



Emerald Tear

Chapter One

His boots made a satisfying squelching sound in the mud as he crossed the jungle dig site.

Oliver Ward grinned. His mom would be horrified. She rarely stepped a designer-clad foot off the Denver sidewalk, if she could help it. His dad would have a manly, resigned look on his face, and Oliver's brother, Isaac, would just roll his eyes.

It didn't matter, though. Oliver couldn't be happier.

He was thirty-one years old and living his dream.

He scanned the dig site. Several of his team members from the University of Denver were with him, including his mentor, Ben McBride. The archeologist had taught Oliver everything he knew. One day, Ben would retire, and Oliver planned to take over from him. Professor Oliver Ward. It had a nice ring to it.

His gaze took in the irregularly-shaped cut stones embedded in the side of the muddy hill. They'd pushed the jungle back to give them access to the remnants of the stone works that had been previously lost to time. Unidentified ruins waiting for Oliver's team to discover their secrets and their place in history.

Archeology in Ecuador was improving, but even now, in the late seventies, it was still haphazard and disjointed from a lack of funding. He looked up at the thick jungle surrounding the site. Through the vegetation, he caught a glimpse of the river not too far down the hill.

It didn't help that the site was in the Amazon jungle, on the wild eastern side of Ecuador. His boots sank into the mud again. The wild terrain made everything harder.

There was a lot more archeology work going on in neighboring Peru—at the famous Inca ruins there. But Oliver knew there were fascinating Inca sites here, too, waiting to be discovered.

Just ahead, crouched down by the ruins of a rock wall, he saw Carlos Lopez, the local archeologist who'd brought in Oliver's team. The man was smart, and keen to improve the methods and understanding of both the pre-Incan and Incan cultures. He wanted to share the history of his country with the world.

“Oliver.” A woman's voice made him turn.

“What have you got, Cheryl?” He crouched down beside the hole she was digging.

Dr. Cheryl Wilson was a good archeologist, although she didn't love fieldwork, and mostly enjoyed being inside the university lecture halls. She didn't hide her dislike of the mud, bugs, and the humidity. Still, he couldn't fault her dedication.

Cheryl lifted a shard of ceramic. He took it carefully, studying it. Perhaps a piece of cooking pot. Cheryl was watching him, her gaze on his face. He stifled a sigh. She'd kept dropping hints about them having dinner or catching a show. She was a smart, attractive woman. She'd started the day with her blonde hair styled into feathered locks that swept away from her face. He'd seen the style become popular with the students at the university as well. But here, the heat and humidity of the jungle had left her curls somewhat bedraggled.

Back in Denver, Cheryl was the kind of woman he usually dated. But now, he felt...nothing but mild appreciation. To be fair, lately he'd been feeling disillusioned with dating. He gave in to the urge and heaved an internal sigh. No matter how attractive the women, he'd felt a lack of passion, excitement, and challenge.

Growing up, Oliver's father had wanted Oliver to follow in his footsteps and become a lawyer. Law had made Oliver feel the same way as his recent dates—bored and stifled.

History on the other hand... Excitement flooded his veins. The thrill of discovery, of uncovering parts of the past and fitting them together, making sense of where they'd come from, that's what lit Oliver on fire.

"Oliver?"

He blinked and saw Cheryl beaming at him. She probably thought his look was for her.

Shit. "Let's see." He lifted the pottery to eye level. "Doesn't look decorative. It's everyday stuff. This has to be a village." He scanned the structures. He was sure they had once been houses.

"You still think it's Inca?" she asked.

He nodded. "Probably." But what were they doing here in the dense jungle?

With a nod at Cheryl, he carried the ceramic shard over to the tent they'd set up to store their finds. Plastic tubs were filled with ceramic and carved stones. They had also found a couple of pieces of delicate gold jewelry.

Ben was working nearby. The older man raised a hand before bending back to his work. Pausing, Oliver set his hands on the hips of his mud-splattered cargo pants and studied the rest of the dig site. A couple of people were working higher up on the slope. He carefully traversed the slippery stones pressed into the mud and headed in their direction. He wondered why the people

who'd built this place had placed these stones here, had built their homes here. What was so special about this spot?

"Hey, Oliver," Dr. Sam Fields, a close friend of Oliver's, called out. They'd studied together at college and been on several digs together.

"How's it going?" Oliver asked.

Sam winked. "Slow and dirty."

"I like it slow and dirty, dude," Cory Kowalski, another member of the team, said. The young man was a graduate student and they happily gave him all the dirty jobs.

Oliver smiled, then glanced upward. The sky was filled with heavy, gray clouds. They'd get a downpour soon.

Suddenly, he heard a scream, followed by several shouts.

He spun and saw Cory sliding down the slope. The young man's arms were flailing, but as his boots slipped off the stone, they hit dirt and he slid faster.

Shit. Oliver leaped forward, his gaze shifting down to the long sweep of the Rio Napo. If Cory didn't stop, he'd end up going over the edge and into the caiman-infested water. No one wanted to find themselves face to face with the aggressive alligator-like predators.

Oliver reacted without thinking. He crouched, snatching up a coil of rope off a pile of gear near the edge of the dig. He ran across the slippery stones, praying he didn't slip, and then threw one end of the rope.

It snaked around a nearby tree. "Tie it off," he yelled.

Then he hurried down the slope after Cory. His boots skidded and more mud splattered up his khaki trousers.

Right near the steep edge of the river, Cory had managed to grab on to some tree roots, and was holding tight, his face lined with fear. Mud streaked his cheek.

Oliver pulled tight on the rope, coming to a stop just above the man. “Hang on, Cory.”

The young man looked up and swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing.

“I’ve got you.” Oliver grabbed the man’s arm and pulled him up.

Down by the river, Oliver heard a splash. He turned his head and saw that an interested caiman had slid off the bank.

No snack today, buddy.

Oliver quickly and expertly tied the rope around Cory. The young man’s chest was heaving. Looking back up the slope, Oliver waved at the others.

“We’re going to take it nice and easy, and take our time walking back, okay?”

Cory nodded. Using the rope, they carefully navigated their way up the muddy slope. It was slow going, but finally they reached the others.

The young man collapsed on the ground. “You are one cool cat, Dr. Ward.” He scraped a shaky hand over his face.

“You’re welcome.” Oliver slapped Cory on the back.

As Cheryl whisked Cory off, Oliver leaned over and pressed his hands to his thighs. His heart was still pumping hard and he took a second to catch his breath.

When he lifted his head, movement at the far edge of the dig, near the tree line, caught his eye. He spotted a small figure standing in the dense vegetation, sticking to the shadows.

Was it a local? He frowned. At that moment, the first few spots of rain splattered down, hitting his shoulders and arms.

From what he could make out, the person was small and slim, and wearing cargo pants and a khaki shirt. They had a hat pulled low over their face, but Oliver was sure the person was staring at him.

For some reason, his heart kicked against his ribs, then he watched as the figure turned and moved along the tree line with a quick, economic gait.

Then the heavens opened up and rain saturated Oliver's clothes.

Within seconds, he could barely see the trees, let alone the lone figure. He kept frowning. From the way the person moved, he was sure it was a woman.

Who was she? Why was she watching his dig?

Ben called out his name then, and with one final glance at the shadows, he turned to join the others.

Persephone Blake strode down the street in the provincial capital of Tena, Ecuador. Perched on the confluence of two rivers, the town was a regional hub, and the number of tourists visiting was growing—lured by intrepid adventures into the Amazon. They had several cheap hotels and hostels, including the best one, where the American archeologists were currently staying.

She nodded at a group of smiling kids playing with some dogs in the street. They grinned back at her, teeth white against their bronze skin and dark hair.

Reaching the doorway to a bar and restaurant, she yanked open the door and walked inside. It was a dive, but had a certain charm to it.

God, how many days had she spent like this in her twenty-six years? Walking into seedy bars or pubs? She'd lost count.

Persephone headed straight for the bar and ordered a tequila in Spanish.

Her Spanish was pretty good, her French passable, and her Portuguese a bit spotty. It was thanks to her good ol' dad that she could speak a smattering of half-a-dozen languages. He'd certainly dragged her around enough countries during her childhood.

The bartender nudged her drink toward her in a chipped glass of dubious cleanliness. She set the coins down on the scarred, wooden bar and took a mouthful of her drink. It was watered down, but it would do.

She'd spent most of her formative years in South and Central America, while her dad had worked mining, or oil and gas jobs. Her mother had popped into their lives whenever the hell it had suited her. Athena Blake only did things that suited her.

Persephone shoved all thoughts of her mother away and took another sip of her bad drink. She turned slightly, so she could see the group sitting at the back of the bar.

The archeologists had all showered and changed. She heard a higher-pitched laugh and zeroed in on the lone woman in the group. She was perched on the edge of her chair, wearing pants that were outrageously wide at the bottom, and had her blonde hair styled in huge feathered waves.

Persephone snorted. In less than an hour, the humidity in this country would make it a waste of time to do all that work on her hair. Persephone kept her own brown hair clipped short in a pixie cut. It was less hassle that way and required no styling. The group looked to be in good spirits, and Persephone saw the woman desperately trying to capture the eye of the man sitting beside her.

Couldn't blame the woman. The man was outrageously good-looking. Put him in a tuxedo and he'd make an excellent James Bond. He had thick, dark hair and an easy, sexy smile.

Even from a distance, Persephone felt a curl of heat lick her belly.

She squelched it. She had no time for men. They always disappointed her, no matter how pretty they looked. Besides, he'd spotted her today at the dig site. She must be losing her touch.

Setting her glass down, she reached inside her shirt and pulled out the papers she kept in a clear, waterproof sleeve.

The first thing she saw was a picture of a tropical island. White-sand beaches surrounded by azure waters. Her retirement goal.

The next thing she pulled out was a photocopy of a page out of a handwritten diary. The writing was loopy and hard to read.

This was key to her achieving her retirement plan.

Her plan was to be retired at thirty-five. Persephone wanted to be sunning herself on the beach and banging sexy surfers or fishermen. She stroked the copy of the diary page. It held clues from a 1920's expedition to find a fabulous treasure right here in Ecuador.

That group had been consumed by the jungle, but Persephone wasn't going to let that happen to her. She was made of tougher stuff.

She folded the island picture and another tattered picture fell out of the sleeve.

This one was of a lovely Victorian house, somewhere in the USA. She'd never seen the house in real life before. While she'd been born in the States, she hadn't spent a lot of time there. But she'd seen this picture in a magazine once, and something about it had captured her interest. It looked like the kind of house a tight-knit family lived in. A family who celebrated Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Fourth of July. She snorted. Persephone had never had a home, so she didn't know much about them.

She shook her head. It was silly that she'd kept the picture. She should throw it out. She was destined for a beach shack by white sand and blue waters.

She lifted the diary page. Right now, she needed to stay focused on following the clues, and solving her big problem—the fact that the archeology team were digging on the location of her first clue.

Oh, and she couldn't forget her other problem. The fact that Sosa, the asshole dealer who'd sold her the page, had also sold a copy to someone else. Which meant Persephone would likely have company of the not-so-friendly kind before too long.

When the treasure was an invaluable lost emerald of the Inca, it guaranteed problems.

Someone sat on the stool beside her, reeking of cheap whiskey.

“*Hola, bella,*” the man drawled.

She rolled her eyes and gave the man an Arctic glare.

Clearly, he was too drunk to read her signals. He set a beefy hand on her shoulder.

She shrugged him off. “Shove off,” she said, in Spanish.

His face hardened. “Just want to have some fun.”

“Not interested.”

His thick brows pulled together. “You aren't being very friendly.”

Great. She could deal with this buffoon, but it would attract unwanted attention.

“The lady said she wasn't interested.”

The smooth voice spoke in perfect, accentless Spanish. She felt warmth along her spine as a firm body pressed close to her back. Every single one of her nerves flared to life.

“Piss off, *gringo,*” the drunk muttered.

Persephone was done. She moved her foot, catching the leg of the stool. It tipped over, and the man sprawled on the floor with a string of curses.

The bartender leaned over the bar, barking out some rapid words to the man. The drunk glared at the bartender, then at Persephone, before he hauled himself to his feet. He unsteadily weaved his way to the door, ranting to nobody.

Persephone grabbed her drink and downed the last of her shot before she turned.

Mr. Mouthwatering Archeologist was even more handsome up close.

She discovered that he had beautiful, cobalt-blue eyes, and he smelled good. *Damn.*

“Nice move,” he said with a smile.

“I didn’t need a rescue.” She slammed her glass back on the bar.

“I can see that.” He tilted his head to the side. “Can I get you another drink?”

“Hell, no.”

His sexy smile just widened. “Not the usual response I get when I offer to buy a woman a drink.”

She snorted. “I bet.” Persephone was sure that women fell over themselves whenever this man gave them any attention. Pretty, normal women, who wanted to play house with him, cook his meals, roll around naked in his bed, and give him pretty, well-behaved kids.

“I have to leave,” she said.

“I wish you’d stay.” His blue eyes bored into hers, like she was an interesting story that he couldn’t wait to hear.

Staring at that gorgeous face muddled her brain. He was too handsome, too everything. Dammit, she never let anything or anyone fog up her head.

“Why?” She mentally cursed herself for opening her mouth.

He leaned closer. “Because I’d like to know why you were spying on my dig today.”

Shit. She stiffened. God save her from smart men.

Persephone spun and strode toward the door. The man grabbed her arm and pulled her back.

Quick as lightning, she let her switchblade fall down her sleeve and into her palm. She flicked it open and out of view of everyone in the bar, she pressed it against his collarbone.

“I don’t like being grabbed.”

He lifted his hands, palms up. “Fair enough.” His voice lowered. “But I will admit I liked touching you.”

Persephone wasn’t dumb. She felt the electric current arcing between them. *Dammit*. He was a complication she didn’t need.

“Forget you saw me,” she said.

“Never going to happen.” Again, she got that sexy smile.

Because she felt her brain fogging up again, she pressed her blade a little harder against his skin. He jerked back, and a thin line of blood welled.

Persephone used the distraction to spin under his arm and escape out of the bar.

Emerald Butterfly

Chapter One

He stepped out onto the deck and pulled in a deep breath of sea air. It filled him like a drug, racing through his veins. The Florida sun was warm on Diego Torres' skin, and since he was on vacation for the next two weeks, he was a happy man.

Smiling, he crossed the deck of his ship. Pride filled him. The *Storm Nymph* was all his. Well, his and the bank's—he had the mortgage to prove it.

She was a research and salvage vessel. Not the biggest ship out there, but to him she was perfect. He hadn't wanted something that needed a huge crew. The *Nymph* had a large working deck, with an A-frame crane at the back for heavy lifting. A secondary crane was tucked away, one that was used for lifting his collection of ROVs into the water. The remotely operated underwater vehicles were all tucked securely into racks and locked down. Another rack contained scuba tanks, and other compartments were filled with wet suits, buoyancy control device jackets, masks, and fins.

Diego swiveled. The cabins sat belowdecks, and on the main level, he had research labs that would make any scientist happy. There was also a tidy galley and dining room, and the topmost

level, ringed by a balcony, contained his bridge. The roof of the bridge bristled with the antennae that made up his high-tech communications systems.

And it was all his. The *Nymph* was the only woman he needed. He crossed the deck to check on some of the gear he wanted to repair and replace over the next few weeks. His crew—a father and son team—were also on vacation, and had gone hunting for a few weeks. Diego was blissfully alone.

He planned to sleep late, do some maintenance jobs on the *Nymph*, drink Coronas while he watched the sunsets, and dodge his nosy family for as long as he could. If his mama or one of his siblings found out he was docked in the harbor, they'd pester him relentlessly. *Come for dinner, cariño. Meet my friend's lovely daughter, mi hijo. Talk to me, mi hermano.*

Diego loved them, but in the two years since he'd left the Navy, they'd honed pestering into a fine art.

He glanced down at the scars on his arm. His family didn't understand. Didn't have the first clue about the things he'd done and seen, and the friends he'd lost.

Dragging in a breath, he set his hands on his hips. He knew he'd never forget and would never be the man he'd been before. He wanted to shield his family from that. Protecting his family, his country—that was the reason he'd signed up to be a SEAL in the first place.

His cell phone vibrated in his pocket. For a moment, he considered ignoring it, but then he flicked it open. "Torres."

"Diego. Thank God, I got you."

He recognized the female voice instantly. Darcy Ward, co-owner of Treasure Hunter Security along with her brothers. Declan and Cal were former SEAL buddies of Diego's. He often did work with THS and their clients when it involved underwater expeditions.

“Hey, Darcy.”

“I’ve got a job for you,” she said.

He frowned. “I—”

“I know, I know, I’m disrupting your time off,” she hurried on. Darcy’s energy vibrated through the line. He suspected she was sitting behind her beloved computers. She was especially energetic when she had her fingers on a keyboard. “I wouldn’t be calling if it wasn’t important.”

Diego heard a deep voice rumble in the background.

“Hang on a sec.” Darcy’s voice turned muffled, like she was covering the phone. “I’m on the phone.” A pause. “None of your business.” Another pause, and then a huff of breath. “Keep your socks on, I just need a few minutes. I’m working *with* you, not *for* you. I didn’t sign a contract to be your slave.” Pause. “I’ll be there in a *minute*. Diego? I’m back.”

“You okay?”

She let out a hiss. “I’m working on a job in DC. An arrogant and annoying job.”

“Okay. Look, Darce—”

“Right.” She barreled over him. “Where was I? I have a friend. A close friend from college. Her grandfather is dying of cancer and doesn’t have long left.”

Diego frowned. What the hell did this have to do with him? “That sucks.”

“It does, especially since he’s all the family she has left. When her parents died, her grandfather took her in. He worked with my dad years ago. Ben was my dad’s mentor, and all his life, Ben’s been searching for an Incan jewel called the Emerald Butterfly. Have you heard of it?”

“Some lost emerald,” Diego said. “Didn’t your parents find one like it?”

“They did.” Darcy’s voice softened. “Mom and Dad met in Ecuador on a treasure hunt to find the Emerald Tear.”

Diego was well aware that the feisty Persephone Ward had been an infamous treasure hunter, and Oliver Ward had been an up-and-coming archeologist. They’d collided in the Ecuadorian jungle, and discovered a lost Incan emerald mine and a famous jewel.

“While they were down there, they found evidence of a second giant emerald called the Emerald Butterfly,” Darcy continued. “Ben looked for it for years. All the stories said that it had been taken by the Spanish. He found evidence that it was aboard a galleon that was bound for Spain.”

Diego felt the hairs rise on the back of his neck. “What ship?”

“The *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*.”

Diego sat down on the steps leading up to the bridge. “Darcy, you know that treasure hunters found the wreck of the *Atocha* in 1985. You can see the artifacts in a museum right here in Key West.”

“Diego, we both know that the treasure hunters only found half of the *Atocha*. They never found the sterncastle. The back of the ship would have housed the captain’s cabin, where the most valuable items, like a giant emerald, would have been stored for safekeeping. It’s still out there, somewhere, unidentified and waiting to be found.”

“People have searched for the *Atocha*’s sterncastle for decades. No one’s found it.”

“My friend thinks she has. She wants her grandfather to hold the Emerald Butterfly before he dies.”

Diego closed his eyes. *Hell*. His plans for late mornings and drinking beer were rapidly evaporating.

“She needs a ship and someone to help her bring up the emerald.”

“Darcy—”

“There’s an extra bonus in it for you.” Her voice turned cajoling. “Enough for you to buy more equipment for your ship. I know you’ve had your eye on some fancy diving gear. Those rebreather units, and the full-face masks with the underwater radio-communications system.”

“You’re mean.”

She laughed. “I just like getting my own way. The best thing is that the wreck is right off Key West. You don’t have to venture very far, and it might only take a few days.” Darcy’s tone turned pleading. “Please.”

“Why can’t someone from THS help her out?”

“Dec’s with me here in DC.” Her voice turned serious. “We’re working on a plan to trap Silk Road.”

Diego’s blood ran cold. Silk Road—a black-market antiquities ring—was dangerous.

“Alone?”

Darcy snorted. “Unfortunately, no. We’re working with the FBI.” She said the acronym like she’d just admitted to catching an infectious disease. “Cal, Logan, and the others are in Mexico working on a dig. Ronin is off with Peri on an Arctic holiday.” Darcy made a sound. “Who goes to the Arctic for a vacation? Anyway, my friend needs help. And I want someone I can trust.”

Diego blew out a breath. “Fine. I’ll do it.”

“Yay! I’m so grateful, Diego. Especially since she’ll be coming up your gangplank any second now.”

He scowled, raising his head. “You’re pretty sure of yourself, aren’t you?”

“I’m good.” There was amusement in Darcy’s tone now. “Now, can I please ask you to be nice?”

Nice? Why would Darcy think he’d be an asshole to a stranger...? *Wait.* “Darcy.” He drawled her name as he stood.

“She needs your help. She has a dying grandfather.”

“And she’s a fucking smart-ass DEA agent. The last time I saw her, she boarded my ship and slapped handcuffs on me!”

“It was all a misunderstanding! You wouldn’t let her board, and she had a job to do.”

“I don’t run drugs.”

“They were searching every ship in the marina, Diego. All just a misunderstanding. Be nice.”

Darcy hung up.

He scanned the docks, glimpsing a few people. His gaze swept over several people heading in his direction, before it zoomed in on a woman walking with a commanding stride along the floating walkway. Cuffed, navy-blue shorts showed off long legs, and a white T-shirt clung to full breasts. A long fall of chestnut-brown hair was loose and a slim backpack rested on one shoulder.

This time there was no pantsuit, tight braid, or tactical vest with DEA emblazoned on it.

Nope, Agent Sloan McBride looked almost normal. She moved with an efficient, energetic stride that told everyone she could handle herself.

As she got closer, her gaze flicked up and met his. She was still too far away for him to see the color of her eyes.

But he remembered. They were gray-green and framed by dark lashes.

“Damn you, Darcy,” he muttered to himself.

Sloan McBride strode up the ramp to the ship.

Diego Torres didn't look pleased to see her.

But she was a woman who worked in a male-dominated profession, and she'd never let a scowling, rugged face deter her before. Even one as mouthwatering as Diego's. He wasn't classically handsome—his nose had been broken before, and his cheeks were covered in sexy stubble. But perfect had never been that attractive to Sloan.

“Hi.” She stuck her hands in her pockets. “Darcy tell you I was coming?”

He slid his cell phone into the pocket of his faded denim shorts. “About one minute ago.”

Ouch. His voice was several degrees colder than the water lapping at the hull of the ship.

Thanks, Darce.

“I need your help,” Sloan said.

“Planning to slap some handcuffs on me and order me around to get your way?”

The mention of handcuffs made her belly flutter. The last time she'd seen Diego, she'd been in a hurry to stop a large drug shipment from leaving Miami. Maybe if she'd explained things better, things would've gone a lot smoother with Diego Torres. But at the time, she'd been running on coffee and no sleep, and under a tight deadline.

“Sorry, I left my cuffs at home this time.”

Dark, silky eyes stared back at her, and an image slammed into her head. For a brilliant second, she imagined what it would be like to have six-feet-plus of hard muscle covered in smooth, brown skin under her, cuffed and at her mercy.

God. A hot flush raced over her skin, and she cleared her throat. She wasn't here for that. She had a job to do, a very personal one.

She tucked some hair behind her ear. "I'm on a leave of absence from work."

"Well, wish I could tell you that it was a pleasure to see you again." His scowl deepened.

Double ouch. "Look, I was in a rush last time we met. I was running on fumes and no sleep, and in the middle of a really big operation. You were not being helpful, and things were time sensitive—"

"You boarded my ship without a good explanation. Nor did you—"

"I had a warrant."

"You could have explained."

"I didn't have time," she snapped. "Sixteen-hundred pounds of cocaine were headed out on a ship, and I needed to stop it. You didn't need to be an asshole."

He tilted his head and crossed his arms over his broad chest. She watched those muscled arms flex, and remembered that he'd been a Navy SEAL. He had not gone soft since he'd left the Navy.

She blew out a breath. "I'm sorry, all right? I really need your help."

He was quiet for a beat, and then he leaned against the railing. She took a second to look over the deck of his ship. Everything was neat and tidy, the deck was clean, and there were stacks of all kinds of equipment, half of which she didn't recognize.

"You're after an emerald," he said.

Sloan nodded. "My granddad has been trying to find it for over three decades."

"He's sick."

Pain shot through her. "Cancer. He's put up a good fight for three years, but he's not going to win." Her grief stole her breath.

"I'm sorry."

Diego's quiet, sincere words hit her. "Thank you. I want to do this for him, and let him hold the gem before he..." It was unbearable to think of her world without her granddad in it.

"Treasure hunters already salvaged the front half of the *Atocha*, and lots of people have tried to find the missing part of the ship. What makes you think you can find it?"

"Because I'm a genius."

His lips quirked. "Modest, too."

She smiled. "I don't play games, Mr. Torres. And you already know I detest wasting time."

"Right. So, tell me how you plan to find it?"

"I minored in computer science at college. That's how I met Darcy."

"So, you're a computer whiz, too."

"Yes. I've been working on a program to simulate weather patterns, storms, ocean currents. The *Nuestra Señora de Atocha* and another ship with it, the *Santa Margarita*, sank in a hurricane off the Keys in 1622. Spain attempted to recover what they could and found over half of the *Margarita's* cargo. But the *Atocha* went down in deeper water, and another hurricane swept in about a month later and scattered the wreckage even farther."

"And you think after all this time, that a fancy computer program will find her?"

Sloan smiled. "Yes. I've been plugging in simulations of the weather, how the ship likely broke up, the effects of the second hurricane."

His gaze sharpened. "You really know where the missing part of the ship is."

"I do. And I'd like your help to locate it and bring the emerald up."

His dark gaze moved over her face and she stared right back at him. He was so damn attractive. Damn her for having a weakness for rugged men.

Diego reached up and stroked his stubbled chin. "Why do I feel like there's a catch?"

Perceptive man. She wasn't surprised. She'd seen his service records, knew he'd been a hell of a SEAL. And now he ran a successful business. There were brains behind the brawn.

"My apartment here in Miami was ransacked. They didn't get my computer program, but they took all my notes on the *Atocha*. All my data, and everything about the emerald."

He cursed. "Silk Road?"

"Darcy and her brothers think so. The Emerald Butterfly is something that would attract them. I'm pretty sure they'll be right on my heels."

Diego cursed again, his gaze moving over her shoulder. "You said you left the handcuffs at home. Did you leave your handgun, too?"

She frowned. "No." She had her personal Glock holstered at the small of her back.

"Good." He pulled a massive Desert Eagle handgun from the back of his shorts.

Her eyes widened. "You want to shoot me for suggesting we work together? Seems a bit excessive, Torres."

He threw her a look. "Two big guys are heading this way. Both armed."

Coolness ran over Sloan, and she dropped her backpack and smoothly drew her Glock from the back of her shorts. She stepped up beside Diego and turned. "Why didn't you say so?"

"I just did." He sounded unhappy.

She rolled her eyes. "Can we save the banter for after, and just take care of these guys?"

