



Sasha Tomás

DROWNING --- TRITON

Tempest
Novel

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“...There is the heat of Love, the pulsing rush of Longing, the lover’s whisper,
irresistible—magic to make the sanest man go mad.”
— Homer, *The Iliad*

Drowning Triton
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Chapter 1

Calm. Cool. Collected.

No one has ever accused me of being any of the above.

“What the fuck are they doing?” I didn’t bother to hide my impatience or lower my voice.

Half past ten, on a Friday morning, at the beach during a heatwave in July, wearing a business suit and pumps was not my idea of fun. Summer sun beat off the white sand, high humidity made it damn near impossible to lose the sweat, and worse, the breeze off the ocean carried the smell of death and rotten fish. Not a good combination in New Jersey.

A few officers in dark blue uniforms with wraparound sunglasses glance in my direction but quickly dismiss me as any kind of threat. Short and young in appearance, I blend in with a bunch of casino workers who had snuck out of work, squished in among bikini-clad tourists, beach bums, and locals that had gathered around on the narrow strip of sand on the Jersey shoreline to gawk and gossip. Not that I had expected any kind of respect from the Atlantic City Police Department. Already they had failed to follow protocol.

My name is Tempest Geryon, GBI Special Agent in Charge and the lead detective assigned to this investigation. Genesis Bureau of Investigation, better known as GBI, is

the official government agency that deals with anything related to everything other than human affairs. As a special agent, I am sworn to uphold the law and protect the rights of theas. A fancy word for monsters. Being of Genesis origin, I am technically considered one of them. One of the deadliest and scariest of the breed. Also, very, very rare. Gorgon to be exact. There are only three of us left remaining in the world, and I am the last of the Titans to be born in the last thousand years.

My great-grandmother was Medusa. I have her sweet heart-shaped face, olive skin, hazel green eyes, petite frame, and curves. I look very human until you get close enough to notice that my curly brown hair has snakes nesting in it and my pupils aren't round but elliptical.

Today, my eyes are hidden behind a pair of silver reflective Ray-Bans and my hair is neatly pulled back with an elastic hair tie. I'm wearing boring, simple polyester black pants with a matching feminine-cut hip-length business jacket. Nothing impressive to see here, folks.

"Excuse me." Pushing through the crowd, I make little headway. I crane my neck to peer over the multitude of people that have gathered to see the spectacle. Sometimes being five-foot-four has its disadvantages. Thankfully, having a giantess for a partner made things go a bit smoother.

"Excuse us! Coming through!" My partner's voice carries over the throng. People part without argument.

Larissa Jensen, my partner and fellow GBI special agent for five years, stands heads above the crowd. Big, black, and beautiful, she commands respect without asking for it. And when I say big, I mean tall. Close to seven feet of long legs and grounded

strength, the kind that can walk right over you or stomp you to the ground. Larissa came from old stock, descendant of the earth-born warriors whose bloodline was known for battling the Olympians. It showed in the ways she moved. Solid. Unshakeable, like the ground had claimed her as its own. Little-known fact, though, gets her drunk, and all that ancient, fearsome lineage turns her into a menace on the dance floor.

Not that Larissa and I are here for a beach party. We are here to solve a homicide. We head straight for the yellow police tape barrier. With two strides, Larissa reaches it first.

One of the officers at the barrier cranes his neck up and holds up his hand. He stammers, “P.p..please step back.”

Larissa pushes her suit jacket aside and flashes her badge hanging from her neck. “GBI.”

For a second, the man frowns, weighing whether or not to let us in. An older gentleman, somewhat in good shape and early forties, takes one look at the badge and lets us in. “Sorry, he’s new. Never seen a dead mermaid before.”

“Yeah, well, it's a first for us too.” We duck under the tape, entering the secured area.

“One of these days, I’d like to come to Atlantic City just to play the slots. Why is this place such a mess? Last year, it was the Minotaur gang and the year before that the traveling troupe of Satyrs.” Larissa shakes her head in pity. Her chin-length flat-ironed black bob rustles at the nape of her neck. Droplets of sweat bead on her skin and make her shirt collar stick to her body. She pulls at it to let out the heat. “People just don't know

how to have fun in the sun anymore. They should be building sand castles instead of bumping each other off.”

I swipe the back of my hand across my forehead, taking a portion of foundation with it. “I hate humidity. Why can’t people die on days when it’s a crisp seventy-five degrees out?”

We were in the preliminary stages of an investigation responding to a call about a dead mermaid. It could be hours before we would get out of the blistering sun. I shrug off my jacket. The thin white spaghetti strap camisole top underneath is already drenched in sweat, outlining the curves of my D cup breasts and utilitarian bra. I can feel a line of perspiration slide down my spine. My tan scaled snakeskin glistens in the sun.

The young officer slid his glasses down the bridge of his nose. His blue eyes are wide with curiosity. He looks me up and down. I can see he wanted to say something but the older officer next to him taps him on the shoulder, redirecting his attention back to the crowd and securing the scene.

I’m used to it. My heritage is interesting. Most people don’t know what to make of me when they meet me for the first time. People see what they want to see. I don’t bother to explain myself anymore. Love me, hate me, fear me, or accept me -- I leave it all up to them to decide. I didn’t come here to make friends. I came here to solve a crime.

Larissa pans the stretch of shoreline. Her mouth set in a tight grimace. “This is ridiculous. Tourists have trod all over the scene. It’s going to be hard to get good evidence.”

My partner has an uncanny ability to process information quickly just by looking at it with a glance. Probably coded into her warrior DNA from back in the day when the

world was dark and dangerous, and her ancestors had to make quick decisions. It meant the difference between life and death.

Gray clouds gather on the edge of the horizon, forcing thick moist air off the ocean, pushing waves up onto the sandy beach carrying plastic bottles, cigarette butts, and seaweed. My aunts would call the sky an omen. Not that I gave it much credence. Death always seemed to make everything ominous.

“Guess we should go talk to the medics and look over the body,” I say. “Figure out who’s in charge and see if we can secure the victim.”

“Let’s see if we can make this quick.” Larissa fans herself and pulls at her shirt collar.

We both knew there was a slim chance of that happening, but I couldn't blame her for being impatient. We’d been stuck on the George Washington Bridge in a cramped government-issued crap economy car in ninety-degree heat with a busted air conditioning system for hours. Neither of us was feeling too happy.

“Fine,” I say tersely. “Let me do the talking.”

“Are you sure that is a good idea?”

“Probably not. I’m hot and sticky. There is sand in my shoes, and my tolerance level for stupid is low. Still, I know how to behave.”

Larissa gave me a look of disbelief.

“I’ll try to be civilized.”

I can understand her trepidation. Unlike her ancestors, Larissa is a gentle giant, prone to avoiding conflict. Me, not so much. I’m in tune with my Gorgon side, but I try

not to let it control me. I do my best to be a professional and represent my badge to the best of my ability.

“Please, Tempest. Just get the info and let’s get out of here. Can you do that?”

Larissa doesn’t bother to wait for my answer. She digs her heels into the soft sand and strides in the direction of the white cloth-draped lump lying out in the hot sun.

Another breeze carries the stench of dead fish and the buzzing sound of flies.

Larissa is right. We needed to hurry up.

My short pump heels slide into the soft sand, giving me little traction. I carefully pick my way forward on the tops of my soles. The going is slow, but I eventually catch up with Larissa. She is already introducing herself to the medic and a skinny, average white-bread looking police officer. They are actively engaged in conversation.

I quickly glance over at his name tag, Officer Shields, nods his head in acknowledgement of me, and continues with his report. “At approximately eight in the morning, the station received a call of a drowned girl in a mermaid costume. A man jogging on the beach came across the body. EMS and the fire department got here first. Female was pronounced dead on scene. Police arrived about a half hour later.”

Larissa jots down notes on her cell phone. “A name?”

“No identification found. No one has called in a missing person’s report. We figure she might be one of the guests in town for the Mermaid convention at the local casino.”

“You were the responding officer?” Larissa asks.

He nods his head. “Didn’t believe it when I heard it over dispatch. Amazing to see a mermaid in person. Although, a shame that my first experience is to see one dead.”

I speak up. “You should be glad. A Nereid is not someone you want to meet while you’re alive. Come across one, and I can guarantee you won’t live long enough to tell the tale.”

He gives me a quizzical look.

Larissa agrees. “Tempest would know best. She’s an expert on nereids.”

“Part Nereid myself.”

The detective looks down at my legs.

“Yeah, I know. Hard to believe.”

In truth, I am a lot of things. My family tree is pretty messed up. Part Titan, part Olympian, I am a primordial ooze of genetic material. My DNA isn’t what made me an expert. I had a four-year degree in Theology, Theogony and Mythology from Rutgers. Also, growing up in Oceanus and being close to a thousand years old made me pretty well versed in various species of genesis. Not that the policeman needed to know my credentials or my age. I pride myself on not looking a day over thirty-five. “But don’t worry, I’m not a true Nereid. My singing skills are horrible.”

Larissa nods in agreement. “I can attest to that one. I’ve heard her sing at the karaoke bar. Pure garbage.”

“So true!” I laugh. It is always good to have a little levity before dealing with death.

“How about we take a look at the body?”

A rotund man wearing a navy EMT uniform squats on his haunches over the covered body. Shoe-polished wisps of black hair barely masking a bald head flap in the balmy breeze. He involuntarily keeps brushing his hand over his combover. I hunch down

next to him. He graciously hands me blue latex gloves. He introduces himself as Tim Bone, a paramedic with the Atlantic City Fire Department.

“Has anyone moved the victim?”

“This is where we found her. We took her vitals. She was unresponsive and not breathing.” He looks at me. “Do mermaids breathe?”

The truth is I have no clue. My mother was a Nereid. She had died when I was very young. My recollection of her is fuzzy. “Based on my knowledge of other water genesis creatures, I would say, “yes.” My best guess is that nereids can breathe air. Just not like you and I.”

I had grown up around naiads in Oceanus. They were freshwater river nymphs. Youthful, vain, mischievous, and bitchy girls that hung out around springs and river banks. My encounters with them were never pleasant. They looked human, but their anatomy was slightly different on the inside. Were nereids different from naiads or similar biologically? I had no idea.

“Only one way to find out. Do you mind?”

The paramedic helps me remove the sheet to reveal the victim.

Alluring and exotic is the only way I could have described her. Lying on her back with her arms tucked at her sides and her eyes closed, she looked like another sun bather worshipping the sun on the beach. Her caramel skin shimmered with violet and light blue markings on her cheeks, chin, and center of her body scales. She had long bleached dreadlocks decorated with cowrie shells that fanned out behind sloped shoulders. Her nude, slender torso had perky, tiny breasts and a tiny waist narrowed down into her hips, but instead of legs, she had flukes similar to a dolphin’s tail.

“I want to see her back. Help me roll her onto her side.”

Larissa and Tim both get on their knees. Together we gently push her onto her side and hold her in place.

The Nereid sported a curved dorsal fin between her shoulder blades. I move her hair to the side. About six inches up under the base of her neck is a round closed flap.

“Just as I suspected.” I point out the spherical indentation. “Looks like a blowhole.”

“There are some pressure marks. Looks like strangulation.” Larissa draws my attention to the girl’s neck.

“Won’t be able to confirm that till we get her back to GBI.” Another waft of fish stench fills my nostrils. “We should bag her up and get her on ice. If she remains out here, her body will deteriorate rapidly. We need to preserve the evidence.”

The paramedic agrees. He leaves us to go get a body bag. Larissa and I gently set her body back down in the sand.

I get up and peel off the gloves, neatly folding them inside each other, careful not to get the smell of fish on my hands.

I turn to Officer Shields. He stares down in amazement at the nereid. I wave my hand to get his attention, but he is completely transfixed.

“Wow, if this is how men react to nereids when they are dead, I can only imagine the reaction in real life.”

Larissa notices the officer staring. “Guess this is why we hear tales of men jumping into the sea to capture the lovely creatures and drowning.”

I tap the cop on the shoulder. “Hey!”

He abruptly jerks his head up and blinks. Officer Shields looks at me like he noticed me for the first time. He blushes in embarrassment. “Sorry.”

Was he staring at the mermaid or her breasts? Best not question it. I’m sure it would only embarrass him further.

Larissa pulls the cover back over her body.

“Who do I ask to have the body released into our custody?”

“That would be Detective Brown.” He quickly looks around and points us in the direction of a group of law enforcement officers congregating over by a rock wall.

I tell Larissa to hang back and make sure the body is handled correctly. “This shouldn’t take long.”

I dust off my knees and head toward the man-made beach barrier.

An African-American woman, not much taller than me, stands off to the side. Dressed in crisp khakis, a light blue polo shirt, and a navy blue baseball cap embroidered with white letters ACPD, she chatted casually with other officers in similar attire. The badge attached to her brown belt matched her sensible brown flats. Her shoe choice is a lot smarter than mine. The backs of my pumps slide into the sand and make it awkward to walk a straight line. I had half a mind to take them off and approach barefoot, but I doubt that would make me look professional.

Bad enough I am sweating and showing off more skin than I was comfortable with around strangers. Then again, I really hadn't anticipated trudging across a beach when I picked out my outfit this morning. I am usually trapped in a gray cubicle with A/C cranked to “middle-aged man in a suit with a dad bod and an emotional support blanket.” Sand is not part of the dress code.

I interrupted her discussion with another officer. He waves and left us alone to talk.

“Hi, I’m Tempest Geryon, Special Agent In Charge with the Genesis Bureau of Investigation. I’m here with my partner, Special Agent Jensen.”

“Detective Brown with the Atlantic City Police Department.”

“See you had a Nereid wash up on shore. Wanted to know if we could get permission to have the body moved to GBI.”

“A what?” She squints her eyes at me in puzzlement under the brim of a cap.

I jerk my thumb in the direction of the covered body in the background.

“You mean the mermaid?”

“Nereid. That is the correct term. Mermaid is a fantastical word created by Hans Christian Andersen to sell books.”

“Mermaid. Ner-whatever. I don’t care what it is called. We’re waiting on the coroner to determine if she is human or one of those people.”

Great, I am dealing with a speciesist. Just as bad as a racist. I really had hoped that her being a black woman would make her more sympathetic. I don’t know why I am still surprised. This is America after all.

“What do you mean by those people?” I did air quotes on “those people.”

The detective crosses her arms under her breasts and sticks out her chin. “Hey, I’m not trying to be offensive. I’m just doing my job,” she says defensively.

I slowly remove my sunglasses. I let her see my eyes. “And I’m here to do my job.”

“You’re one of them, aren’t you?”

“Thanks for noticing.” My skin is growing flush with heat, and it has nothing to do with the blistering sun high in the sky. The woman annoys me. Her ignorant comments are raising my hackles.

“Not that it’s my job to explore your biases, but it is my job to clear up any misconceptions. That young woman over there is not an “it” or “one of those people.” She is a Nereid, and she deserves respect. She is of theria origin, which means she falls under the Genesis Bureau’s jurisdiction. By not releasing the victim to us, you’re impeding our investigation.”

Her eyes narrow and she firmly places her feet in the sand. “Let’s make something clear. I am the one in charge here. This is my crime scene. Until it is determined otherwise, I want your scrawny, snakeskin ass off my beach!”

“Excuse me!” My voice pitches higher, and my blood pressure rises. I take a step forward, getting in her space. “We’re not going anywhere without that body,” I hiss through my teeth.

“Whoa! Whoa!” Larissa comes bounding over, shaking her hands in the air. The giantess can be quite nimble and light on her feet. In two strides, she is here separating the two of us. “What is going on, Agent Geryon?”

“Detective Brown and I are having a bit of a disagreement.”

“A disagreement? More like harassment,” Detective Brown shot back.

Larissa yanks me off to the side. She bends down and whispers harshly in my ear, “I thought you said you’d be civilized?”

I shrug my shoulders and put my shades back on. “I said I’d try.”

Larissa takes a deep breath. “Do I need to remind you of the consequences for turning humans to stone?”

“I had it under control.”

“Are you sure about that?” She gives me a look of disbelief. “Because your hair is writhing.”

I smooth my hand over my ponytail full of snakes. Indeed, they were awake. “So they’re a little agitated.”

Larissa pinches the bridge of her nose. “Get it together and get them under control.”

“I wish I could. You know the girls have minds of their own.” Horned-nosed vipers, venomous snakes with black and brown markings, they blended in with my curly brunette hair. They felt my emotions and responded to threats. “What can I say, all my life I’ve had unruly hair. Thankfully the elastic band is holding them in place. Would’ve hated to fill out an incident report explaining how my hair bit the detective.”

Larissa rolls her eyes heavenward. I could see her mentally praying for patience. “Let me do the talking, okay?”

We turn back around and rejoin the detective.

Larissa knows better than to apologize for my behavior. Instead, she sticks out her hand and shakes the other woman’s hand firmly enough to assert domination but not crush her bones to dust.

“Special Agent Jensen, GBI. Seems the heat is getting to us all.” Larissa gives her a polite smile. “Nice to meet you, Detective Brown. How about we try this again?”

“Finally a voice of reason.” The detective glares hard at me.

Her condescending comment perturbed me, but I let it slide. I give her a toothy grin, making sure to flash a little fang.

The detective turns away from me, opens her notepad, and speaks directly to Larissa.

Detective Brown seems more at ease in the presence of Larissa. Even at seven feet tall, Larissa looks very human. Probably thought she was another sister. Very few people would ever guess that she was of Thera origin, and that was the way Larissa preferred it. She never really fully embraced her heritage, which I could understand. If I could avoid ignorant fools like Detective Brown making derisive comments, I would hide my Thera-side too. Hopefully, Larissa would succeed where I failed.

“As I was telling the other agent, I cannot release the body until the coroner confirms it is not a human dressed in cosplay.”

“Well, I can tell you, if that is a costume, it’s a really good one.” Larissa cocks her head in the direction of the body. “I’m leaning towards the probability that she is a Nereid.”

“Look, Agent Jensen, like I was saying, I don’t know, and I don’t care. Until the coroner tells me otherwise, that is a human.”

“With all due respect, I can understand the confusion. Some genesis can look very human and mortal.”

The detective cuts Larissa off. “Are you implying that I don’t know what a human being looks like?”

“Actually, I’m not sure you do.”

Detective Brown holds up her hand. “Stop right there. This is my circus. So how about you two clowns hit the road.” She waves over the two police officers we had passed earlier at the crime scene tape. “Please see these GBI agents to the street.”

“You will be hearing from us again, and I will get that body,” I snap out before the young officer takes me by the elbow. I pull my arm back. “I know the way out.”

Without a word, they escorted us off the beach and left us curbside. We stand dumbfounded on Atlantic Boulevard.

I turn to Larissa. “So which one of us is going to tell Themis?”

“Well, you see, things didn’t exactly go to plan.” Larissa fumbles with her words.

Both of us sat in uncomfortable, leather, straight-back chairs plunked down in front of a large oak desk with a hard-faced woman scowling at us from the other side.

Themis is the Director of GBI, the head of the organization who oversaw all the agents at the bureau. She also was a Titan. One of the originals mentioned in the Greek texts. Themis, the goddess of justice, could be summed up in two words: dignity and grace.

Yet, for some reason, whenever we were in front of her, we rarely got to see those qualities. We were known to push her limits.

Or more precisely, I pushed her limits.

We had both agreed in the car ride back that it might be better for Larissa to explain why we had shown up at GBI empty-handed.

So far, all she had done was make Themis frustrated.

Larissa tried again to explain the situation but kept stumbling. It is apparent by the deep furrow on the director's forehead that she's having a hard time buying the story. Her sharp brown eyes rimmed by tortoiseshell horn glasses look at us with incredulity.

I interrupted her. "It's my fault. I screwed the pooch on this one."

Themis cringed in her chair. "That is a really disgusting turn of phrase. I never understood why Americans use this as a colloquialism. What exactly does that mean? It's a terrible image. Don't ever say it again."

She is also my great-great-aunt. Not that I got this job through nepotism. I earned it based on my merit and graduating top of my class at Quantico. We keep our relationship purely professional and rarely bring personal matters into the mix. It keeps things nice and tidy. Except when I screw up, like today, and the fifty million other occasions.

"Tempest, how many times do I need to remind you to control your temper?"

"I tried. The detective was a speciesist."

She sighs and tents her fingers together. She turns her attention toward Larissa. "From Tempest I expect this kind of behavior. How is it possible I got a complaint about you too?"

Larissa squirms in the too small chair. Half of the seat swallowed up under her backside, she tried to sit upright and look authoritative. "In our defense, the detective was really rude. She insisted on getting the coroner to confirm the victim was of Thera origin. Anyone with eyes could have made that determination. The Nereid was the real deal."

Themis shakes her head in exasperation. "I will handle getting the victim's body released and the case transferred over to GBI."

“Thank you, Themis.” Larissa looks relieved.

We both get up to leave.

“Tempest, please stay behind. I have other matters to discuss with you. Larissa, please close the door behind you.”

Larissa leaves. I remain, stuck in my miserable chair.

“Before you start, I just want to say that I had it all under control. No one got hurt. The detective clearly had issues with our kind. She called me scaly-skinned.”

Themis waved her hand dismissively. “I didn't ask you to stay behind to discuss the case. Humans disliking genesis is nothing new.” She lowered her voice. “There is something more pressing that I need to tell you.”

I didn't like the way that sounded.

The director gets up and moves around the desk. Themis always carried herself with an air of dignity. She made the political pantsuit her standard outfit of choice, usually worn with a simple strand of pearls. She wasn't a tall woman. We stood about the same height. Some would call her statuesque and handsome. Her face was chiseled but pleasant. She rarely wore makeup, preferring to go bare-faced. Her wavy hair was dyed beige blonde and styled in a simple shoulder-length blowout, which she tended to let grow to the point that she needed a touch-up at her dark brown roots.

Themis perched sideways on the edge of the straight-backed chair next to me. She takes both my hands in hers and holds them on her knee. Her warm hands are soft and lined with age. She is one of the few immortals I knew who preferred to look more mature, somewhere in her 50s or 60s. In reality, she is probably closer to forty thousand years old, give or take a millennium or two.

“Word has come from Oceanus. Ceto requires you to return at once.”

My body went rigid. I pull my hands away and tuck them between my knees. It had been a decade since I had been summoned back to my homeland. My mouth felt dry, “What is the reason?”

Themis leans in closer. Her voice barely whispers, “Phorcys has fallen ill.”

I stand up abruptly, accidentally knocking over the chair. My heart is pounding in my chest. The words swirl in my head, but I could not comprehend them.

Phorcys, ill?

The man is one of the oldest and mightiest of the Titans. “No, not possible.”

Themis slowly rises. Her eyes fill with compassion and dread. She puts her hand delicately on my shoulder. “Tempest, you need to go home.”