

Nautilus

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The sun was high overhead, baking him with its unrelenting rays. He was sweating like a stuck pig, his shirt was plastered to his back.

Matt Duncan wasn't the type of guy to curse the gods, God, or whatever existed out there but it'd been a shitty day. He needed a break from the family back at the beach house. Whoever had thought it was a good idea to bring together his parents, his brothers and sisters and their families for a week of sun, surf and insanity needed to be shot. And then shot again. Just for the hell of it.

He climbed over a stack of rocks, plopped down in the middle of the beach as if the aforementioned gods had grown tired when they'd created this stretch of land.

"Right, what should we do with these rocks? Who cares, just plop them down there." He snorted, hoping no one was close enough to hear him talking to himself.

Keeping his gaze on the rocks underfoot, Matt paused at the top, breathing hard. Christ, he was out of shape if a little hike along the beach made him exhausted.

The pounding waves were a calming presence to his right. He inhaled deeply, bringing the salty sea air into his body. The waves crashed along the beach, the only sound for miles. It was glorious.

He was alone. Finally.

Crash, whoosh, crash, whoosh. He loved the sound the waves made as the water met the land. *Crash, whoosh, whimper, crash...* wait.

Whimper?

He scanned the beach, seeing nothing. That had definitely been a whimper though. Where had it come from?

He made his way carefully along the rocks, watching his step. When he reached the sand on the other side from where he'd come from, he paused again. There was something there. What the hell was that thing?

It was black, long and sinuous. Kind of rubbery, really. It looked like a tentacle, the end was

tipped with what looked like suction cups. Had an animal been beached here? He wasn't sure he wanted to find out what kind of animal had tentacles and made whimpering noises. Had some squid thingy caught some mammal and beached them both?

Only one way to find out.

He followed the tentacle to the edge of the rocks. There was an overhang here, no wonder he couldn't see it from above.

The one tentacle was met by others, dozens of others. Lovely. Actually, it was. Surprise, surprise, but he couldn't tear his gaze off the sinuous black length. The skin glinted in the sunlight that poured down from above, taking on a sheen not unlike that of an oil spill. Hundreds of colors appeared out of the black skin, creating an unbelievably beautiful sight.

The rest of the creature was hidden back under the overhang, deep in the shadows.

He'd have to go into the water to see if it was still alive.

Glad he was wearing shorts and a pair of beach shoes, he waded through the water, moving with the waves as they came in and left again.

"Ah..."

"What the hell?" Matt rushed forward, forgetting himself.

He went to his knees in the water, peering into the shadows. They weren't as dark from this side, he could make out a shape under the overhang. Reaching out with both hands, he leaned in.

And was met by the hands reaching out to him.

He pulled back, an instinctive reaction, but he managed to bring with him the creature that was clinging now to his hands. Hell, at least he didn't squeal like a little girl when he'd been grabbed. Thank God for small favors.

Pulling whatever it was into the sunlight, he gasped.

It was a woman. An incredibly beautiful woman. Her hair was pitch black, plastered to her upper body with the sea water she'd been lying in. Her skin was pale, God, was it ever pale. Almost unearthly, it looked like she'd never been in the sun before.

Unconsciously, he bent over her, attempting to block out some of the sun's rays on her delicate skin. And there was a whole hell of a lot of skin showing. Her breasts were as pale as the rest of her, tipped with small rosy nipples. He'd be able to fit the entire thing in the palm of his hand. Not that he was thinking of doing any such thing with a body he'd found on the beach. Not to mention she wasn't exactly his cup of tea seeing as she was missing a vital piece of equipment between her legs.

God, he apparently needed to get laid. He shifted his grip on her, moving his hands behind her to hold her more comfortably. He tried to ignore how nice she felt. Her skin was like silk.

Her cheekbones were pronounced, her lips the color of the sea. Oh, that was a bad thing,

wasn't it?

She blinked large slumberous eyes up at him. "Please..."

"What, sweetheart? What do you need?"

"Don't let them take me..." Her voice was raspy, pained.

He held her closer to his chest. "Who's them?"

She didn't answer him. She couldn't answer him slumped as she was against his chest now. Her eyelids closed over those piercing black eyes. He panicked, looking for the rise and fall of her chest to tell him she was okay.

No, he wasn't looked at her breasts. Not much anyway. Following the silky skin under the small globes, he silently cursed himself but couldn't seem to stop. She was a soft weight in his arms, pressed against him as she was.

Her stomach was as perfect as the rest of her, the dip of her belly button incredibly arousing to his already confused mind. Who was this woman?

Her hips were narrow, the black skin underneath was even more beautiful when set against the milky white skin of her upper body.

Wait, black skin? Oil spill black skin? Oh, Christ.

The tentacles he'd admired before spilled out from her hips, a beautiful fan of otherworldly appendages. Before his eyes, the tentacles started to recede. Within seconds, long milky white legs rested against the sand.

Who was she? A mermaid? Meroctopus? Mersquid? He was losing his mind.

Who was coming to take her? He tightened his grip. He wouldn't let her go without a fight. She trusted him. He wouldn't leave her now.

Matt looked around, trying to see if anyone was watching. He needed to do something with the woman, but he was terrified whoever was after her was waiting around to pick them both off. What did she mean, don't let them take her?

Who was *they*?

He shrugged off his shirt, wincing at the sweat soaking the fabric, but he didn't want to be walking around with a bare-assed naked woman. It just didn't seem very respectful of her. He slung the shirt around her back, gingerly pulling her arms through the sleeves and buttoning the front.

Matt tightened his hold on the woman before awkwardly gaining his feet. She was a solid weight in his arms. She stirred and his attention was brought, once again, to her bare skin. Or at least, the bare skin of her long legs. What was he going to do with her? He couldn't very well take her back to the house. Christ, his whole family was there, and he could just imagine what would happen if he walked in with a lady wearing only his shirt.

His older sister would rant about such disgusting shows in front of the children, his brother would snark about him getting a room, his dad would probably ignore him or shake his head in disapproval. No doubt his mom would start engraving the wedding invitations. She didn't exactly like the type of people he normally brought home. Geez, family rocked.

"What am I going to do with you, pretty?"

"*Nautilus...*" The word slipped out on a soft sigh, barely audible.

Matt bent his head closer to her mouth, peering intently at her face. She blinked up at him with large, black eyes. He shuffled her in his arms, making sure he had a good hold on her.

"What're you trying to say, pretty?"

"Nautilus, don't let them get me." Her words were slurred.

"What? Who's Nautilus? Sweetie, you're starting to scare me."

She lifted her arm, clutching his neck tightly.

"It's okay, sweetheart, whoever you are. I won't let anyone take you. Okay, you hear me? You'll be safe here."

She nodded, tucking her face in the crook of his neck, tightening her hold around his neck.

Matt waded back into the water, stepping carefully. He'd have to go back up and over the rocks and it wouldn't be easy but he wanted to keep her safe. She was obviously scared of someone. Why did she keep calling him Nautilus though? It was starting to freak him out.

"*Nautilus...*"

Matt sighed, leaning back to try to catch her gaze. "Babe, who're you talking to?"

"Him."

Matt twirled in place, almost losing his footing in the surf, but catching himself in time. She was a soft weight in his arms, but he'd kill himself if he dropped her after everything he'd done to get her in the first place.

At first he didn't know what she was talking about, and then he saw the shape.

A big, frickin shape further out in the waters. Christ, every image of Jaws flashed through his mind, and Matt hop-skipped backwards until he was out of the water.

The shape broke the surface, revealing an inky dark head of hair plastered to angry, fiercely masculine features. The man's face and shoulders were covered in thin black lines, intricate swirls and patterns. Matt had no idea how he could tell from this distance, but he was sure the man had pitch black eyes. What the fuck?

"*Nautilus...*"

Nautilus watched the human take Maris up the beach. He tensed, keeping his gaze on the man,

watching for any untoward movement. He seemed gentle with her, cradling her in his arms. Keeping a wary eye on Nautilus in the water, the male carried her over the rocks, striding briskly along the sand to the other side of the outcropping.

Keeping pace with him, Nautilus swam in the water, staying to the depths in case anyone else was watching. The human paused by one of the structures lining the beach, bringing Maris up a staircase that led to a balcony on the second floor. Shifting her in his arms – with one last glance out to the ocean – he opened the door leading into the house and the two disappeared inside.

Nautilus paused, floating in place, his tentacles fanning out. He wasn't willing to risk it yet, but he wanted answers. He'd heard what Maris whispered to the man, the sound of her dulcet tones had been carried across the waves to him. Someone was after her and he meant to get to the bottom of it. He hadn't missed the weakness in his sister's limbs. The man was only alive because he'd taken such care with her body.

If it had looked for one second like he was about to take advantage, Nautilus would have destroyed him. But, it still didn't answer his questions. He wanted to know why the man had taken Maris. Who was he?

For hours Nautilus waited, swimming back and forth just off the shoreline. He kept an eye on both the land and the sea behind him. He wasn't going to be taken unawares. Besides, his enemies – and there were more than a few of those – knew better than to assume he was distracted. It would take quite a lot to make him lose control.

He hadn't missed the twitching of the curtains in the upstairs windows of the structure on the beach. The human knew he was out here. Good, let him know. Fear would make him easier to command once Nautilus came to visit.

When darkness fell, he slowly made his way to the beach. He concentrated, shape-shifting his mass of tentacles into two legs. He touched bottom, awkward for a moment until he could become accustomed to the feel of the sand between his toes. Striding up the beach, he looked neither left nor right, although he was aware of his surroundings the entire time.

With a low growl, he started up the staircase on the structure he'd seen the human take Maris into. Without pausing, he snapped the lock on the doorknob, thrusting open the door.

“What the hell?”

Nautilus grinned, pleased at the sight of the human bolting up from where he'd been sleeping on the floor. A quick glance showed Maris safely ensconced in his bed. So, the human was a gentleman. It was more than Nautilus ever would be. He was no gentleman, he was a warrior.

Two strides brought him within reach of the human. With one mighty jerk, Nautilus had the man in his arms, his feet lifted clear off the ground. The man studied him, startled but not afraid.

Good.

“Who are you?” he growled, squeezing the man lightly.

“Shouldn’t I be asking you that? You’re in my house.”

Nautilus pulled the man closer to his chest, until their lips were nearly touching. “Don’t bait me, human. Who are you and why have you taken Maris?”

The human pulled back as much as he could. “Is that her name?”

“Who are you?”

“My name is Matt. I, uh, who are you?”

“Nautilus.”

Matt studied him closely, hardly blinking. Nautilus knew what he’d see. He was strong, muscled, but it would be the tattoos that would capture Matt’s attention. Thin black lines covered his body, from his hairline to his human toes. They were inked on, swirls and intricate patterns that marked his position among his kind. Only the strongest among his people were able to ink their bodies in this manner. The fact that he had marks said he was a warrior, but the fact that they covered his entire body marked him as their leader. Matt wouldn’t know that though.

Matt’s eyes flickered, his lids lowering. Well, well, well. Interesting. Nautilus hadn’t expected this, but he wasn’t one to let opportunities slip. Without making his intentions known, Nautilus jerked the man even closer, melding their bodies together. The man was wearing a small covering at his hips and nothing else, but it didn’t hide his arousal at being so close to Nautilus.

Nautilus captured his lips, swallowing the moan the other man let slip out. Matt grasped his shoulders, pressing his hips hard against Nautilus. Growling, he felt his body react to the presence of the human. His marks began to glow, a soft black light that radiated out from his body.

Impatient, Nautilus pressed the man backward, hearing Matt’s cry when his back slammed into the wall behind him. Nautilus released his lips, flipping him around until he faced the wall, his hands bracing himself. Matt made no move to stop him, instead his hips jerked infinitesimally against the wall, silently begging for something more.

He intended to give it to him.

“You have oils?”

“In the, uh, in the, oh gods, table...”

Nautilus moved away briefly, casting a glance over the still sleeping Maris. Removing the tube from the bedside table, he squeezed slippery liquid into his palm, reaching down to coat his cock with the substance. He growled at the touch of his hand, snapping his hips once. Reaching the human again – whimpering so beautifully for him – Nautilus thrust a single finger into his ass. Matt screamed, removing one hand from the wall to cover his mouth. Nautilus paused, bringing up his free hand to

cover Matt's.

“You're going to need both hands to brace yourself.”

“I can't, I, there's others in the house.” His hips jerked, fucking himself on Nautilus' finger.

“If you must let out your pleasure, I will hide the sounds.”

Matt nodded, letting Nautilus cover his mouth. The man kissed his palm, thrusting his tongue out to taste Nautilus' skin. He wondered what the man was sensing. They were different, the two of them. But, he was going to do everything in his power to give them both pleasure this night.

Without warning, he pressed his cock against the lovely hole presented so nicely in front of him. Nautilus thrust, covering Matt's scream with his hand. Growling, he pressed insistently until he was balls deep inside the human. Gods, he felt good. Warm and inviting. He snapped his hips, driving them both up to the edge and over until stars flashed in front of his eyes and his pleasure poured out of him, finding a welcoming home inside Matt. He was dimly aware of Matt following him into paradise, achieving his own orgasm.

Panting harshly, Nautilus leaned against the human's back. He couldn't wait to do that again.