

Summer Dreams

PARADISE
PINES
#2



Delia
Latham

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1

“Well, I’m going with or without you, Summer Callihan!”

“That’s fine. Go without me. I’ve already said I don’t want to come along.” Summer sighed.

Her younger cousin, Deah, seemed unable to exist without a great deal of drama. She’d made the threat as if it would convince Summer to dash off on yet another shopping spree, despite their agreement before setting out on this vacation to Cambria, California.

Knowing the trip would be for the entire season—no one stayed at Paradise Pines Lodge under any other terms—Summer had laid out clearly defined stipulations before agreeing to come with Deah to the coast. She wanted to work. Her cousin wanted to play. They would each be free to do “their own thing,” without pressure from the other.

Uncle Barry and Aunt Grace had agreed without hesitation. They simply wanted their daughter to have someone a bit more levelheaded with her, especially on such a lengthy vacation. In return, they’d pay Summer a handsome wage in lieu of the temporary jobs she normally worked on a nearly full-time basis.

Summer wanted to remind them that Deah was no longer a child. At twenty-one, her cousin was only a few years younger than she. Chronologically, at least.

Mentally and emotionally, Deah might never be an adult.

Her parents couldn’t quite bring themselves to deny the girl anything. Hence their appeal to Summer to come along on a trip she would have preferred to avoid—or at least, to have made on her own. Rather than refusing to pay for the season-long playtime their daughter demanded, they coaxed Summer into a tentative alliance. She’d go along with Deah, but not as a full-time companion or overseer—simply to keep them apprised of their daughter’s well-being, since the spoiled woman-child seemed to hold little regard for safe practices, legal boundaries, moral

limits—or keeping her parents in the loop so they wouldn't worry about her in her absence.

Of course, Uncle and Auntie would never define their daughter in that way. They preferred to think Deah simply threw herself so wholeheartedly into every situation that she forgot to follow the rules most people adhered to as a simple matter of principle.

Summer always tried to manifest a sweet spirit, displayed the expected behaviors in almost every situation, and followed all rules to a fault, so her aunt and uncle adored her. Yet she wasn't bossy or nosy or interfering, enabling Deah to tolerate her cousin's company if it meant her parents would give in to her demands, as they always did.

Truth be told, Summer longed for a chance to get in some serious writing time. She'd been working a series of temporary jobs that kept her bills paid, thinking she could work between assignments on the romantic novel she'd started writing months ago. But making a living meant accepting more jobs than she turned down. Writing might be her passion, but between work, keeping her tiny apartment clean and homey, teaching a Sunday School class for tween-aged girls, and doing her part on the church's praise team, she had to adhere to rigid writing practices in order to meet deadlines on the contracts she was now getting on a regular basis. She hadn't seen a huge return in royalties, but those welcome checks were a little larger each time.

Not that anyone knew she was a published writer. She wrote under a pseudonym, and no one besides her publisher knew she and Shelby Callan were one and the same. That was the way she liked it. No one needed to know she spent her spare time with a variety of imaginary characters.

Maybe while Deah hung out on the sand and surf, Summer could lose herself in fictional romance. At the rate she was going, it might be the only kind of relationship she ever experienced. She was simply too shy—and too busy—to work on a social life.

“Sheesh, you're such a stick-in-the-mud.” As if echoing Summer's own thoughts, Deah spat out the insult. “I'll be back before midnight.” She slammed the door as she took her leave.

Summer sighed. Her gaze fell on her laptop, which she hadn't had a chance to open since arriving at Paradise Pines three days ago. Her cousin had dragged her from one touristy shop to another, East Village to West

Village and on to Moonstone Beach. Finally, today, Summer stood her ground and refused to go.

As she'd known would happen, Deah threw a tantrum, and then settled into sulky acquiescence when her histrionics proved unsuccessful. By this afternoon, she'd have forgotten she ever wanted Summer along for the ride. The younger woman had already made friends since they arrived, and Summer had no doubt she'd be absorbed in a series of beach parties, bonfires, and shopping tangents before many more days slid by.

Which worked perfectly for Summer's own plan.

She jumped up with a grin and grabbed her laptop. After peeking out the window to make sure her cousin's little red rocket-on-wheels was really gone, she gave a delighted chortle and headed for the private beach behind the lodge.

Finally, a chance to write. On the beach. All alone.

Paradise, indeed!

She found a perfect spot, hewn into the rocks above the beach by eons of incoming and outgoing tides. After spreading the quilt she'd brought along to sit on, she allowed herself a few minutes to enjoy the ocean's beauty, and then lost herself in the world of her hero and heroine.

She didn't allow her gaze to even drift toward the water for the next hour and a half. The roar of the ocean, the sting of the salty breeze, and the extraordinary peace of nature all worked together to whet her senses to a sharp, creative point. She hadn't experienced a writing session quite so satisfying in—well, ever.

And that kind of blessing deserved a bit of gratitude.

She put her laptop to sleep, closed the lid, and grinned when yet another bit of divine fortune presented itself. A narrow gap between two large boulders provided a perfect place to stash the computer for a short time while she stretched her legs on the beach.

At the water's edge, she gazed out toward the horizon. Tears stung her eyes, and then burst free to run in rivulets down her face. The wind dried them in an instant, but a fresh torrent quickly followed. Such splendor, right here on Earth! Why would she be considered worthy to behold the breathtaking perfection of the scene now before her?

“Many, O Lord my God, are Thy wonderful works which Thou hast done.” The soft words somehow carried above the roar of the waves, and

yet failed to startle Summer. Instead, the Paradise Pines landlady's voice soothed and quieted her spirit.

"Miss Angie!" Summer turned a welcoming smile on the lovely woman who had appeared at her side as if out of nowhere—ridiculous thought, of course. But then, from the first time she'd laid eyes on the older woman with her crown of pure white hair, sky blue eyes, and a smile that seemed to make the whole world right, she had sensed something special about Miss Angelina Love. Being around her filled Summer's mind with the sweetest of music, and soothed her heart with gentle spirit flutters.

"That's from the book of Psalms, isn't it?"

"That it is, child." Miss Angie spread her arms, indicating the entire vista of water and waves, white clouds and blue sky. "And so is this one, which I think of each and every time my eyes feast on the wonders He created. 'Let the heaven and earth praise Him, the seas, and everything that moveth therein.'" Miss Angie shot Summer a twinkling smile. "I hope you don't mind the King James. It's still my favorite, despite all the newer, 'more easily understood' versions. I love the poetic beauty of the old language."

"Not at all. I like it." Summer's eyes widened, and turned once more to the majestic scene spread out before her. "Miss Angie...do you think that's what's happening? All this loud roar and rumble from the ocean, the slap of the waves, the shriek of the seagulls—is that nature praising God?"

The woman smiled and touched a gentle hand to Summer's cheek. "Well, who am I to say, child? But I like to think it is. Yes, I believe the sea is praising its Maker, just as we should when we behold all the beauty He gave us to enjoy."

Tears misted Summer's gaze, and she swallowed a little lump of immense gratitude. For better or worse, Cambria seemed to bring out the emotional in her.

"That's exactly what I was thinking while I stood here. God must have sent you to confirm what was in my heart."

"Well, it would be just like Him to do that for you. He loves you *that* much!"

With one last smile and a squeeze of Summer's hand, the woman turned and made her way back toward the lodge. Summer watched her for

a moment, and then returned her gaze to the water, where she mulled over the brief conversation.

Something about Miss Angie spoke to her spirit. She couldn't put her finger on what was so intriguing about the woman, but there was something—something almost divine—that overshadowed the beautiful lady like an invisible cloak.

She stood a long time, silently praising the Master of the sea, and the Savior of her soul.

Her toes twitched, and she glanced around the quiet beach. Not a single living creature in sight—not man, woman or child, not even the aforementioned seagull at the moment—but what if, like her, someone else had found a hidden nook in which to enjoy the ocean's magic?

Should it matter? As part of the praise team at her church in Three Rivers, she lifted her heart to God in dance in front of others at nearly every service. Reaching a point where she could shut off her natural shyness and simply *praise* had required much prayer and a terrific longing on Summer's part to worship God in a way beyond the ordinary.

Still she hesitated, while her bare toes dug into the damp sand. But the pull to uplift her Lord at last overcame her reticence as she recalled yet another verse from the Psalms—the one that had been her strength and her song during the time she'd sought enough boldness to dance in front of the congregation at church: "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord."

Overcome with the desire to express her appreciation for the surrounding beauty in a way that words could not, she cast one last, quick glance around. Not seeing anyone else on the beach, she began to bend and sway, her toes spinning across the sand almost without her direction. Her head filled with music and lyrics from one of her favorite praise and worship songs, her heart overflowed with love for God, and her body responded in a slow dance that poured her feelings out on the sand at her feet, across the waves of the mighty ocean, and upward—into the heavens.

She had no banner to wave, no pennant to incorporate into her moves. She didn't need one. Tears flowed and her heart sang praises as the ocean breeze cooled the sun's touch on her face and arms. Summer lost herself in the moment and released her heart in dance.

Until, in one terrifying instant, a huge, icy cold wave slammed into her from behind, with enormous force. She uttered one, instinctive cry—“Jesus!”—and then she was in the water and tossed into the swirling depths.

Never a strong swimmer, Summer’s strength was no match for the ocean’s. She posed no more challenge to the sucking, pulling tide than a piece of weightless driftwood. Although she fought with all her strength—even clawing her way to the surface once, and then twice to gulp in precious air—Summer hadn’t a chance of survival.

Her head bobbed above water once more as her strength dwindled to nothing. Still, she inhaled a deep breath before going under again. For the last time.

As the water flowed over and around her, she succumbed to the battering waves, no more fight left in her. She knew Christ, so she wasn’t worried about what awaited her at the time of her death. What she regretted was her life.

Why, oh why, had she not *lived* while she had the chance?

Logan climbed the boulders and rocks to his favorite spot on the Paradise Pines beach and settled in for another session with his paintbrush. Within moments, his easel was set up and secured, and he clipped the canvas onto it, his gaze already traveling the scene he’d been creating for over a week.

He’d painted *her* into it, with no more to go on than hazy dream images. Little detail existed in the slender form dressed in white, arms spread wide, head uplifted in praise. Yet the entire painting revolved around her—not the vast, choppy ocean beside which she stood, not the flawless blue sky. Despite how insignificant her figure in proportion to the other elements, the woman dominated the scene.

He touched his brush to her hair, adding a bit more light into the long, golden locks in which dwelt a tantalizing hint of silver. His dream-memory told him those silky strands absorbed and reflected every ray and beam of sunlight. Before he was finished, no one would look at this work and not see the sunshine in her hair.

An hour passed, during which he accomplished little. He couldn't stop looking up from his work, checking the water's edge. Ridiculous, of course. That same, disturbing dream—the swaying girl, the crushing wave, the horror of watching her disappear beneath the ocean's surface—had visited him nearly every night during the past month. It hadn't come true yet...why did he keep expecting to see her here on this stretch of shoreline? His chances of ever meeting the lovely dream dancer weren't great, especially considering the fact she most likely wasn't even real.

With a sigh, he laid his brush on the easel's built-in tray and stretched. Sitting for such long periods of time created kinks and knots in his neck and back if he didn't take time to move a little. He stood, and his gaze traveled once more to the quiet beach. Logan froze, unable for a moment to move even the slightest muscle.

There she stood, long, silver-gold hair blowing in the constant ocean breeze. The wind whipped at her white skirt and billowed around her ankles like something alive. The gracefulness of the woman's movements captivated him, just as it had every time she'd appeared in his sleeping world.

He didn't even breathe as he watched his dream re-enacted almost scene for scene. Her bare toes curled into the sand. Her head raised to the sky. Her shapely body swayed with incredible grace, moving to a rhythm only she could hear.

Finally free of the temporary paralysis brought on by seeing the woman of his dreams in his waking world, Logan vaulted himself forward, making his way down the slick, often unstable boulders toward the beach. Long strands of damp seaweed caught at his ankles and sent him sprawling, but he didn't slow down to assess any damage, despite the fire in his skin where his knee struck a pile of sharp, broken shell and stone. He prayed aloud as his feet finally hit the sand and propelled him across the distance between himself and the white-clothed stranger.

“God, You put me here.” He huffed out a breathless spew of pleading words as he jerked his shirt over his head on the move and tossed it onto the ground. “You showed me what was coming. Now please, *please* let me reach her in time!”

He saw the wave rolling in and called out to her, but of course she didn't hear over the roar of the ocean.

Once again, he lived through the horror of seeing the woman of his dreams pulled beneath the choppy surface and out of sight.

Logan reached the water's edge only a moment after losing sight of her. Barely slowing to kick off his sandals, he hit the water at a run, at the precise spot from which she'd disappeared. The instant he reached sufficient depth, he dove under.

Beneath the surface, his gaze darted here and there, watching for a glimpse of white in the murky, underwater world. Nothing. Just kelp, sea life and currents of water movement.

God, help me! His heart cried out again, *Please...where is she?* He surfaced for air and dove again. This time he caught a glimpse of the girl—just a bare half-second's view of white cloth and a splay of long hair around a pale face. He plowed his way through the water toward her. Then she was gone again.

He shot to the surface, his gaze tracing a rapid swath across the waves. He spotted one tiny, white hand flailing atop the water for a second or two before sinking once more beneath the water. Sucking in a lungful of precious air, he dove under one more time.

There. He saw her.

She'd stopped fighting...that couldn't be good.

Her body bounced around at the ocean's whim like a piece of hollow wood.

Ice shot through Logan's veins, colder than the frigid water on his skin. Was he too late? Was she dead already? One more desperate heart-plea for help, and he shot through the waves toward her. A moment and three eternities later, his fingers closed around one slender arm. He tugged her closer, fighting the pull of an ocean that seemed determined to win the tug-of-war.

As a teen, he'd worked two summers as a lifeguard on one of the public beaches near Cambria. Now, he frantically sought highlights of the training he'd been required to take, and settled on the right rescue tow to get a limp body to shore without injury, and without putting both their lives any further at risk.

Several exhausting moments later, with his lungs threatening to burst, he gained the shore and pulled her out of the water.

Oh, God, is she alive? Please...I can't lose her now!

He set to work, going through the necessary CPR steps without even thinking about them. Prayers for help tumbled from icy lips as he worked, refusing to give up.

At long last, she sputtered and coughed.

It was the most beautiful sound Logan could remember ever having heard.

Then she opened a pair of stunning green eyes and looked straight into his soul. “Am I...alive?” Water bubbled from her mouth just behind the weak whisper.

He spun her on her side.

An unbelievable amount of the ocean spewed onto his chest and soaked the sand around the two of them.

He didn’t mind in the least. She was alive.

Wilted on the sand, her skin so pale it was almost translucent, she seemed to barely draw a breath.

A skitter of fear shot through Logan. Despite his own exhaustion, he slid his arms beneath her and struggled to his feet. The trip from the water’s edge to Paradise Pines Lodge would be forever lost to his memory. He prayed all the way to the lodge—for strength to get there, and that the woman in his arms would live.

She was real.

He couldn’t lose her now.

Later, when he thought about that day, the first thing Logan would remember after setting out from the beach with the girl in his arms was Miss Angie’s face.

She waited in her open doorway as he stumbled across the yard.

“Bring her on in, Logan. I have a warm bath ready.”

A warm bath? How did she know...? No matter. He shot through the door as fast as his flagging strength would allow and followed Miss Angie’s tall, imposing form into a large bathroom, where he lowered his burden into the tub, clothes and all.

Miss Angie knelt beside the girl and waved a dismissive hand toward the door. “Logan, dear, please wait in the kitchen, if you don’t mind. I need to loosen poor Summer’s clothing so she can breathe better.”

Summer.

He headed for the kitchen and a cup of the coffee he smelled, but the name rolled over his tongue again and again, in a low whisper.

“Summer.” She was alive, and would be a part of his life in some way. Why else would God have brought her to him, straight out of his dreams?

Miss Angie shot into the room long enough to drop a blanket still warm from the dryer over shoulders Logan hadn’t even realized were shaking. The heat felt like a hug from Heaven, but he barely registered the welcome warmth—all his mind could absorb for the moment was that perfect name.

Summer.