed, then stopped when he saw Aurora's comical expression. It took him a few seconds to catch the joke.

"Right, blowing bubbles all day in the ocean, a seal." Chase smiled, and then continued. "I was in MARSOC."

"A what?"

"Marine Corps Special Operations Command. We do direct action, special reconnaissance, counter-terrorism, information gathering, and unconventional warfare in fast-paced remote and complex environments."

"In short, you kick ass."

"Right."

"Sexy." Aurora winked. "So how is it that you ended up teaching scores of hot babes to dive?"

Chase's eyebrows dropped for a second. He knew what she was asking. He saw her expression change when he told her he lived in Thailand. A thought milled in Chase's head. Would he move to New York for her? He had the means. But was Aurora serious or is this just fun for her?

"I lost my dad when I was 12. He was in the marines. I always wanted to grow up like him, so as soon as I could enlist, I did. Two years ago, my mother collapsed at her job. A blood vessel burst in her brain. By the time they got her to a hospital and operated, a lot of damage was done. I left the marines to be with her for the last days. After her death, I just wanted to get away from the death and fast life of my old life."

"I am sorry." Aurora held Chase's hands. Chase looked away for a moment, then continued.

"I already had been trained as a scuba diver, so it was an easy adjustment to become an instructor. I thought I would do it

for a short time, but I love it where I am. And, no, I do not teach scores of hot babes to dive. I leave that to the other guys and mostly keep to myself. Now your turn Aurora."

Aurora took a deep breath and looked past Chase to Angkor Wat. She shared Chase's pain of losing parents. Aurora wanted to tell Chase that she wished to live in Asia, possibly Cambodia or Thailand, but she had to admit the truth. She was too scared to quit her job on a promise of love, and that it somehow will work out. No, the only way she was quitting her job and moving to Asia was if she had a fool-proof plan with multiple backups.

"I am a manager for an investment firm in New York."

"Investment. Why investment, I took you for a lawyer."

"I like numbers. They are orderly. Each one knows his place. And I like to be able to plan everything down to the finest detail. I know the investment laws, and my plans are always guaranteed to give good returns."

"It sounds like you are very good at your job. I think you devote yourself totally to it."

"I did."

"You did? What changed?"

"Well, a coworker took my project and sealed the deal behind my back, so I got a bit upset and was put on mandatory leave until the board decides if I keep my job. So, here I am."

"You got a bit upset? What did you do?"

Aurora held her breath for a moment, then looked away. She closed her eyes a few times to let the tears go away. Her feelings for Rick was competing with her attraction for Chase, and it hurt to think Rick had a relationship with Emily for so long. The fact that he now wanted her and professed his feelings for her messed with her mind.

"I punched my boss."

"Wow, why?"

"The coworker that took my project. He recommended her for a promotion when I did all the work." Aurora's voice slightly wavered.

"I am sorry." Chase took her right hands in his. His touch was warm and comforting, bringing Aurora to the edge of tears. She had to fight not to let the emotions pour out of her. Closing her eyes, she tilted her head back and held it there for a few seconds. Aurora took a few deep breaths then dipped her head forward and smiled at Chase.

"Right. Enough of things we cannot change. Let's have dessert."

"I vote milkshake." Chase volunteered, still holding her hands.

"Oh yes." Aurora exclaimed.

"What flavor?"

"I prefer chocolate, but anything but vanilla."

Chase brought her right hand to his mouth and gently kissed the back of her hand, stopping Aurora's heart. Letting go of her hands, he called a server over. Chase ordered two double thick chocolate milkshakes and then turned to Aurora.

"Do your parents also live in New York." Aurora dropped her head and shook it slightly.

"I am sorry. If I may, is it related to your fear of water?" Chase took Aurora's hands again.

"Yes. The car spun out on ice on our way to my grandmother's house in Minnesota. It landed in a lake, and they died." Pain ripped at Aurora's heart. She loved the comfort Chase gave her by merely holding her hands. No man has ever held her hands so gently and for so long before.

"I was four." Aurora swallowed hard. "My heart stopped. A passerby pulled me through the back window and did CPR on me. He was an off-duty paramedic. He brought me back to life."

"It was not your time."

Aurora ripped her hands from Chase's.

"It was not my parent's time as well." Aurora said louder than she meant.

"I am sorry. That's not what I meant." Chase said softly when Aurora stood. Aurora dropped money onto the table then with tears in her eyes commented. "I need some space. Thank you

for a lovely morning." Aurora wanted Chase to stop her, to grab her and hold her, but he did not. He let her go without a word. Chase clenched his fist when Aurora walked away. *Dammit, the one girl who you allowed to touch your heart, and you screw it up. When are you going to realize you are not in the marines anymore and talk to people normally? Girls! How does one understand them?* Chase leaned back in his chair when the server brought the milkshakes.

"It's okay, I will take both. Don't ask."

"You should go after her." The server commented.

"Trust me. She hates me right now."

"No, she needs you right now."

"How you figure that?"

"She looked back three times while she walked away and waited for a moment the last time before she crossed the road. She wants you." The server smiled.

"She does?" Chase jumped up.

"Yes, go get her."

Chase ripped out his wallet, dropped some notes on the table and then ran after Aurora. She was a distance away from him, across the road. For a moment, he had her still in his vision, then she disappeared into a crowd of people. His heart pounded in his chest while he expertly dodged people.

"Aurora" Chase yelled when he caught a glimpse of her. Without looking around, Aurora climbed onto the back of a scooter taxi. Two buses off-loaded their passengers near Aurora. Her scooter taxi pulled away, and she disappeared into a sea of people. Chase's heart dropped to the ground. There was no hope of catching Aurora, for his motorcycle was parked too far away.

"What now Chase?" Chase said aloud and then pushed his way through excited tourists to his motorcycle.

Chapter 10: The Choice

Aurora let the tears flow while the scooter zoomed past tuk tuks and other scooter taxis. Here and there, tourists were cycling from temple to temple.

"Where to?" The driver asked.

"Any nice temple."

"You want to see Angelina Jolie Temple?"

"Which one is that?"

"Angelina Jolie Temple. You like."

"Okay."

Aurora closed her eyes for a moment. Did I screw up something beautiful? I know I over reacted. But with Chase driving me wild and Rick's email and the hearing coming up, I cannot think straight. And then Chase had to put the pool incident and my parent's death at the same time in my head. And what's with him not running after me? He is probably already on his way to a bar to have a few beers with friends. Aurora squared her shoulders and pushed Chase from her mind. Temples big and small zoomed past them on their way to the mysterious Angelina Jolie temple. A few minutes later, the driver stopped his scooter in front of a temple entrance. Aurora narrowed her eyes and studied the entrance.

"This is the Angelina Jolie temple?" Aurora laughed.

"Yes yes, very famous. Was in the movie Tomb Raider" The driver smiled.

"This is Ta Prohm. I wanted to see this temple. Thank you for choosing this one."

"See, I know you like famous temple. All the girls do. They want to be Angelina. Now, warning. No climbing any tree or wall. You nice, but you not as nice as Angelina." The driver said while he waved his finger at Aurora.

"Uh, thank you, I guess." Aurora climbed off the scooter, paid the driver, and then made her way to the entrance. The driver had dropped her off at the entrance that had a wooden bridge that crossed a moat. Water gently flowed beneath the bridge. Aurora

made her way to the outer wall of the temple. Set in an attractive jungle setting with vines, trees, and moss growing over the temple walls, this was one of the most visited temples in the park. Aurora slowly made her way into the inner temple and passed through multiple passages and small courtyards. Finally, she entered a clearing where the famous tree that grew over an entrance, was. People lined up to have their pictures taken at the spot Angelina once was. A short while later Aurora passed a spot where a tree root grew over a wall. The thick root looked like a massive anaconda snake at sleep.

Aurora watched as a couple deep in love walked past with their arms around each other. Okay, I over reacted. If I see Chase again I will apologize to him. Maybe we can still have a good time before he leaves for Thailand. The temple fascinated Aurora so much that it was close to sunset before she was ready to leave. Outside the temple, Aurora took another scooter taxi and headed back to Angkor Wat temple. If there was one thing she was not going to miss, it was the sun setting over Angkor Wat. In the mornings, the sun rises on the other side of Angkor Wat, blinding you. This allows one to see only a silhouette of the temple. At sunset, the sun was from behind and transformed the multiple walls and towers in a breathtaking show while the sun let its red rays glide over it.

Aurora walked the path she took the morning until she passed the libraries that flanked the causeway. A number of travelers were already seated on the grass next to a library. Aurora sat down far enough to be alone, but close enough to hear the travel guide give details about Angkor Wat. The shadows grew long, and the sun was low when someone came to stand next to her.

“May I sit down?”

Aurora nodded. She did not need to look up to know it was Chase. His voice and perfume will be with her the rest of her life. Slowly, Chase sat down close enough that if he put his hand next to her, he would touch Aurora’s hand on the ground. A few minutes passed with neither saying a word.

"I am sorry I upset you." Chase broke the silence.

"It is not your fault. I over reacted. I am sorry. So many things have happened to me today, and I just needed a bit of space to think."

"Do you want to be alone now?" Chase made ready to stand.

"For a guy who trains hot girls in bikinis, you do not know much about talking to girls do you? Are you afraid of us?" Aurora teased, breaking the tension.

"Well, I have not had much experience. I only use the training job to have a visa and stay in Thailand. I kind of do not need to work so I only take students when I feel like it."

"Army pension?"

"Marines."

"Right, sorry. Do not insult the Marines by calling them Army, they are sensitive about it." Aurora said in a mock deep voice then playfully pushed Chase on the shoulder.

"We are big teddy bears with hearts of gold wearing guns and bullet-proof vests." Chase chirped in, then continued in a more serious voice. "My mom had a large estate. She was in real estate and did well for herself. I invested my inheritance, and with my pension, I do okay." Chase was actually doing more than okay as his mother left him a fortune, but he wanted Aurora to like him not for his money. They watched the sun slowly give power over to the moon. Aurora slid her hand over Chase's and they held hands when the night began.

"So beautiful." Chase said.

"The sunset is amazing right?"

"That's not bad as well."

Aurora pressed her lips together. Smooth Chase, very smooth. I walked right into that one. You are a fast learner. She gave Chase's hand a slight squeeze.

"Are you hungry?" Chase asked.

"I am. And I miss my chocolate milkshake. How was it?"

"I don't know."

Aurora turned her head and gave Chase a puzzled look.

"I ran after you but was too late. You got on a scooter and sped away. I spend the rest of the day riding all over the place looking for you."

"You did?" Aurora's jaw dropped.

"Yes. I finally came here when the sun was setting, hoping that maybe you still wanted to see the sunset. I had to find you."

Aurora reached forward and kissed Chase, who went stiff. Immediately Aurora pulled away.

"I am sorr..." Chase's hot lips over hers cut Aurora's words off. She slid her arms around his broad shoulders and pulled him closer while Chase placed his hands on her hips. Chase's kiss was devastating to her senses and when he pulled back for a second to look into her eyes, she hungered for more. She wanted him, needed him. He was right and wrong for her at the same time. Chase captured her lower lip with his mouth and then suckled her lip for a second before letting his tongue dance over her lips. Aurora's breathing quickened, and her heart pounded in her chest. Her creamy mounts swelled until they hurt while her apex moistened. Even in the low light, her hardened throbbing rosebuds announced themselves through her shirt. Chase's tongue found hers and seduced it with moist sweeps until they mated. Aurora gave a slight moan when Chase brought his hands up and cupped her throbbing mounts through her shirt. Aurora was ready for him, ready for him to take her fully. To let every inch of him explore her deepest passion.

"You have to leave now. The park is closing."

Aurora pushed away from Chase with such force that she fell over backwards. Her face went scarlet when she stared up at the park's officer who shone a light in her eyes.

"Right, we are off." Chase said with a hint of laughter in his voice and jumped up. He held out his hand to Aurora then helped her up. Laughing they jogged to Chase's motorcycle and then raced back to the hotel. Aurora was in heaven. She slid her hand under Chase's shirt and ran her fingers over his hard abs. Aurora leaned her helmet against Chase's shoulder and held him tightly while they passed locals on their way home. At the hotel Chase

locked the helmets against the motorcycle and then turned to Aurora.

"Do you want to get pizza to go?"

"Oh yes." Aurora smiled.

Aurora took a seat in one of the bamboo couches in the reception area while Chase ordered Cambodia pizzas and sodas. Aurora turned in the couch to face Chase and then brought her legs up.

"Why do you hate vanilla Aurora?" The question took Aurora by surprise, and she looked away. She remained silent for a moment then took a deep breath.

"My mother loved chocolate ice cream. The last time she kissed me, she was eating some. I can still taste her cherry lip-gloss mixed with the chocolate ice cream even though I was four at the time. My grandmother refused to buy anything but vanilla ice-cream."

"That is a bit mean."

"My grandmother loved her son, but she did not approve of mom marrying him. After the accident, grandmother said it was my mom's fault that she lost her son because if he did not go after mom and leave for New York, we would not have made the trip to her and have the accident. Grandmother took her hatred for my mom out on me. It did not help that I look like my mom. So the older I got, the worse things got between us. I felt sorry for her and did the best I could to please her."

"I am sorry to hear that."

"Well, she is gone and I can buy as much chocolate ice-cream as I want." Aurora smiled.

"Your order." A server said behind Chase, and held a plastic bag up. Chase took the bag and then held his hand to Aurora to help her up. Hand in hand they walked back to their rooms while making small talk.

"My room?" Aurora asked when they walked down the balcony.

"Sounds good."

Aurora opened her room door, and motioned for Chase to

leave his shoes at the door. Aurora switched on the lights and then set the air conditioner to just break the heat. Chase sat down at the end of the bed and took out their dinner. Two baguettes with toppings, rolled in paper, and soda. Aurora took a spot at the head of the bed and crossed her legs. In silence, they started on their food.

"Wow, this is amazing. Extra so since I am starving." Aurora exclaimed.

"I got you something extra as well." Chase smiled when Aurora was almost done with her baguette. Slowly, Chase pulled two small chocolate-chip Haagen-Dazs ice cream tubs from behind his back.

"Oh thank you. That is amazing." Fireworks erupted in Aurora's eyes, and she held her hands in front of her mouth. She had to contain herself not to grab the tub from Chase. Aurora smiled when Chase playfully held the tub tightly for a moment, before letting Aurora have it. His gaze for a moment fixed on the scar on Aurora's left hand, then he quickly looked away.

"It is from the car accident." Aurora said and ran her index finger over it once.

"I am sorry. I know it is painful for you."

"No, don't be. It is okay. I have been keeping my feelings locked up for so long. Talking about it with you at lunch actually helped."

"That's good."

"Chase. How do you go into battle knowing you may die? How do you get the courage to face death?"

"I don't know how the other guys handle it. But for me, I tried to live each day to the fullest. So that each battle I went into, I felt that if I died that day, I lived my life."

"But did you not have plans for the future? Was there not something you were scared you would not get to do if you died?"

"I had plans for the future. But in combat you soon learn that the best plans rarely go as you want them. You adapt and change plans in the moment. The hardest part is the quiet times. When everything around you is going to hell, all you think about

is staying alive."

"Did you lose friends?"

"Yes."

"Why do some live and some die?"

"Aurora. Are you asking why you lived and your parents died?"

"Yes. What makes me deserve to live and they not?"

"I don't know why some live, and some die. Maybe it is fate, maybe destiny, maybe it is random, or maybe it is nothing but luck. But what I do know, is that if it was my choice, I would have wanted me to die so that my team members can live. And I would not want my team members to feel angry or undeserving for my sacrifice. I would want them to follow their dreams. I don't know why you lived and your parents not. But I believe that they would want you not to feel sorry for yourself. Or that you did not deserve their love and sacrifice, but to live your life to your fullest and go for your dreams."

"Thank you."

Aurora sat silent for a moment then ran her spoon around inside the ice cream tub and scooped the last out. As she licked the spoon off, ice cream ran down her chin.

"Let me help you there." Chase said and took a serviette, then leaned forward. Gently he wiped Aurora's chin off. Their eyes locked and for a moment neither moved. Slowly, Chase leaned in and kissed Aurora. She dropped the empty tub on the floor and ran her fingers through Chase's hair. Chase placed his hand behind her back, and Aurora leaned back. Gently Chase lowered her head to a pillow. The little sluts in Aurora's stomach went wild. Her rose buds hardened when Chase left a trail of kisses from her lips to her neck. Aurora ran her hands down his back, grabbed his shirt and pulled it off. His muscles were hard and hot under her touch when she ran her hands over his chest and abs. Chase's lips found hers while he unbuttoned her shirt. With one hand behind her back he unhooked her bra and gently pulled her shirt and bra away in one motion. Her creamy mounds lay bare and started to swell.

Aurora unbuttoned Chase's pants and pulled them down. Chase suckled on her rose buds while he cupped her throbbing creamy mounts. Aurora arched her back when Chase left kisses all over her chest and stomach, then unbuttoned her pants. She giggled as he pulled her pants off. Aurora ran her hands over his underwear. His manhood was hard and hot underneath. Aurora bent her head back and closed her eyes when Chase slipped his hand under her panty and over her naked flesh. Tipping her head forward again, she opened her eyes and froze. A shock went through her body. Rick was on top of her. Panic flooded her body and she quickly closed her eyes. A second later, she opened them, and Chase was on top of her again. Slowly, he bent down to ravage her aching mounts with his searing hot lips while he gently started to pull her panty down. Aurora's thoughts were all over the place. *What are you doing Aurora? You can have Rick. But I want Chase. Am I doing the right thing? If I sleep with Chase and then go to Rick in a few days I am no better than Emily. But I don't want Rick anymore. I want Chase. But it will not work out with me in New York and Chase in Thailand.*

"Stop." Aurora's command and her hands pushing on Chase's chest caused him to jolt back. For a second, his expression went blank and then his face became emotionless. Aurora's heart stopped. *O God, what have I done? Is he going to get mad and hurt me, maybe even rape me? Shit I led him on, and now I am telling him to stop.* Chase looked at her with that deep-blue eyes, now not showing any emotion. Aurora cringed when he placed a palm next to her head on the pillow. Chase took a deep breath, then his muscles relaxed and his expression softened, turning to sorrow.

"I am sorry for pushing too fast Aurora." Chase said and pushed away from her and made to get up.

"No no no, please don't go. Just give me a moment." Aurora said, and grabbed Chase by the arm. She closed her eyes for a second, her breath racing almost as fast as her heart.

"It is not you. You are perfect and I want you, oh I want you badly, it is just." Aurora took a deep breath to try to calm her nerves.

"Is it something to do with your problems in the city you came to Cambodia to solve?"

"Yes."

"Your boyfriend dumped you and you thought you would screw some random guy to get over him?" Chase's voice had a hint of anger in it.

"Yes, No."

Aurora's eyes shot open when Chase got off her and the bed. Without a word, he picked up his clothes and headed for the door. Stopping by the door, he looked at Aurora and commented. "Aurora, I am no girl's bounce. I was not playing around." Aurora jumped out of bed and ran to Chase. Throwing her arms around his neck, she held him tightly.

"You are not a bounce. I did not have a boyfriend." Aurora let Chase go and then took his hand. "Will you give me a minute to explain?" When Chase nodded, she took him back to bed. Chase sat on the edge of the bed, while Aurora crossed her legs and faced him where she sat at the top.

"My boss whom I punched because he suggested my co-worker to the board to get the promotion that should have been mine. Well, I did not punch him because of the promotion. I was mad because I had a crush on him. I found out they were seeing each other for a month already."

"You felt he betrayed you?"

"Yes. Stupid dreams I had. I had planned to come to Cambodia in any case, and now I had the time. Yes, I was open to having a causal relationship just to get over Rick my boss. But then you came along and complicated everything. I want you Chase, and I do want to make love to you. But I just need time because I want it to be real, not just a one-night stand. I want to be with you. I just do not know how it can work out yet."

"For you Aurora, I will wait an eternity." His comment brought tears to Aurora's eyes, and she had to fight hard not to break down in a sobbing mess.

"Chase. Will you stay tonight and just hold me please?" Chase slowly leaned forward and kissed Aurora on the forehead,

then gently pulled her legs straight and tucked her in bed. Switching the lights off, he snuggled up behind her. Chase rested his hand on her thigh, unsure how to hold her. Aurora dropped her hand to Chase's, then brought it up to her throbbing mounts that were still yearning for his touch.

"You can touch me Chase. I just don't want sex tonight." Chase gave her breast a slight squeeze, then kissed her once in the neck.

"Thank you for understanding and not getting mad, and for staying. I need you here tonight."

"There is no other place in the world I would rather be than here with you tonight, even if I have to sleep on the floor."

Raw emotions ripped at Aurora and she could not contain the tears anymore. Tears of joy burst out and her body shook. *I have to make this work. But how?* Chase hugged her a bit tighter while she cried herself to sleep.

Chapter 11: Facing Fears

Darkness was still ruling when Aurora awoke. During the night, they had turned and Aurora was lying on Chase with her head resting on his chest. His arm was wrapped around her. Aurora closed her eyes and listened. Chase's heartbeat was steady and strong. Aurora gently lifted her body, then pressed one hand on Chase's heart and another on hers. Their hearts beat as one. Aurora let her hand glide over Chase's chest and stomach, then she slid out of bed. She had pressing matters to attend to. After letting go of the soda she had the night before, she stepped into the shower. The water was warm and helped her clear her mind. Movement to her right pulled her attention to the bathroom door. Chase poked his head around the door and smiled at her. Aurora lifted her arm and held it out to Chase, inviting him into the shower with her. Chase took her invitation, and came to stand behind her. Gently he hugged her from behind.

"I am messed up right?" Aurora asked.

"We all have our problems and hang-ups we have to deal with." Chase took the soap bar from its holder and began to wash Aurora down. His gentle touch was in stark contrast with the power hidden in his muscular body. Aurora took the soap from Chase, and ran her hands all over his body. He was as ready for her as she was for him. Aurora stood and pressed herself against Chase.

"I feel so safe in your arms Chase."

"Do you want to see something special?"

Aurora looked into his eyes. "I am already looking at something special."

Chase kissed Aurora, then took her hand and pulled her from the shower.

"You will need long pants and boots. It is some distance away on a dirt road." Chase held a towel for Aurora.

"And I just had a shower." Aurora smiled.

"Oh, and wear a bikini underneath."

Aurora's face went stark. "Chase, you know I don't swim."

"I know. Just trust me on this one." Chases closed the shower taps, dried himself, and then wrapped a towel around his middle.

"I am quickly going to my room to get my swimming trunks and fresh clothes. See you in five minutes." Chase picked up his clothes from the floor and left the room. Aurora selected a two-piece black bikini, then dressed in long denim and a cotton button up shirt, followed by her hiking boots. Chase returned just as Aurora was fastening her boot laces. All done, Aurora grabbed her Rip Curl wallet, cell phone and then locked up. Energetically they jogged down hand in hand to Chase's motorcycle. The morning air was fresh and full of promise. The sun and birds were still asleep when they pulled out of the hotel's parking area. Aurora held Chase by his hips and took the scenery in while they passed through the heart of the still sleeping town. Boutiques and upscale restaurants stood shoulder to shoulder with small convenient shops, Khmer roadside restaurants, and local businesses. Siem Reap's heart catered to all, tourists and locals alike.

Chase turned right onto a main road that lead to the next town and opened the motorcycle up. Businesses selling office supplies, household goods, car parts and more flanked the road. Two flea markets flashed by, and then only trees lined the road, illuminated by the powerful headlights of the motorcycle. A short distance later, Chase turned left into a side road, and let the motorcycle run at full speed.

The full moon illuminated rice fields dotted with trees that lined the road, while in the distance, the Kulen Mountain range called to them. Now and again Chase slowed down when they passed a small local village where in the daytime chickens crossed the road, children ran after them, and banana leaf thatched wooden houses stood proud on tall stilts next to the road. Slowly, Cambodia came to life further on. Women cooked breakfast on open fires under the houses while men helped, and old folks watched on while they lay in hammocks fastened to the stilts.

The sky turned pink when they turned off into the Kulen

Park. Dirt and dust spat into the air when Chase opened the throttle. Minutes later, they stopped before a gate where Chase quickly bought tickets from a still half-asleep guard. Chase gave one look at the sky turning light orange and then headed up the mountain. Aurora's heart beat wildly when they raced up the steep cement road that led to the top off the mountain. Below them, the Cambodia countryside was ready to step out of the darkness. On top of the mountain, Chase let the motorcycle spew up rocks and dirt while he gunned it over the gravel road. Dense jungle like forest lined the road while trees touched branches overhead. A distance later, Chase turned into a side road.

"Hold on tightly." Chase yelled to Aurora, who grabbed him around the middle and held on. The road changed from a small dirt road to a foot path and then nothing while the powerful motorcycle climbed over rocks, passed through ankle deep streams, negotiated large dry river beds and followed a footpath through the forest that eventually opened up in a large clearing at the crescent of the mountain. Chase switched the motorcycle off and helped Aurora off, then climbed off himself. He led her to a large rock nearby and sat down. Aurora held her breath. They were on top of the holy mountain Phnom Kulen, the birthplace of the ancient Khmer Empire. It was on this mountain that King Jayavarman II in 804 CE proclaimed himself a God-King and declared the independence of Cambodia from Java. Jayavarman II initiated the cult of the linga king. In front of them, the mountain range was almost flat and stretched out for 40 km. In the very far distance, Angkor Wat and the other large temples were specks on the horizon, now breaking out of the darkness.

Aurora sat next to Chase and wrapped her arm around him. She held him tightly while the sun bathed the land in orange and then chased the last of the night away. Aurora leaned against Chase. *I have never been happier in my life. In two days, I have lived more than in my whole life put together. I know Barbara will come through for me. I may not get the senior manager position, but as long as I keep my manager position, I can save a reasonable amount each month. As soon as I have enough to sustain me for a few years in Asia, I am*

coming back. Aurora glanced at Chase. *How we are going to make it work?*

"Aurora." Chase said and pointed to the sunrise.

"You know what my name means?" Aurora gasped.

"Of course. It means dawn in Latin, or sunrise. It was also the name of the Roman goddess of the morning."

"A goddess. I did not know that. But I like it." Aurora laughed.

"Come, the day is far from over." Chase said and stood. They followed the off-road path they came with to the larger dirt road, then headed down it for a few minutes. After another turn off and crossing a wooden bridge that creaked while they drove over, they stopped in a large clearing. Local Khmer restaurants and gift shops lined a dirt path that led down towards a strong stream. Chase secured their helmets and then led Aurora past the shops that was just opening up. Hand in hand, they walked to the stream that was one of the main sources of water for the towns below. A 15 meter long, rope sway bridge crossed the stream and gave access to the other bank. Aurora's eyes widened when Chase led her to the bridge.

"No way." Aurora protested.

"It is okay. The bridge is strong, and the stream shallow under it. People often come to stand in the holy stream." Chase assured her and then put his foot onto the bridge. Aurora took a deep breath, then grabbed onto the guide rope on her left while holding Chase's hand with her right. Chase grabbed the other guide rope, and slowly they crossed the bridge. Aurora's heart was hammering in her chest while the bridge swayed gently to and fro with each step. The closer they got to the middle, the worse it got. Under their feet, the water was laughing at her. Aurora clenched her jaw and pushed on. Relief flooded through Aurora when her feet touched firm ground on the other side. Chase led her to a small temple ruin on the other side, and they explored it for a few minutes.

"You ready to go back?" Chase asked.

"To the hotel?" Aurora's face dropped.

"No. Over the bridge, there is still much to see here." Chase laughed.

"Okay."

The going back was easier and Aurora almost enjoyed it. They walked alongside the stream until it widened out on a large rock area. Up ahead, the ground disappeared with the water where it dropped down a large waterfall. Aurora and Chase walked to the edge where safety ropes prevented tourists from falling or willfully jumping off. Aurora peered down the waterfall and gasped. The water dropped 20 meters down the rock face and gathered into a large pool of 30 meters wide. Large boulders broke up the flow of the water further downstream, creating a natural pond. All around the sides of the rock face were vines and scrubs, transforming the base of the waterfall into paradise.

"Come, let's go have a look." Chase said and took Aurora's hand. They followed a path that led off to the left until they came to a metal staircase set against the side of the rock face. Adrenalin rushed through Aurora with each step that brought them closer to the base of the waterfall. When the stairs ended, they were next to the stream, a short distance from the pool. Aurora and Chase negotiated a number of boulders next to the stream, then came to a wooden walkway that was built on the edge of the pool. A number of Khmer restaurants lined the walkway, all still closed.

"What are you doing?" Aurora gasped when Chase stripped down to his swimming trunks.

"I am going to take a bath in the holy water. Come on, it is shallow." Chase said. He sat down on the walkway and then slid into the water. Standing hip high in the water, he held out his arms to Aurora. Aurora swallowed hard, then started undressing. Hip high calm water she could take. Her heart stopped when the refreshing mountain water covered her legs when she slid in. Chase grabbed her, and held her tightly against him. His warmth and presence gave Aurora comfort.

"Are you okay to go in a little deeper?" Chase asked.

"You will not let me go?"

"No."

"Okay." Aurora's heart raced, and her breathing increased while they slowly shuffled deeper into the water. When the water was level with her chest, Chase stopped.

"You still okay?" Chase asked when Aurora closed her eyes and put her head on his shoulder.

"Yes, just give me a moment. This is the deepest I have been in water." The rush of the water coming down a short distance from them scared and excited Aurora at the same time. The water was so majestic and beautiful, yet so cruel and unforgiving.

"Okay. I am good." Aurora said and pulled a bit away from Chase, who held her by the hips. Aurora held onto Chase's shoulders.

"Okay. I am going to gently lift you up so that your feet are off the bottom. Feel how it feels to float." Aurora lost her sure footing when Chase lifted her up. She gasped and frantically kicked with her feet. Slowly, she relaxed and her breathing slowed down.

"Is this how it feels when you are floating?" Aurora asked.

"Yes. Not so bad?"

"Not with you holding me no." Aurora smiled. Chase held her a bit longer, then gently set her down until her feet touched the bottom.

"Ready to face your fear Aurora?"

"I thought I was."

"You are, and have done great. But you still have a short distance to go. You game?"

"You are not going to let me go are you?" Panic shot up in Aurora.

"No. I promise not to let you go. All you have to do is take a deep breath, keep holding on to me, and then bend your knees until your head goes underwater."

"What?" Aurora gasped, her eyes the size of plates.

"We will be holding onto each other, and you can just stand up anytime you want. You only have to keep your head underwater for a second."

Aurora clenched her jaw and closed her eyes. "Okay, one

second." Aurora took a deep breath then slowly lowered herself. She paused for a moment when the water touched her lips, then went for it. Aurora dipped her head underwater, and instantly she was four years old again and drowning in her parent's car. Aurora kicked and tried to free herself from the car seat. Her heart pounded against her chest when her head broke water. Aurora gasped for air while Chase held her tightly. When her heart slowed just below light speed, she looked at Chase.

"I want to go." Aurora gasped. Sadness filled Chase's face, and he started for the edge of the pool.

"No." Aurora stopped Chase while she still tried to catch her breath. "I mean. I want to go again. I want to end this fear." Chase's lips were hot on hers. Aurora pressed hard against him and savored his kiss, then pulled away.

"Now, stop distracting me so I can concentrate." Aurora laughed and pulled slightly away from Chase. Before Chase could respond, Aurora took a deep breath and dunked her head underwater. Chase ground his teeth when Aurora's nails dug into his shoulders. 15 seconds later, Aurora's head broke water, and she gasped for air.

"I thought I would be able to hold my breath for longer."

"It is the excitement. You are burning a lot of oxygen."

"Okay, relax, got it." Aurora said before taking another deep breath and going underwater. This time Aurora managed 20 seconds. She continued until she could hold her breath for a minute, then gently let go of Chase. He took his hands off her middle. With her eyes open underwater, Aurora looked around her. For the first time ever, her parent's car was gone, and she was free. No longer strapped in a baby seat and drowning, and free from the fear of water. Slowly, she stood and then grabbed Chase and passionately kissed him. When she finally surrendered his lips to him, she threw her arms around his neck and held him tightly. Tears of joy flowed over her cheeks. When she caught her breath, she leaned back.

"I cannot swim. Will you help me to get closer to the waterfall?" Chase smiled and took Aurora in a rescue hold, then

swam backwards with her until they were close to the waterfall. The water spray filled the air like mist, and a rainbow ran through it.

"Kick with your feet to help you stay up." Chase said while he held Aurora by her middle and helped her float. When he could feel from the weight on his arms that she could float on her own, he asked. "Are you okay for trying to float for a moment by your own?"

"Okay."

Chase let Aurora go, but held his hands close to her middle.

"This is beyond my wildest dream." Aurora yelled. When she became tired, Chase grabbed her and held her up.

"How do I get back to the shallow side myself?" Aurora asked.

"There are a number of ways. One of the easiest is to kick with your legs like a frog and wade the water away from you with your arms." Chase let Aurora go and then demonstrated by swimming a short distance away then returning. Aurora copied him and headed for the shallow side. As soon as her feet touched the ground, she turned around and headed deeper again until she was at the spot they stopped near the waterfall. Aurora turned around and headed to the shallow area again. She repeatedly swam up and down until she was exhausted.

"Wow, now I am starving." Aurora gasped when Chase came to stand next to her in the shallow water, having swam next to her on each lap.

"The restaurants up on top should be open now. They have a nice breakfast at the main restaurant. Ready to head out?"

"Oh yes. Thank you for today, and yesterday, and last night. Shit, thank you for cramming a lifetime of joy into two days." Aurora pulled Chase closer, then froze. "Shit did I do that? I am so sorry." Aurora ran her fingers over the marks on Chase's shoulders.

"It's nothing. Don't worry about it." Chase smiled. "Now, shall we have breakfast?" Aurora nodded and let Chase help her out of the water, then gave him a hand getting out. While they

dressed, the first tourists for the day walked down the stairs. Aurora almost floated up the stairs to the restaurant. To her delight, they served cereal with fruit salad, topped with yogurt and honey. Aurora smiled when Chase ordered an American breakfast with sausage, scrambled eggs and bacon. Aurora's mind was trying to calculate how much it cost to live in Asia without asking Chase out right.

"Asia is far cheaper than Manhattan. I paid \$20 for a bus from Bangkok to Siem Reap. Granted the thing fell apart, but still way cheaper than a cab ride in New York." Aurora broke the silence.

"\$20. That is a bit steep for an old bus. A minivan is only \$12 right through to Siem Reap."

"What?" Aurora gasped.

"Yes. A luxury bus with air conditioner and internet is around \$24." Chase took a sip of his coffee as if overpaying for bus tickets was an everyday thing.

"The damn women, she conned me." Aurora said loudly.

"At least you helped the community."

"What?" Aurora's jaw dropped.

"Was there a lot of locals on the bus with lots of goods?"

"Yes. The bus was packed."

"Did they get off at all kinds of random stops?"

"Yes?" Aurora's eyes questioned Chase.

"Well. With many of the country folks living on around \$1 a day, who do you think paid for their bus fare to work?" Chase smiled, then stabbed a piece of sausage and popped it in his mouth.

"I did." Aurora dropped her gaze to the ground and pressed her lips together. "I am sorry for getting upset. My temper is something I have to work on."

"Asia will teach you a lot about the world that Manhattan did not. And it is a good place to work on temper tantrums." Chase laughed.

"Hey, that was not a tantrum. That was me just stating my thoughts strongly."

"You have much to learn grasshopper." Chase teased. "And much to still see on the mountain." Chase continued before Aurora could reply.

"You seem to know the mountain well?" Aurora's eyes held Chase's.

"I have been here a few times. I love then mountain, and the ocean. Unfortunate I do not like Sihanoukville with all its backpackers. So to be with the ocean, I chose Thailand. Now, finish up, we have lots to see."

Aurora and Chase finished breakfast, then headed out. Chase showed her the Terrace of Leper King and the 1000 lingas in the river, the hidden Krol Damrei temple with its elephant statues, the 8 meter reclining Preah Ang Thom Buddha statue dating from the 16th century and the Preah Kral Pagoda on top of Kulen Mountain. By the time they headed back, the sun was touching the horizon. The powerful motorcycle ate up the dirt road down the mountain, and soon they pulled onto the tarred main road. Chase lifted the front wheel a distance.

"This is so amazing." Aurora yelled in her helmet. Her heart raced the motorcycle's engine for top speed and won. Never in her life had she felt so alive. Aurora hugged Chase tightly, and he reached down with his left hand and gave her hands a little squeeze, then took the handle bars and let the motorcycle run at top speed. Excitement bubbled out of them when they stopped in the hotel's parking area.

"Dinner?" Chase asked.

"Definitely. But I first want to take a shower." Aurora smiled, then frowned when Chase received a text message. Chase's face dropped when he read the message.

"Something wrong?" Aurora asked, concern lacing her voice.

"I am not sure. Can I come by in say an hour, and then we can go for dinner?"

"Okay." Aurora stood motionless when Chase gave her a hug and then walked away. Around her backpackers were having a blast, having started the night early. Aurora shrugged her

shoulders, then headed for her room. Inside, she quickly stripped down, then stepped into the shower. The hot water massaging her muscles made her think of the morning's shower with Chase and his hands on her. Aurora smiled. *Tonight, I am yours Chase.* Aurora dried herself, then went through her clothes in her backpack. She pressed her lips together when she found the pink see-through underwear Chase liked. *Just for you Chase.* Aurora dressed in a T-shirt and shorts, then opened her wallet. Her face slightly glowed when she looked in her wallet. The condom in its pink wrapper Jeni had given her was screaming for attention. Aurora closed her wallet and put it in her back pocket, then slipped her cell phone in her other pocket. Chase was to come pick her up in a few minutes. Bored, Aurora opened her laptop and downloaded her new emails.

Aurora's eyes stopped on an email from Dorothy, marked urgent. Her heart beat increased, and her hand trembled while it hovered over the mouse button. *What if it is bad news? But Barbara said she would call. I don't want to know now, it will spoil the evening. But I have to know. I will not be able to think the whole night until I know.* Clenching her jaw, she pressed the button and opened the email. Aurora brought her hands to her mouth. Dorothy was sorry to email Aurora, but she thought she should at least warn Aurora. She had overheard Rick and Barbara talking when she passed Rick's office. The board had a meeting late the afternoon, Aurora's night. Barbara sounded very upset. Rick had asked Barbara if they should wait until Aurora came back before informing her of the board's decision, and Barbara had said no. She had promised Aurora that she would call when things changed. She was just waiting for final confirmation on something, then she would call. Dorothy did not know what happened and why the board met without Aurora present, but Emily's name was mentioned a few times. Dorothy feared the worst for Aurora.

A tear formed in Aurora's eye, and she closed the laptop. Defeated she curled up in a ball on the bed. Aurora hugged a pillow and let the tears flow. *What am I going to do? I have no work. How am I going to get the money to move to Asia? What is Chase going*

to say when he hears I have nothing? Will he still be interested in me? The room walls closed in on Aurora, and she jumped from her bed. *I have to get fresh air.* Aurora locked the door behind her, then leaned on the balcony wall. The full moon reflected in her glistening eyes and turned the tears on her cheeks silvery.

"Are you sure you are okay?" Came a male voice from the first floor almost directly underneath Aurora. Aurora snapped her head up. *Chase?* Aurora leaned over the balcony. Chase was standing in front of a woman Aurora's age. She was in the doorway of her hotel room, wearing skimpy short pajamas and a cast on her left leg. Aurora's eyes shot open. Her jaw dropped, and her heart stopped.

"I love you Chase."

"Love you Sam."

Aurora's heart was ripped from her chest when Chase hugged the girl. The girl leaned forward to kiss Chase and Aurora pulled her head back, unable to see them kiss. The world around Aurora stared to spin, and her knees gave in. *He lied to me. He took me out while he had an injured girlfriend waiting in the room. The asshole.* Far away, Aurora's grandmother was laughing in her grave. Aurora jumped up and ran. She had no idea where she was going, but it did not matter. Aurora took the steps two at a time and then bolted past the garden. With a thud, she ran into someone. Both tumbled to the ground.

"Aurora, what is going on?" Nana asked when she stood and dusted herself off.

"Nana can I borrow your scooter please?"

"Why?"

"Aurora wait." Chase yelled from the stairs.

"I see." Nana said and held out her keys. Aurora bolted to the parking area while Chase ran for her, calling for her to wait. "Drive slow." Nana yelled when Aurora climbed on the scooter.

"Aurora." Chase yelled when she pulled away. He stood frozen for a moment, then bolted to his motorcycle. He had to catch Aurora. She had to know the truth.

Chapter 12: Will Love Win?

Aurora zoomed through the traffic. There was only one place she knew to go to think. Nana's small automatic scooter was easy to ride. All Aurora had to do was operate the throttle. Being a cheaper model, there was only a hi, and low beam switch for the light, with the lights activating when the ignition was turned on. Tears flowed freely while Aurora dodged dogs and locals on bicycles returning home. A short distance out of town, the traffic lessened, and Aurora sped up. She let the scooter run flat out at 80km/h on the deserted road, double the speed limit. At the back of her mind, Nana's words forced their way up. Aurora backed off the throttle and slowed down to the speed limit. Just then the scooter's headlights lit up a broken-down truck that blocked most of the road. Aurora slammed on the brakes, and the scooter skidded on the dirt road. Aurora almost lost control of the scooter and dragged her boots in the dirt alongside the scooter to stay upright. She stopped just in time with the front of the scooter going under the truck and the side of the truck almost touching her chest. Her heart raced while she pushed the scooter backwards, then negotiated around the back of the truck. If she had gone any faster, she would have been seriously injured.

The near accident took some of Aurora's thoughts away from Chase and her lost job. When she looked again, she was at the gate that led to the hidden temple on Nana's uncle's property. Aurora put the center stand out while letting the scooter idle. With its headlight lighting the gate up, Aurora gave the lock a good kick. It opened up and Aurora pulled the attached chain away, then opened the gate. She quickly pushed the scooter through, then locked the gate behind her. The road was narrow like Nana said, but with the full moon, it was spectacular. Aurora brought the scooter to a stop when she spotted the temple. She climbed off and walked to the forgotten temple that once served as a library for monks. At a time, chants and incantations reverberated off its walls and roof. With the roof mostly gone, the moonlight bathed the inside in a soft silver glow. Aurora walked over the leaf

covered ground to the back of the temple and dropped down on the blanket Nana had left there. Aurora's mind and emotions were in disarray. *Everything I wanted and thought I had was gone in an instant. Rick sleeping with Emily and then Chase not telling me he had a girlfriend. Was grandmother right? Did I not deserve to be loved?*

Aurora bolted up when a motorcycle stopped outside the temple. *How did Chase find me?* Aurora's heart raced. She balled her fists. *Chase will come to know the karate moves I know.*

"Aurora." Chase said when he entered the temple.

"You said you would wait an eternity for me, and then you went and shagged some girl while I got dressed for dinner. I had the perfect evening planned, and you ruined it." Aurora yelled and sprinted forward, her eyes locked onto the soft spots on Chase's body. Aurora jumped through the air and did a flying kick. Expertly Chase sidestepped and Aurora landed in a kneeling position behind him, then jumped up and took her stance again.

"I did not sleep with a girl."

"I saw you come out of her room, and she was all over you. Slobbering you and you telling each other you love each other." Aurora yelled then lunged forward and threw a triple combination punch. Chase managed to block two, but the third one caught him on the shoulder. Chase rolled his shoulder, and Aurora smiled. *He felt that one, good.*

"You hardly can call it slobbering. She only gave me a peck on the cheek, and..."

"Whatever." Aurora launched another triple combination punch attack. This time Chase was ready and blocked each blow.

"AND, she is my sister."

"What?" Aurora dropped her hands, unsure as to what to do.

"She is my sister. We have not seen each other for almost ten years since I joined the marines. She hated me being there, and she had constant fights with my mother for taking my side. She was still staying with my mother when I joined the marines. Then she just one day packed up and left. She did not even know our mother had died. I only found her a month ago after hiring a

private detective. I was in New York meeting her. We settled our differences, and when she heard I was no longer in the marines and lived in Thailand; she wanted to come with me. We were on our way to go see Angkor Wat when you ran into me on the airport in New York. The day I saved you in the swimming pool, she had gone to Battambang for the day but had a motorcycle accident. That was why I left you to go to Battambang. She only came back this afternoon. I missed her text messages through the day, and she was angry with me for not replying all day. I did not know how she was going to react when I explained why I missed her text messages."

"And, how did she react?"

"She hit me with her crutch and then said if I do not bring you with me for breakfast with her tomorrow she will bash my head in with her crutch. She is dying to meet the person that stole my heart."

"Shit, I feel like an asshole." Aurora looked down and kicked a few leaves up.

"Don't. You behaved exactly as I would want you to behave. If you did not care for me, you would not have reacted so intensely. A girl used me a while back to get her boyfriend jealous. I thought I would never trust a girl enough to fall in love again. You proved me wrong. How you reacted showed to me you really care."

"I do." Aurora looked up at Chase.

Chase leaned forward to kiss Aurora, but she stopped him with her hand on his chest and pushed him away.

"Not like this, I am a mess. It is not perfect."

"Why does everything always have to be perfect Aurora?" Chase asked softly.

"Because I am not perfect. I am useless. I lost my job. I am nobody. I can never do anything right. I do not deserve to be happy. I do not deserve YOU." Aurora yelled. Aurora's energy left her, and she dropped to her knees. Tears ran in rivers down her cheeks while her body rocked. Chase's hands were warm on her shoulders.

"Go away Chase. You deserve a better girl. A perfect girl for you that will make you happy."

"You are perfect Aurora."

"No I am not."

"You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. I am madly in love with you. You are the perfect girl I want." Chase gave Aurora a hug, and then lifted her chin. "Who raised you Aurora?"

"Why?"

"Do you trust me Aurora?"

"Yes."

"So, then who raised you?"

"My grandmother from when I was four."

"Aurora. Picture yourself being four years old. You are in your grandmother's living room, and she is with you. You look over to the kitchen, and you see a glass of soda. It is your favorite color and you shuffle over to it with your little legs. You take it in your little hands, and it is your favorite color and smell. You take a sip, and it is amazing. So you shuffle over to your grandmother to show her the treasure you found. Just as you enter the living room, your little hands cannot hold the glass anymore, and it falls and messes soda all over your grandmother's carpet. You look up and you look into her face, and you see her expression. What would you like to tell her now as an adult you could not back then?"

"I was only four. How could you yell at me like that? The carpet did not even stain. You demanded perfection from me when you yourself were a mess; your life was a mess. Nothing I ever did was good enough for you." Aurora took a deep breath. "I see now. You were jealous of me doing better than you ever could. You could not admit I was better than you were. I am not worthless. At least, I planned a bit in my life. You could not even plan for your funeral. I spent two years paying off the hospital bills you left me with. I am not worthless. I am perfectly like I want to be, and I am exactly where and with whom I want to be." Aurora grabbed Chase and held him tight while rivers wetted his shirt.

His warmth and strong shoulders gave her comfort. *This is what I want. This is where I want to be. I want you Chase.* Aurora's cellphone rang in her pocket, and slowly she pulled away. She gave Chase a kiss and then pulled away from him.

"It is probably Nana checking if I am okay." Aurora said and pulled her cellphone out. Aurora's face dropped.

"Who is it Aurora?"

"Crap, this is bad timing. It is Barbara, my boss' boss. One of the board members. She is phoning me to tell me the board decided to fire me. My secretary had already altered me by email."

"You will have to talk to her some time, why not now?" Chase asked. Aurora ground her teeth and answered the call.

"Hello Aurora."

"Hi Barbara."

"Aurora. I am sorry to bother you like this. I know it is a bit unusual doing this over the phone, but the board had a meeting. I cannot go into all the details now, but I thought you should know soonest that the board are giving you the senior manager position."

"What? Why?"

"It is not something I want to discuss over the phone, but Emily no longer works for the company. The portfolio is a mess, and the investors are upset."

Aurora slowly stood and then took a step back from Chase. Her heart pounded in her chest and her head span. As a manager, I could juggle the workload and fly once a month for a long weekend to see Chase, but as a senior manager, there would not be the time. Keeping my job and taking the senior management position means letting go of Chase. I love New York. I love my job, but I also love Chase and Asia. But I have no job here or no idea how it is going to work out. Nothing is planned. Aurora bit her lip. Grandmother, I deserve to be happy, and I am worthy of love, even if I do not have a job.

"Barbara. I thank you for the offer, but I have to decline. I am not coming back to New York."

"Aurora."

"Barbara. I greatly respect you, but I have to follow my dreams, and they are here in Asia."

"You have a work offer there?" Barbara gasped.

"No." Aurora took a step closer to Chase and put her hand on his chest. "I met a man, and I fell in love with him and with the country and culture here. This is where I belong."

"You give me no choice Aurora. I did not want to tell you this over the phone. Emily tried to steal the money. She transferred the \$100 million to different foreign accounts and then tried to leave the country. She was arrested at the airport a few hours ago. If it was not that I was going through the files online to see if you really did all the work, I would not have picked up that the money was transferred to personal bank accounts instead of investment accounts. Aurora, we need you. The investors are threatening to sue the company. I understand that you want to stay in Asia; I will do anything for my husband, so I understand. Can we compromise?"

"How?"

"The work you do Aurora can be done mostly from anywhere in the world. If you want to stay in Asia, we will set you up there. Visas, work permits, housing, anything you need. You can fly once a month to New York for meetings. Please think about it. It will take a week for the banks to release the funds back into the company's accounts. I can give you that long to decide. Will you think about it?"

"I will? Thank you." The call disconnected. Aurora switched the phone off and dropped it onto the leaf-covered ground. Before Chase could comment, she grabbed him and kissed him. Aurora ran her hands down Chase's back and then grabbed his shirt at the bottom. She pulled his shirt off and then let it drop on the ground. Aurora moaned when Chase planted kisses from her lips to her neck while he unbuttoned her shirt.

"Nice." Chase smiled when her pink bra showed. Chases pulled her shirt off and unhooked her bra. Aurora's creamy mounds swelled, and her rose buds hardened when they hung bare. She unbuckled Chase's pants while he suckled on a rosebud.

Her creamy mounts throbbed while Chase cupped them. Chase dropped a hand to Aurora's pants while Aurora pulled his down. His manhood was hot and hard in her hands. The apex of her legs became swollen, and her portal of pleasure ached for him. Chase pulled her pants down then lay a trail of kisses from her creamy mounts to her apex. His lips were hot on her petals of womanhood. He suckled on her pearl and shockwaves of ecstasy shot through Aurora. She grabbed Chase at the back of the head and arched her body backwards as he ravaged her senses. Deep inside her, she clenched multiple times. Aurora pulled Chase's head away from her, then bent down and pulled her wallet from her shorts. She took the condom wrapper out and opened the packet. Chase's manhood throbbed in her hands while she rolled the condom on. Her creamy mounts ached impatiently for his hands to cup and caress them while Chase lowered Aurora onto the blanket. His lips found hers, and their tongues did a dance. Chase dropped his hand to her apex. His fingers glided over her wet naked flesh and massages her petals of womanhood.

"Take me now." Aurora gasped and pressed her body hard against Chase, feeling his warmth. Slowly, Chase entered her and she accepted him fully. Rhythmical they moved as one, their hearts beating as one. Their heartbeat increased, and their breathing were fast and shallow. Chase was in and out of her while his hand stimulated her pearl of womanhood. Aurora moaned and hugged Chase tightly when she clenched around him. Chase let go on the second time she clenched around him, driving her even higher. Chase continued the onslaught on her senses with his fingers on her pearl while he suckled her throbbing hard rose peaks. Aurora gently pressed her lips tighter while her eyes glistened. Slowly she leaned forward and ran her hands through Chase's hair while he planted kisses from her swollen creamy mounts, over her chest, to her neck and then her lips. Gently Chase pulled out from her. Aurora felt empty at the loss of him. Chase lay down next to her and the caressed her body with his fingers.

A butterfly landed on one of her sensitive rose buds, sending a shiver through Aurora. Chase frowned, and then his

face went serious.

"Hey, that's mine." He said and brought his hand up. Aurora stiffened. *Is he going to kill the butterfly?* She relaxed when he placed his finger on her swollen creamy mount next to the butterfly, and then gently scooped it up. Slowly, he glided his finger off her hardened throbbing flesh towards the apex of her legs while his tongue suckled a sensitive rose bud, causing ripples of pleasure to engulf Aurora. Stopping at her tummy, he off-loaded the butterfly there and lifted his head.

"I think this is where you belong, you must have escaped."

Aurora giggled then ran her hands through his hair while he renewed his onslaught on her senses with his tongue on her rose buds. His hand glided over her body to her apex, then joined the onslaught on her senses. Aurora's breath raced and she arched her back, giving him full access to her. His hand was hot on her bare flesh as it glided over the damp petals of her womanhood. Seconds later, her portal of pleasure glistened. Aurora brought her thighs together as her love's sweet lava flowed, and she clenched deep inside multiple times. Not being able to take any more attacks on her rose buds, she pulled his head to hers. His lips were hot on hers, and his tongue absorbed her drugging nectar before dancing a tango with hers. *I love you Chase*, floated through her mind. Chase slowly pulled away, causing her lips to yearn for more suckling. Chase pushed himself up and then let his right hand glide up over her tummy, past the butterfly and on to her creamy mounts. His fingers caress her rose buds, sending jolts of lighting pleasure through her body.

"Are you sure you are ready for a beach server job in Thailand?" Chase asked. Aurora grabbed his hand and pressed it hard against her swollen mounts.

"You do not like what I did?"

"I do! And that's the problem. I cannot think straight with you doing it." Aurora gasped, and then calmed her breathing. When she had some sort of control over her breathing, she continued. "My company just offered me the senior manager position. Emily screwed up. They are desperate to have me back."

"Are you going to accept?"

"Hell yes." Aurora yelled.

"And us?" Chase's face went white.

"They are willing to set me up anywhere in the world I want to live. I was thinking of moving in with a gorgeous hunk lying next to me." Chase smiled, and his color returned.

"You know I live in a traditional Asian wooden house half in a forest on a cliff that overlooks the ocean. Is that something you want?" Aurora smiled. *I don't care if we live in a barn knee-deep in cow manure, as long as I have you. However, your house is my dream house.*

"It sounds perfect."

"How many days did you plan on still staying in Cambodia?"

"I want to stay two days here in Siem Reap, then go to Phnom Penh for two, then to Kampot for three days."

"And then?"

"Then off to Thailand to see some gorgeous hunk that swept my feet out from under me."

"So I will see you in about a week then?"

"You bet that amazing ass of yours."

"Is my ass all you care about?" Chase dropped his eyebrows.

"Well, you have other qualities as well."

"Such as?"

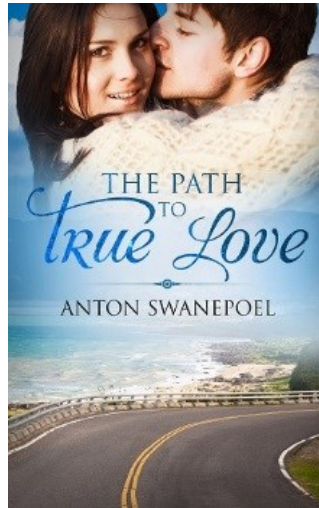
"You are terrific in the woods, not sure how you are in a bed or shower yet."

"We can go back to the hotel and find out." Chase smiled then gave Aurora a passionate kiss.

"We should probably get dressed." Aurora panted when Chase surrendered her lips to her.

"Has it got anything to do with the fact that several mosquitos already zapped my ass, and you do not want to share?" Aurora burst out laughing when she leaned forward. Several red spots showed on Chase's still perfect ass.

Continued in



Love struck, Aurora decides to move to Thailand and live with her dream man, Chase. However, her haste to be with Chase puts her on an adventures path to a different country when she takes the wrong bus.

Rick, Aurora's ex-boss and womaniser is hell bent on having Aurora as his trophy. Unable to let her go, he decided to do whatever it takes to break Aurora and Chase up. He also needs to make sure Aurora does not find out about his dark secrets that can send him to jail. Maxine, recently divorced, takes a vacation to the resort where Chase works. Lonely and desperate, she is determined to have Chase as her vacation toy boy.

Can Chase's love for Aurora resist Maxine's charm and Aurora make it to Chase in time before Rick destroys their relationship.

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What if you fell in love with the person you were hired to kill?

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For years, international spies, operatives with a taste for blood, have sought a mystical relic, a treasure, and with it knowledge that could destroy the world. As unsolved murders ring the globe, an unsuspecting woman, Laura Electa Valencia, tries desperately to escape her own troubles: the brutal, unexplained death of her parents, an abusive ex-boyfriend, and the loss of her job at the local library.

On a cruise, charted for exotic locations and unknown love, Laura is catapulted to the heart of intrigue, with deadly consequences. The demur librarian, baffled by the turn of events, skirts near-death and descends into a sphere of deceit, where even the dead cannot be trusted. Unbeknownst to Laura, she is the key, and every nation on earth would kill to have her.

From the first to the last page, this is a novel filled with

excitement, chicanery, romance, and a body count that puts 007 to shame. Travel to far-away lands, well known to the author, and walk actual ruins in search of riches and awesome power. Adventure awaits...explore the road less traveled and discover The Jaguar Prophecy.

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The secret writing, now in Laura's hands, has the potential to unlock and harness energy like never before. Committed to protect the mystical artifact, the unwitting pair unite, utilizing

Victor's past as an international assassin to guide them. The safety of the planet lies in peril, as nations compete, steering the world to the brink of all out war. Safety? There is none. Certain death appears at every turn, leading the lovers across a vast continent, to exotic locations, and beyond.

Columbia, a small, cartel-controlled country, reeks of civil war and corruption. For years, powerbrokers have planned a worldwide power shift of colossal proportions, and now, with chaos at the door, they mobilize to fulfill their dream. Heads of state and even the Pope are targeted, impelling all in a murderous game of "chicken". The climactic end result is uncertain, but a new world order is at hand: one of slavery and death.

Join the author for an exciting romp through jungles, ancient archaeological sites, and the unknown, as he balances Laura and a host of intriguing players on the edge of a knife. Writer Anton Swanepoel has penned another thrilling story, with enough mayhem and bloodshed for two novels. Keep a close watch over your shoulder, as you explore and discover what's been prophetically hidden until now...The God Code.

Recommended for mature readers.

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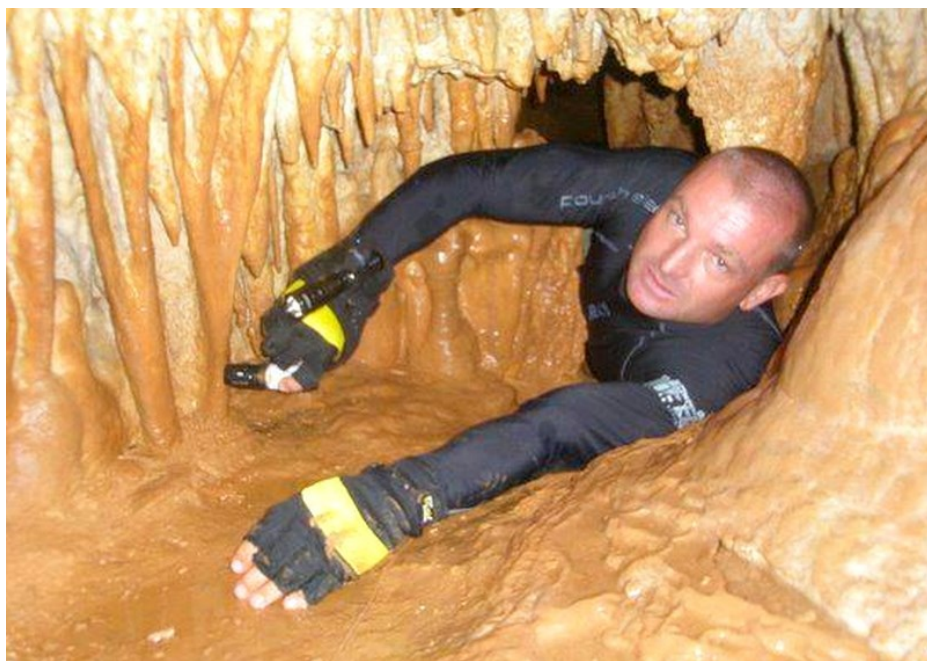
Thank you for taking the time to read *Untamed Love*.

If you enjoyed this book or found it useful, I would be very grateful if you would please post a short review because your support really does make a difference. Alternatively, consider telling your friends about this book because word of mouth is an author's best friend and much appreciated.

Anton Swanepoel

If you want to contact me personally, send me an email @ anton@antonswanepoelbooks.com

About the Author



As a Technical Diving Instructor and Cave Diver with over seven years' experience working in different places, including the Cayman Islands, I have come to believe that limits are what you set for yourself. I used to be afraid of water until I forced myself into a diving course, and then things just kept going and the thing I feared gave me what I dreamed of doing, travel. Having dived to over 400ft on open circuit, I realize how much of life we miss if we let fear run our life.

Sometimes, life is like a dark tunnel that feels like it is going to squeeze the life from you. However, if you just keep going, you are bound to come out the other side. I love writing, travel, diving, caves, motorcycles, and speed, but as a Reiki Master Teacher, I know you have to balance your life with love, and compassion. Be proud to stand firm in your quest for your dreams, but humble enough to ask for help in reaching them.

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