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Mumbai Harbor, India

SHAFTS OF YELLOW LIGHT PIERCED THE BLUE-GREEN WATERS, SILHOUETTING the dive rig that hovered on the surface of the Arabian Sea. Shiloh Blake stopped and watched a wrasse scuttle past, its tiny fins working hard to ferry the brightly striped fish to safety.

Clad in her wet suit, Shiloh squinted through her goggles and tucked the underwater camera into her leg pocket. She gripped the small stone artifact and propelled herself toward the surface. Ten meters and she would reveal her historic discovery to long-time rival Mikhail Drovosky.

Shiloh smiled. The guy would go ballistic. Score one for the girls. Between her and her new dive partner, Edie Valliant, they had surged ahead in finds. Not that this was a competition. Not technically. But everyone with the University of California–San Diego dig team knew it was make or break time.

Shiloh broke the surface. Warm sun bathed her face as she slid off her mask and tugged out her air regulator before hauling herself onto the iron dive flat. She squeezed the saltwater from her hair, the auburn glints catching in the sunlight.

“What did you find?” Khalid Khan knelt next to her.

With a smirk, she peeked at her best friend. Her own excitement was mirrored in his dark eyes. Then she noticed Edie's absence.

"Where'd she go this time? And Dr. Kuntz?"

"She wasn't feeling well."

"More like she had another date." Irritation seeped through her pores like the hot sun, boiling her to frustration. She couldn't believe her dive partner kept cutting digs to flirt with locals.

Khalid reached over to remove her dive tanks.

With a hand held up, she shifted away. "No, I'm going back down."

Footsteps thudded on the deck. "It's my turn." Mikhail's glower fanned her competitive streak.

"Sorry." Shiloh grinned. "Not for another ten minutes. You're not going to stop me from qualifying for the Pacific Rim Challenge." She nearly sighed, thinking about racking up enough dive hours for the deep-sea assignment—her dream.

On his haunches, Khalid swiveled toward her, cutting off her view of Mikhail. "What'd you find?" he whispered. Damp from his last dive, Khalid's jet black hair hung into his face. "Please tell me you aren't playing games."

From a pouch hanging at her waist, she produced the lamp. "This for starters."

He took the piece and traced the contours. "Soapstone." His gaze darted back to hers. "You mapped it on the grid, right? And photographed it?"

Any first-year grad student would know to take a picture to verify its location and record it on the mapped grid of the site. "Of course." She patted the camera in the pouch.

Not so many years ago a sunken city had been found in the area. Would she find another? Her heart thumped at the prospect. Tools. She would need better tools to safely remove the vase waiting at the bottom of the sea. Shiloh stood and hur-

ried to the chest to remove an air pipe to suction the silt and sediment away and then grabbed an airlift bag. As she plotted how to excavate the piece, she tucked the tools into holsters strapped around her legs and waist.

“I’m coming down there whether you’re done or not.” Mikhail bumped his shoulder against hers and pursed his lips. “If you find it in my time, I get to log it.”

Eyebrow quirked, she swept around him to the stern and sat on the ledge.

“I mean it, Blake!” Mikhail’s face reddened.

She slipped the regulator back in her mouth, nearly smiling. With a thumbs-up to Khalid, she nudged herself into the water. Glee rippled through her. The look of incredulity on Mikhail’s mug buoyed her spirits. Finding the lamp had been exhilarating, but one-upmanship had its own thrill. Besides, how many divers had worked this dig in the last year? Like them, she had found a piece of history. Divers and researchers had scoured this area and other sites along the coast of India.

Dr. Kuntz would have insisted on diving with Shiloh if not for ferrying Edie around Mumbai. Irritation at her new dive partner swelled. Why they had ever agreed to take on that useless woman, she’d never know. How could partying compare with the discovery of the past?

Although silt and sand shrouded the lip of the vase, Shiloh spotted its outline easily where she had marked the place with a flag. She lifted the red vinyl square from the sandy floor and worked quickly, refusing to relinquish this relic to the overblown ego of Mikhail Drovosky. He’d beaten her out of top honors for her bachelor’s degree, relegating her to magna cum laude, lessening her scholarship. Enough was enough.

Why hadn’t anyone else found this vase? As she brushed away the sediment, confusion drifted through her like the cool waters. A spot in the clay smeared. Her heart rapid fired. Had

she ruined the relic? Yet something . . . Shiloh stilled, staring in disbelief. What on earth?

She rubbed the piece. Metal gleamed beneath the clay. The lip and handle floated away. This wasn't ancient pottery. She turned it over in her hand. What was it? It almost reminded her of a thermos. The cylinder was about eighteen inches long, and its weight surprised her. Why was it buried here like treasure? Just as she freed the object, her white watch face flashed, snapping her attention to the competition. Time was up.

Joy ebbed like the tide. Whatever this thing was, she wouldn't leave it down here for Mikhail. She held open the bag and tried to ease in the metal tube. The piece teetered on the edge, nearly falling out, so she slipped it under her arm and started toward the surface. Light again directed her to the rig. Suddenly, thrashing ripples fractured the luminescent water, stirring particulates beneath the wake of a powerful motor.

A speedboat? Why were they so close to the dive area? Didn't they see the warning beacon, the one that announced divers below? What kind of idiot would put someone's life in danger for a thrill ride?

A torrent of waves rattled her, threatening her grip on the vase. What . . . ? A half-dozen bicolor parrotfish shot past. Shiloh paused, watching their incredible color—like a psychedelic underwater show.

Thwat. Thwat.

A sound vibrated against her chest. She searched for the source but found nothing.

She continued upward, and then someone dropped into the water. Could Mikhail not wait? Sticking to the schedule ensured everyone's safety. He wasn't supposed to enter the water until she climbed out. He was in such a hurry to win that he would risk injury to her and anyone who got in his way. She'd throttle him. Only, it wasn't Mikhail.

Khalid!

A plume of red swirled around his dark form like some freakish science experiment. Blood? Was he bleeding? Her heart skipped a beat—he wasn't swimming.

Shiloh launched toward him as adrenaline spiraled through her. She struggled to breathe, threatening the nitrox mixture in her tank. Why wasn't he swimming? He'd drown if he didn't paddle back up.

She pushed into his path, and he thudded against her. Hooking her arm under his, she aimed toward the surface, scissoring her legs.

A shadow loomed over the water. Another body plunged toward her, sinking deep and fast. Mikhail's open, unseeing eyes stared back at her, a shocked expression plastered on his face. Reminding her of an Egyptian plague, the water turned red.

Watery tubes pursued him. Bullets!

What's happening?

Khalid. He needed oxygen. She wrangled him toward her so she could share her air. The metal cylinder fumbled from her grasp and sunk back into the oblivion where she'd found it. Whatever the thing was, it couldn't be worth a life—especially not her best friend's. She removed her air regulator and stuffed it into his mouth.

Khalid jerked. Pain hooded his eyes. His dark brows knitted as he gazed at her. He gripped his side and grimaced. That's when she saw the source of the red plumes. He'd been shot too. Her gaze flew to the rig. What about the captain and his son?

Khalid caught her arm. With a firm shake of his head, he pointed away from the rig. Escape.

Shiloh linked her harness to his and swam from the rig. Uncertain where they could find safety if someone was determined to kill them, she barreled away from the nightmare. If she could make it to an island—she remembered seeing a small one in the east—they might be safe. Khalid tried to

pump his legs, but not successfully. At least he hadn't passed out. Or died.

Her stomach seized. No way would she let Khalid Khan die. Shiloh wagged her fins faster, thrusting both of them farther from the boat. Seconds lengthened, stretching into what felt like hours. With each stroke, her limbs grew heavier, dragging her down to the ocean floor. She pushed upward, refusing to let Khalid die.

Suddenly, she was drawn backward, pulled out to sea by the strong natural current hugging the Indian coast. Battling the forces of nature, she did her best to keep herself and Khalid aimed in the right direction. Her chest burned from oxygen deprivation.

The mouthpiece appeared before her. Surprised at Khalid's attentiveness, she stuffed the piece in her mouth and inhaled deeply, savoring the strength it gave her. Another twenty meters, and the water collided with mangroves. Shiloh struggled around the roots to a small, shallow inlet. On her knees, she tore out the regulator, dragging Khalid as she clawed her way to safety. He attempted to crawl, but collapsed. She yanked off her goggles and released their d-rings.

Khalid coughed, gagged, and vomited sea water.

Warm sand mired Shiloh's trembling limbs as she lay there, panting and gasping. The swim had been harder and much longer than she'd expected. They both could have drowned.

She squeezed her eyes shut. Thoughts of what was lost . . . Mikhail! Was he truly dead? Who would attack grad students on a dig? Why?

Shiloh pressed her hand to her forehead, tiny grains of sand digging into her flesh. She rubbed her temples and tried to make sense of the chaos.

"What happened back there, Khalid?" She flipped onto her back, the sun blazing against her pounding skull. "Who was it? Did you see?"

Silence.

Shifting, she rolled her head to peek at him. He wasn't moving. On all fours, Shiloh scrambled and shook him.

"Khalid!" His grey wetsuit glistened red from the blood that poured from his side. She clamped a hand over his wound, the warmth sickening. "Khalid, talk to me."

He groaned.

"No!" Fire flashed through her. "You aren't chickening out. Not now." Again she shook him, but this time he didn't respond. "Please!"

Shiloh examined his chest. Not breathing. With two fingers pressed to his neck, she tried to feel past the hammering of her own heart to detect his pulse. Nothing! She started compressions and breaths, counting between each to keep a steady rhythm. His blood stained her hands. While she pumped his chest, she took a cursory glance around the thick vegetation. It was so thick, she'd never know if someone stood five meters off.

They needed help—now! She activated the emergency beacon on her watch as she again searched—hoped—for help. Her heart caught when she spotted a "mechanical giraffe" staggering in the shifting fog. *Jawahar Dweep*.

"Butcher Island," she mumbled, as she tried to revive her friend. The spot only offered isolation and oil. No help. They were alone.

"At least we're safe," she said. But would Khalid die? "Don't you dare!"

She pounded his chest. More blood dribbled from the wound that seemed too close to his lungs.

A rasp grated the air. His ribs rose.

"Khalid?"

He moaned.

Tears stung her eyes as she slumped next to him. "Khalid, stay with me. I've activated the beacon."

His blue lips trembled against his chalky skin. “C-cold.”

She’d always admired his dark olive complexion, but the pallor coating his rugged face worried her. Would she ever see his dark eyes ignite when she made some snide, inappropriate remark? Who would help her through her episodes? She’d told only him about her rare disorder.

“We should move you closer to the rocks to stay warm until help arrives.” Shiloh once again hooked her arms under his and drew him to the side. Blood stained the sandy beach.

A wave rolled in, then out. Red streaks reached toward the warm waters. She nestled him against a large boulder and lay close to keep him warm.

“Stay with me, Khalid. No naps. This is the ultimate test, got it?” She looked to where the ocean kissed the horizon. Mumbai sparkled in the distance. So close, yet so far away it might as well be a million miles. She could only hope they would be found in time.

“You just wanted to kiss me,” Khalid mumbled.

Shiloh jerked toward him, frowning. “What?”

“CPR. I didn’t need it . . .” He coughed. “You just wanted to kiss me.”

With her hand pressed to his forehead, she smiled. “Ah. Just as I expected—delirious with fever.”

A half-cocked grin split his lips.

She tried to swallow. He had been her rock for the last four years. Despite the tight-knit relationship between their parents, Khalid and Shiloh had forged their own friendship in the fires of college life. They’d been inseparable since he came to America to study.

How long would it take Search and Rescue to locate her signal? What if the SAR team didn’t make it in time? If this were American waters, it would only be a matter of minutes, but in the Arabian Sea . . .

Shiloh's head dropped to her chest. She had to believe everything would be fine. They'd be found, a doctor would tend Khalid's wounds, he'd recover, and then they'd be off to the Pacific Rim Challenge. She had worked so hard for it. They both had. For the last two years, they had prodded each other toward their common goal. Their requisite dive hours were nearly complete. No, nobody would die, especially not Khalid.

Mikhail died. She clenched her eyes shut and blotted out the image of her rival slipping through the water, sinking lower and lower.

Biting her lip, she groped for something to refocus her attention. Naming the scientific classification for the sun star. *Animalia. Echinodermata. Asteroidea. Spinulosida. Solasteridae. Solaster dawsoni.*

"Miss . . . Amer . . . ca . . ." Khalid's words, though broken, speared her heart.

She scooted closer. "I'm here. Be still, Khalid. They're coming."

"Marry me."

"You dork." She let out a shaky laugh as a shudder tore through her, threatening to unleash tears. Lips pulled taut, she forced herself to remain calm and look at him. "Rest."

His fingers twitched. She lifted his hand and cradled it in hers.

A gurgling noise bubbled up his throat. "I love . . ."

"No, shh." He couldn't love her. Not her.

"Shil . . ."

When he didn't finish, she knitted her brow. His eyes closed, and his mouth remained open.

"Khalid?"

His arm went slack.

"Khalid!" Tears blurred her vision, making it impossible to see if he was breathing.

A horn blared in the distance. She whipped around and spotted the massive white Indian Coast Guard rig racing toward them with its lights swirling.



Reece Jaxon straightened and watched the woman without watching. Seeing without being seen. She batted her auburn hair, thick and tangled with ocean water, away from her face. Hiding in plain sight on the rescue boat, he tracked her movement with ease. She hadn't noticed him yet, even though he was less than a dozen feet away.

Wrapped in a grey thermal blanket Shiloh Blake stared at the injured Pakistani on the medical stretcher as the boat churned across the water toward Mumbai. She hadn't left the man's side since the rescue.

Another man in his early fifties hooked an arm around her shoulders and drew her close. Dr. Kuntz, according to the file, was fifty-three. Married. Three grown children. An unfaithful wife and a divorce later he'd partnered with a local Indian museum to arrange underwater excavations with U.C. San Diego. Something about the man didn't sit right with Reece.

"Noor Hospital," Dr. Kuntz insisted to the Coast Guard captain.

An hour earlier Kuntz had stormed into the Coast Guard station and interrupted Reece's conversation with the officer. Surprised at the man's intrusion, Reece feigned disinterest, although Kuntz's story corroborated what Reece had relayed to the authorities after witnessing the attack. Then the emergency transponder signal erupted.

Reece noticed Shiloh stiffen under the professor's protective touch. Kuntz spoke soothingly to her, reassuring her that Noor Hospital would give Khalid the best care. Bent to shield his face, Reece tightened the laces on his boots while memorizing everything that took place in the boat's small cabin. Now, if he