



In a time of
war
love is all they
have

On the Wings of
Love

SIENNA MYNX

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On the Wings of Love

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Editor Rie Langdon

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Dedicated to the men and women who serve, and who have served.

Author's Note

On the Wings of Love was first written in 2006 as a 3,000-word blog story. It has lingered in the dust pile, amongst many other stories that hadn't quite yet found a voice. Recently, while going over my older works, I was reminded of my fondness for historicals. I know that as a writer of fiction featuring African American women and men of other ethnicities, historicals can be a challenge, but I find these periods, and especially stories of the women who thrived in them, fascinating.

I've chosen to release *On the Wings Of Love* as a sample read. It's a good example of my writing style and the types of heroes and heroines I choose. It is my hope that those who discover this tale will enjoy it, and venture into others. To learn more about my works or share your thoughts with me, about this story or others you'd like to see, please visit my website:

<http://siennamynx.com>.

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Chapter One - *Shattered Trust*

Oahu, Hawaii. Early December 1941.

“Get your damn hands off her!”

Vivian stiffened. Michael drew away from her and focused on the dark pair of eyes that glared at him. Vivian's lips still burned from the forbidden kiss she shared with Michael. Her body was warm all over from his embrace. That wasn't the worst of it. Her stomach was a knot of quivers as shame washed over her. Eli Scott, her twin brother, filled the entire doorframe. Six foot two, ebony, with the chest and muscles of a bricklayer, he was a giant of a man. He'd apparently come upon them some time ago, and neither she nor Michael had been aware. The sun at Eli's back cast the left side of his face in deepening shadows. Vivian found his once-gentle features hardened with disgust.

The day's mail from the box outside was crumpled in his fists. Eli stepped inside and slammed the door. His Dixie cap, what some called sailor cap, slumped down on his brow. His chest expanded and contracted with each hard breath he drew in, doing his best to stay in control.

Vivian hadn't expected Eli for hours. Why was he home? *What does that matter now?* she thought. *He is, and you've got big problems now.*

Michael's hands fell from her waist. Vivian shifted away from their compromising position on the sofa, buttoning the top of her blouse. Her gaze naturally drifted back to her secret lover. *Not so much a secret any more,* she thought. Michael looked tense, alert, and as guilty as she.

How long had her brother been there? What had he seen? Was it the soft kiss of regret that Michael pressed to her cheek at first as silent tears of acceptance dropped from her closed lids? Was it before his lips found hers and she sank into his arms, seduced and pliant? Was it her earlier confession of love, despite the many reasons she and Michael should avoid the scandalous emotion between a colored woman and a white man, and an enlisted one at that? Or had Eli heard the plea in Michael's voice as he begged her again to run away with him?

Vivian felt her insides go tight as Eli's look registered the truth that only could be shared between a brother and sister—he'd heard and seen it all. She bit her lip, prepared to confess. And even though a confession was clearly her intent, she struggled to find the words. For her actions, though questionable by anyone's standards, were propelled by emotions she still couldn't name.

"Eli, let me explain." She rose from the sofa, shifting down the raised hem of her skirt and fixing her dress. Michael followed, tucking in his shirt.

"Get out!" her brother shouted above all explanation, throwing the mail aside. Letters scattered to the floor. He made the demand of Michael, who stood deathly still, cautious and wary of the larger man's anger. Vivian chewed sadly on the inside of her bottom lip. From birth, she and her brother had been closer than two siblings could ever be. Gram said as babies they had their own secret language, and would often fall asleep holding hands. Eli protected her, and when the Navy humiliated and abused him for just wanting acceptance, wanting a fair shot to serve just like any other enlisted man, she'd protected him, enveloping him in care, nurturing, and loving understanding, the way any twin sister would. In their world—fatherless and motherless—their unity was the foundation of their lives. It was all they had left.

That was until she fell in love with Michael, a man who only recently earned Eli's trust enough to be called friend.

"Eli, please calm down," Vivian whispered. She felt nauseous with dread. Her mind went to the Negro couple next door and the thin walls between their units. Annie wasn't above snooping and spreading lies. No one could know what Eli discovered. The repercussions were too severe for them all.

Her brother stared directly at her. Heat banked in his eyes and his nostrils flared. The kind light to his face, usually brightened when he smiled, had dulled to an ashen shade of disappointment. His disgust shifted in intensity, in a flash that turned his soft brown irises so black she couldn't see his pupils under lowered, angry lids.

Please Eli no! Don't lose your cool. Don't! I can explain if you just hold it together. I swear. You see, we're in love and I was afraid to tell you. Michael said we should, but I told him no. I know how protective you are. Love just happened. Michael's your friend. He's not like the rest of them. He didn't do this to mock you, to humiliate you. He fought it. We both did. If you must, blame me.

Vivian fell back, unable to form the words.

"How long?" Eli demanded through clenched teeth.

"What you saw was inappropriate, but nothing else happened," Michael lied.

Vivian closed her eyes. There could be no more lies between them. That time had passed. Her brother deserved the truth.

"Six months. It's been going on for six months," she blurted out, keeping the even more shocking secret from them both. That secret she couldn't dare say aloud until she was sure.

A bark of laughter caught them both by surprise. Eli's anger had darkened his sense of humor. "Six months, Viv? You've been whoring around behind my back for *six months*?"

"No. I mean yes." Shame shivered through her. He looked at her with such raw hurt she wanted the floor to open beneath her and swallow her whole. It all began so innocently...

Vivian bent at the waist, bringing down the oven door. A heat wave rich with the fragrant aroma of roasted meat and potatoes rolled out and washed over her face. She lowered her eyelids and inhaled deeply. Her hips rocked side-to-side then rolled, keeping in rhythm with her favorite tunes. Eli had gotten her a RCA portable radio no bigger than a shoebox with thermometer-style tuning and nickel-size dials to the front. It fit nicely on the sill of the kitchen window, right above the sink. When Annie saw it, she said it had to have cost a week's pay. Even now Vivian wasn't certain how he could afford it. But Eli was good at playing cards, so every now and then treats, pleasures that made her grin a mile, would appear on her dresser. Now it was her turn to reward him.

Dinner would be the best she could make for Eli and the E-4 he kept going on about. She hummed louder. The big band remote broadcast live jazz straight from New York City. The trumpet player was doing his thing. Vivian couldn't fathom how such lively music could travel the airwaves and make it into her kitchen outside the base at Pearl Harbor. Smiling, she hummed along. Her mitt-covered hands turned the sizzling pork roast in her grandma's favorite roasting pot.

"Excuse me, ma'am?"

Vivian shot straight up and whirled around. The oven door slammed shut. In her small kitchen stood a stranger. He was in his blues, with his cap pulled down on his brow, shadowing his eyes. However, she was paralyzed under his watchful stare. Vivian felt his gaze intensely. The heat to her backside did little to draw her from his watchful eyes. He was quite handsome, with a

chiseled jaw, dimpled chin, and broad shoulders. His stance spoke of authority. Her stomach clenched. There was a white man in her kitchen, catching her in a surprising position.

"Pardon me, ma'am," he said removing his cap and placing it under his arm. "I'm Michael Daniels. Eli invited me to dinner. No one answered the door and it was open so, well forgive the intrusion."

"Oh?" She couldn't complete her thought. The man had the clearest pale blue eyes she'd ever seen. They were almost grey. His raven-dark hair was tapered low and smoothed back in dark waves pressed flat to his scalp. She stared on, searching his face for a trace of what he thought at finding her in such a compromising position. And when the left corner of his mouth lifted in a small but sly smile, heat infused her chest, spreading up her neck and warming her cheeks.

"There you are, Mike," Eli said, stomping in with a wide grin on his face. "I see you met my sister. This here is Vivian. Isn't she something?" Eli came to her proudly and dropped his huge arm around her shoulders. Vivian glanced up at Eli, then shyly back at their visitor.

"Yes, she is. Very pleased to meet you, Miss Scott."

"Thank you. Pleased to meet you too, sir."

"Eli, this isn't about deceiving you. Not the way you think. I wanted to tell you, but, I..." Vivian's mouth went instantly dry. She took a step toward her brother and Michael drew her back. Eli's gaze darkened further at the touch. Upon reflection she would understand how Michael misread Eli's temperament. Most white men did when a six-foot-three, two-hundred-eighty pound black man towered over them, full of anger. But this was her brother. As much as their betrayal of his trust had slain him, he could never hurt her.

What he must think of her now? Ever since she got her first bra, her brother had been keenly aware of the attentions of men. Eli kept both white and Negro seamen off her on the rare occasions they crossed her path. He couldn't fathom that she'd willingly walk into Michael's arms.

"Let me go," she said, trying to reach her brother.

"Did you force her, make her do this? Did you?" Eli asked in a voice taut with tension, taking a threatening step. Quickly, Vivian got between them.

She faced Michael when she spoke. "Please do as he said, Michael. Just go."

"I won't leave you with him."

Eli turned away from them both. His boulder-sized hands clasped the top of his head and he paced a tight circle. She knew he was suppressing the urge to strike Michael. She knew he was on edge. If her brother hit a higher ranking, *anyone*, in fact, then all hope was lost. Because Eli wouldn't be able to stop. She'd seen this kind of rage in him only once. When some boys in the schoolyard attacked her cousin, Claudette, it was Eli who'd defended her honor. He'd put one of her attackers in a coma. When the boy recovered, the sheriff had taken pity on their grandmother and let Eli off the hook with a warning: his best bet was to leave town. Enlist.

If he hit Michael and made it to jail it would be a miracle. She knew what the Navy did to black sailors who dared to strike back. She knew a lot of things she wished she didn't, thanks to Eli being nothing more than a seaman apprentice on the battleship named for their landlocked home state, the USS West Virginia.

"Michael, leave now," she warned.

Leave? How could she ask that of him? He tore his gaze from Eli and focused once more on Vivian's lovely face. He could deny her nothing. The way she stared up at him, those wide brown eyes fringed with dark lashes. Innocent, pure, Vivian was the only woman he'd ever desired for longer than the duration of his erection. Dammit to hell, he should never have touched her. But once he had, there was no turning back...

"So where are you from, sir?" Vivian asked. As she spoke, the movement of her lips, pouty pink over delicate pearly-white teeth, kept Michael transfixed. Each time her voice rose, his gaze returned to the lush pair. But he was a man of discipline. The Navy taught him that. Certainly he could control whatever had become of his senses.

"Um, born in Arizona, but raised in a small town known as Redwood. It's in Northern California. And please call me Michael, ma'am, everyone does."

She shyly lowered her gaze, but a playful smile tugged the corner of her lips.

Ah? So she feels it too?

"See that chevron there, Sis? On his shoulder, there, he's a Petty Officer now." Eli said.

Her brow creased and furrowed. "But you already were, I thought?"

Michael allowed Eli to explain so he could hold her gaze and absorb every detail of her pretty face without question.

"Nah, he was a Seaman before. Still above me, but more like across because of his rating," Eli explained.

Vivian shook her pretty head. She grinned at her brother. "You just made no sense, Eli. But I suppose it makes sense to you both." Her focus returned to Michael. "Anyway, congratulations."

"Thank you Miss. Scott." Michael said.

"Vivian. Please. It's time for pie," she said, rising, collecting their plates. Michael stood as well, to help.

"Don't you move. You're a guest here. It's my pleasure," Vivian winked.

Michael lowered to his chair, his gaze honed as he watched Vivian again. She was medium in height. Her small waist made her dress fall sweetly off her curvy hips. It was white with tiny yellow embroidered flowers, puff sleeves, and shifting skirt. Her hair was smoothed away from her face, but curly tendrils fell loose around her temples. When she turned and walked away, he forced his gaze to lower.

Eli spoke: "Yes, it's our pleasure to have you dine with us. I wanted to thank you.

"For?" Michael asked, trying to shrug off the anxious feeling that settled, like trapped butterflies fluttering in his chest, the moment she'd walked away. How long would it take their angel to return?

"For the exercise yesterday. When you chose me over Seaman Edwards to lead the drill."

Michael's focus returned reluctantly to the big man before him. He found himself shrugging.

"Negroes work the galley. Mess jobs. Cleaning up, or fixing food for the white sailors. Segregation is even worse in the military... but you took a chance, and I... well it's been my dream to wear the bars on your shoulder."

Michael wasn't sure how to respond. His job was to train the men, not judge them. He hated the hypocrisy of lesser men having privileges simply because of the color of their skin, while men like Eli were regarded as a nuisance, or even worse, relegated to servitude, without cause. Even so, he hadn't meant to take a stand. They'd told him to identify a deserving crewman. He'd chosen Eli, the Senior Chief had signed the order, and the paperwork had gone upstairs. No one asked him about the color of the selectee's skin, and Michael hadn't volunteered the information. And with no one in the chain of command willing to undo what had surreptitiously been done, Eli had been allowed to prove himself. Michael was still weathering the repercussions for that small act of rebellion. "Eli, if it were up to me, you'd do more than lead a rescue drill. You'd command your own fleet someday."

Eli's eyes widened. "Well, too bad it ain't up to you. What was up to you was fairness, and you gave me that. I respect that." Eli extended his hand. Michael smiled and accepted the shake. "I plan to make you proud, from the galley of course." Eli chuckled. Though there was bitterness in that chuckle, Michael detected a hint of hope. There was a war taking place across the blue waters that surrounded this island, after all. Who knew what the future could bring?

"Ever hear of the Buffalo Soldiers?"

Michael nodded.

A gleam of pride and commitment sparked in Eli's dark eyes. "Those were real men. Colored men. And they did it. I'll do the same, in time. See, I figure we might see a war, and I figure when we do, that blood in your veins will spill the same color as mine. And that's when I'll get my due. The world's changing. Just got to let it."

For Michael, Eli's courage, and values made him a top-notch seaman. Eli was a man he'd instantly liked. And from the moment their eyes met one morning at chow, he'd sensed a wisdom Eli rarely showed to their commanding officers. It intrigued Michael, because until he'd enlisted, his life had been the epitome of ordinary. There was no greater motivation to any man than overcoming ordinary. Eli, he imagined, had been extraordinary from birth.

His eyes returned to the door Vivian had disappeared through. He could hear the soft sounds of her humming as she moved through the kitchen. Could still see her in his mind's eye. Michael didn't have the best of reputations with ladies. In fact, his appetite for female companionship kept commitment off the books. He wasn't sure if the desire rolling through him was thanks to the best home-cooked meal he'd had in months or the lovely way she greeted him

humming to the radio while bent and facing the open oven. Either way, if she kept looking at him with those large, round eyes, he was certain to be taking a cold shower that night.

"She's a wonderful cook. Your sister, I mean."

Eli looked to the kitchen door. He nodded. "She sure is. The best. My grams was good, but I swear Viv took everything she learned from her and just added more love to it. You know?"

"How'd she come to be here?" asked Michael.

Eli lowered his eyes to the thin lace of the tablecloth. "There was some... trouble... from when I left home. My trouble, not hers. Couldn't leave her to it." He shifted in his seat, a wooden Windsor chair that looked hardly sturdy enough to support him. "She lookin' after me, but I want her to marry, settle down. Have a family of her own. She deserves it."

"Is she ready... to, um, marry?" Michael asked taking a sip of coffee, trying to mask his curiosity. "She have a fella?"

"Naw. She think there's going to be a war. I keep telling her it ain't happening to ease her worry. But she won't leave my side til she knows I'm okay. It worries me though, her here alone when I'm out to sea. I'll do anything to protect her, but I can't be with her all the time."

"It's just you two?"

"Yessir, we twins. Just us. Which brings me to my question. I have something to ask."

Michael's gaze switched to Eli. "Go on."

"I hear I might have to ship out with the West Virginia in a few days. Do you mind... um... I hate to ask, but..."

"Go on. We're friends, Eli. You can ask me anything," Michael said, and he meant it.

"Do you mind checking in on her from time to time? I'd feel better knowing someone I trust was looking out for her when I'm not here."

Michael found the request shocking. First, Eli was a man of many friends, the Negro men that he worked with. One in particular was always at his side—a short, stocky colored guy with reddish-brown hair and a face dotted with freckles, who went by the name Leroy. Eli must have detected the question in his eyes. His tone hardened when he spoke again. "Guess, you wondering why I didn't ask Lee or Carter?"

"Well..."

"To be honest, I see the way they look at her. I don't like it." Eli's hand curled into a fist. "She's young and trusting. Been sheltered most of her life by me and Grams. They'd take advantage. I rather someone who isn't... well, I know you are a man of honor and principle."

The end of his statement almost forced a laugh from Michael's throat. That was the problem with segregation. As men divided by color, the misconceptions and paranoid assumptions bordered on ludicrous. Was it the color of his skin here? Or did Eli find him more worthy of trust because of his race? The few married men Michael spent time with wouldn't let him within ten feet of their wives. But here Eli thinks a chevron on his sleeve meant that his most precious jewel would be safe in his hands. Either way, Michael was humbled and a bit ashamed of the rise he'd felt in his manhood after looking at sweet Vivian. He most certainly would decline.

"I understand. It's not your responsibility, I only thought—"

"Okay boys, time for dessert." Vivian said, presenting her berry pie. She placed the dessert on the table before them with pride. Michael's gaze lowered to the golden crust, with dark-red filling bubbling out of the top slits. His mouth watered instantly from the rich aroma. Michael swallowed his objection. Eli's request was an honor. But with one look at Vivian's fresh smile, he knew any further visits on his part would be less than chivalrous.

"So what do you say?" Eli pressed. "Will you?"

Michael's gaze slowly lifted to Vivian's face. He noticed how her dimples deepened when she smiled. "Sure, Eli," he mumbled, trapped in the beauty of her smile. "It'll be my honor."

Michael grabbed his cover, and placed it on his head. He opened his mouth to speak to her but words failed him. He'd already given her his heart. He'd vowed to find them a place where the miscegenation laws that made their love illegal could be fought, and won. A place for them to be free. He was dreamer. She wasn't. Neither was Eli.

"Goodbye, Michael," she said, knowing it would be the last time they spoke.

"Never," he mumbled, and turned for the small foyer.

No sooner did the door close than Eli's fist crashed through the oakwood tallboy he'd saved a year to buy her for Christmas. She jumped, startled. He grabbed the top of it and brought it down with a ferocious slam on the hardwoods.

"Eli stop..."

Then, through the kitchen door, he was gone.

Stunned, defeated, Vivian stepped back and dropped on the sofa. What had she'd done? On the coffee table was the tiny kitten carved out of crystal, a token of Michael's heart. *I can't give you a ring*, he'd whispered one afternoon, pushing the sheets aside and pulling her closer to him. *He'd know*. She picked it up and pressed it to her own heart, then let the tears roll.

Chapter Two – *Severed Bonds*

He'll never forgive me...

In three days Eli hadn't said a word to her. He left before she woke and returned home long after she fell asleep on the sofa, waiting for him. The dinners she made, each more delicious than the last, were never touched. Vivian would rise, take the plate out of the oven and dump it in the trash, then sit by the door and wait, hoping the new day would bring him home with a bit of forgiveness in his heart. He'd been drinking, too. She smelled it in his room, on the cast-aside clothes he didn't bother to pick up off the floor.

It was on the third day their new routine changed. Vivian was at the kitchen table, staring at a dinner plate she was sure her brother wouldn't eat, when the knock came. She feared that knock.

Michael, not Eli, had driven all the way to their cottage in a military-issue Jeep. "Michael, what are you doing here?" she asked.

"Let me in, Viv."

"No. You know I can't."

He nodded. "I understand. I just don't think we should talk through the door."

"What's wrong? Is it my brother?"

"Yes, it's Eli. He took a swing at another sailor. A Negro sailor, thankfully, but it's an infraction that'll cost him a few days in the brig." Michael told her this from the other side of the screen door. She couldn't bring herself to lift the latch, though the temptation to go into his arms for comfort was overwhelmingly strong.

"Thank you for coming to tell me, Mr. Daniels."

"Viv... wait."

She closed the door.

Alone, she collapsed. Reduced to tears, she prayed that she could explain her weakness for the forbidden when Eli returned to her. Make her brother love and trust her again, as he once had.

But the loneliness of the night went on forever.

Burdened by the weight of her heavy heart, she woke from a sleepless night with her small crystal kitty clutched in the palm of her hand. She showered in the pre-dawn light and cried

until there were no tears left. The rest of her morning routine was done in a daze. She dressed of course, and then hung out the fresh linen on the clothesline and took the dry clothes in. She folded and refolded Eli's clothes to military specifications, the exact way he'd taught her. Nothing stopped the void in her from threading through her heart, strangling her with guilt. The walls caved in, the pressure in her chest spread to her head, and the simple act of breathing became a chore. She wanted out of her self-imposed hell. She wanted many things.

So Vivian did the only thing she could. She ran from their small duplex, to the beach, away from her shame. No amount of distance or denial could keep the reality from her heart. It was too late to dare for hope or understanding from Eli. And Annie had warned what her missed period meant. It was the second month and no sign of it. On top of all things, this would seal her fate.

Pearl Harbor, for all its beauty, was never paradise. Paradise was a life with Michael, one without scorn. Add to that happiness for her brother, where he'd be accepted and appreciated, with a rank deserving of his commitment and skills. Maybe love for him too, so they could raise children together. All the longings she never dared to dream. When their grandmother died all the clothes-washing and ironing she did for the local housewives couldn't keep them in their family home. They'd had nothing. Eli joined the Navy. She went with him, determined to be a schoolteacher, meet a good husband, have babies. That was as far as her mind would allow her to dream. And Eli, he was just happy to be enlisted. He suffered greatly at the hands of mean-tempered officers who seemed to love humbling him for their amusement. But Eli never complained. All he wanted was to make her proud.

Then came Michael. Eli's savior.

Neither of them planned it.

Neither of them could prevent it.

They just fit.

And now she'd failed them both—for love.

The ocean, a vast blue oasis of calm, glistened under the Hawaiian sun to her right, and rolled in with white, foamy waves. The dark sands of the beach stretched toward the mountainous cavern of rocks that blocked the beach from view. It was silly to run. But it felt good, she felt free. Vivian inhaled the sea-fresh aroma spraying the wind, wave after wave. It

wasn't the prevailing scent. The island carried a citrusy fragrance from all the colorful, wild blooms around her. She could even detect the gritty flavor of the wet sand beneath her feet.

She ran harder, listening to the break of the waves over the marble-smooth sand and the gulls swarming above her. She inhaled deeply and breathed out through her mouth as she paced herself, but ran harder.

"VIVIAN!!"

His voice was in her head, until the pitch rose with frequency. Confused and leery, she cast her gaze back over her shoulder. How did he know where to follow her? The worry and regret on his face shredded what was left of her heart.

"Vivian... wait!" he called out. "I need to talk to you."

"No Michael..."

"Miss. Vivian, ma'am, I hope I didn't catch you at a bad time." Michael tipped his hat at her.

"Well, no. I wasn't expecting company, though. Is something wrong? Something with Eli?" she asked, throwing the screen door open wide.

"No ma'am, he just asked that I check on you from time to time while he's afloat. I was driving through and thought I'd stop to see if you needed to go to the store, or anything."

Her breathing softened. He had scared her with his sudden arrival. He hadn't meant to. He'd actually passed her small duplex three times before summoning the courage to stop.

"Oh, that's really generous of you. Won't you please come in?" she asked, holding the door open to him. Michael hadn't considered venturing that far. He would take her for a ride to the store, and try to get answers for the questions plaguing him since they met. But an invitation inside could be deemed inappropriate. He cast his gaze to the left. There, colored children of servicemen played on a chalk-drawn ladder, the game of hopscotch, with bottle caps. To his right, a young colored boy had his bike turned over, working to re-set the chain that had come off. It was midday, and no one seemed to notice his arrival.

A furrow dug into her forehead, creasing the skin between her perfectly arched brows. "I just need to get my purse, I don't want you to bake outside my door," she said.

She must have read something into his actions. Something he didn't intend. "Yes, ma'am. Thank you," he said, entering.

She stepped back, but her soft powder-fresh scent lingered. He inhaled deeply, shutting the hot summer day out behind him. Despite the sweltering heat outside it was unusually cool inside her small home.

"Lemonade? I just made a pitcher. Would you like some?"

"Ah, sure. Um, yes, please."

"C'mon," she said, comfortable with inviting him further.

Her hair was down today, a spongy, thick mass of curls that bounced on her shoulders like a dark cloud. She wore a starched white short-sleeved collared shirt and a khaki skirt with white roll-down socks and tennies. She could be dressed like the Queen of Egypt and not be any more captivating.

Vivian cast an expectant look over her shoulder. Thankfully, his eyes had lifted from her swaying hips just before she caught him. "So you don't sail away like my brother? Why is that?"

"I sail at times. But there are duties I have to attend to here." He removed his cap and looked around the kitchen. It was spotless. Still, he noticed the simple touches that seemed to be her. Like the ladybug apron and matching mitts tucked into the door of the stove. Gracing a slender vase, the hand-picked flowers from a garden he'd seen out front. And most curiously, little wooden carved kittens on the kitchen windowsill.

"Those are interesting," he said, accepting the glass of lemonade.

Vivian turned, then followed his line of sight. "My kitties?"

"Yes. Are they hand-carved?"

"By Eli, yes. It's a cute story. My cat had kittens when I was eleven and I wanted to keep them. My grams said no. I cried for a week." She approached the tiny figures, picked one up. She glanced up at him with round, soft-brown eyes. "Eli always hated to see me cry. It took him three months to carve each one. He replaced each kitten Grams gave away."

Vivian held the figure out. "I keep them with me always."

Michael accepted the little carved kitten. His warm fingers brushed Vivian's cool ones. The charge that tingled his palm and went through his arm didn't seem to faze her. He fingered the detail, truly amazed that an eleven-year-old boy would have such a skill. But after meeting

them both, sharing a few meals, and many conversations with Eli, he was learning each day that one should never make assumptions about a person.

He didn't know any colored people in Redwood. There were a few families from the local Indian tribe, but no blacks. As a child, he'd assumed segregation of those of color was based on inferiority. His Aunt Jeannie had told him that the darker skin made that person and their beliefs far too foreign: they simply weren't like us, she'd said. And although segregation was very much in place in the Navy, it was here that he'd learned to question those ways of thinking.

"I'll get my purse," said Vivian, in that soft lovely voice of hers that buzz-sawed through his thoughts. Michael could only nod. She left him with her five kittens, and even more questions. Who was she, really?

Vivian rode in the back of the Jeep. A colored woman in a car with a white man was uncommon enough, even in the daytime, but riding shotgun was a definite no-no. Michael kept glancing to his rearview mirror. Through the coffee-colored lenses of his sunglasses he watched her smile and try to keep her wind-tossed locks out of her face. She talked a lot. Told him about her classes. How she hoped to get a teaching job in Honolulu. They hired colored teachers for the Hawaiians. She liked to walk, run mostly, on the beach that wasn't far from the back door of their house. She wanted to learn to swim, but Eli never had time to teach her, so she would just walk the shore and let her feet sink in the waves brought in by the tide. Before sunrise. According to Vivian watching the sunrise over the sea was magical.

She talked and he listened. Tuned in to her voice and the different levels of her speech, trying to identify and assign moods: dreamy, chatty, confused, sad. Her voice was so lovely, he wondered if she could sing, too. Michael had to bite his tongue to keep from asking.

"So do you think there will be a war? That we'll go fight the Germans?" she asked. He trailed what he hoped was an appropriate distance behind her. They were at the very crowded farmer's market. In front of a bench table stacked with a colorful assortment of fruit, she stopped

to pick up a melon and sniff. He hadn't paid much attention to the question. When she cast him a curious look over his non-response, he had to page back in his memory in order to answer.

"War, yes... there already is one. And we are very much so involved."

"How so?"

"We provide financial aid, convoys, to England. Do I think we will join in the fight officially, that Hitler will invade if we don't?"

Vivian waited, melon in hand.

"I think some things are inevitable. What they're doing is evil, ma'am, and they should be stopped."

"I get so nervous for Eli. Out at sea on that big boat. Funny, he may not be able to fight side-by-side with those white sailors, but if someone attacks that boat and sinks it he sure can die with them."

"It's a battleship," he said, taken aback by her directness.

"Yeah, like I said, boat." She shrugged.

Michael laughed. "Eli's in good hands, trust me."

She turned on him. "Mr. Daniels, I—"

"Michael."

She nodded. "Michael, I have another question."

She was blocking the narrow aisle. A short Hawaiian woman and her trailing toddlers looked on impatiently. Michael removed his sunglasses and tucked them into the front pocket of his uniform. He gently took Vivian's elbow to steer her away from those that wanted to pass. Her gaze remained boldly attached to his. "What do you feel about integration in the Navy? Eli says you're fair, open-minded. I know he struggles with how they treat him. He got this wild idea that if we face war, they will have to integrate. That he'll see combat. I want to believe, but I see such meanness in how he's treated at times. What do you think? Is there really any reason why a colored man should join the military?"

Michael coughed, and chuckled nervously. He was impressed. He thought of her as sweet, pie-baking, shy. But not truly a thinker. All that small-talk led here. She wanted to know who he was, what he really stood for, and she was going about it the old-fashioned way. Making him say it.

She had spunk. He liked that.

There was a bump to his shoulder as an older woman passed. Vivian waited for his answer. The groceries she'd collected remained tucked in a green shopping bag hooked over her arm.

"I love this country. I believe in all the principles we were founded on. It's why I joined the Navy. I assume that's why anyone would, white or Negro. Thing is, Miss Vivian, you can't believe in freedom and then ignore the fact when people aren't free. Negro, Hawaiian, Hispanic—they're my brothers when they enlist and should be afforded every right to serve as a man."

Had he said too much? Poured it on too thick? He waited. Possibly, but he hadn't understood his beliefs until that moment. Every word he'd said was true. He hated the smug, self-righteous attitude of many of the men he'd sworn to go into battle with and die beside. Especially when it came to Eli. That's why he'd stepped in and put an end to his harassment. Staring down at Vivian, he realized that even that small act of rebellion wasn't enough.

Then she cut him a break and smiled. "I knew I liked you, Michael Daniels. Eli was right about you." With little else to be said, she turned and continued walking.

Vivian couldn't look at him. She faced the sea, biting back the urge to cry. "We got problems."

"Yes, sweetheart, I suppose we do."

Internally she melted at the warmth in his voice. Slowly she sank to the ground, dropping in defeat to her knees. She was so tired of it all, and even more weakened. Especially if what she believed was true, was. Another little secret that neither Eli nor Michael knew.

"I tried to stay away, Viv, but how can I? What Eli walked in on was us trying to end things. And look where it's brought us! I'm not saying things aren't complicated between us now. But let's deal with this, sweetheart. No more running. No more lies. Give me a chance and we can fix it. I can fix it," said Michael.

She dropped her head back so the ocean breeze could dry her tears. "Always the dreamer, Michael. There's no fixin' it. We are who we are. Eli knows it, anyone can see it but you." Vivian sucked in a tight breath. She tilted her head further back, her gaze searching his expression. He

towered over her. The beauty of the tropical sky at daybreak, cloudless and pale blue, made his eyes again clear and gentle on his strikingly handsome tanned face. Those blasted eyes of his made her want to believe. "I hurt you, Michael, I hurt Eli. You're in my heart, and that has nothing to do with us being lovers. You were my friend first. But now it's just too much. I knew this could happen and I done it anyway. Because... well, I'm not sure why. I just wanted us."

"I still do. That's not the issue here. Eli was caught off guard. We handled it wrong, but it doesn't sully anything between us."

"How can you say that?"

"How? Because I love you, Vivian. I sat outside of your place thinking of how to convince you of this and I realized that I don't need to. Look at us, Vivian. Would something hurt this bad if it wasn't meant to be?"

"Yes! Yes! That's the reality, Michael." She slapped her hands on the tops of her thighs. "It's not supposed to hurt, especially the people we love. If your superiors find out, you know what will happen to Eli, to you both. We can't be that blind to the world around us."

"I'm not blind, I just won't let go now... it's too late," he said. He lowered to the sand, refusing to give an inch.

If he knew her secret, then he'd never leave her side. Annie next door said she could fix her a strong tea, and make the problem go away. But Vivian could never bring herself to do that. She considered running away, but Eli would be lost without her and she would be lost without him. And without Michael... she shook her head. What could she do?

"I will help Eli. I swear it, Viv, but I need you to answer a question for me."

"What's that, Michael?"

"The question I asked when you told me we had to end things, before you kissed me and I felt different."

Oh God, did he suspect?

"I- I don't remember." Her heart lodged in the back of her throat and she braced for it.

"Do you love me?" he asked.

Vivian blinked, shocked. It couldn't be as simple as that. *Love?* Feeling suddenly vulnerable again, which she figured was his intent, she pulled in another steady breath before she spoke. "How could you even ask?"

"I need to hear you say it. Answer me. Do you love me?"

Vivian's gaze slipped to Michael's questioning one. She recognized the steely confidence in his stare and the set of his jaw. Eli said he was tough. Most men, even of higher rates, avoided challenging him. She already knew he was brave, giving Eli supervisory duties over other men, instead of cleanup. Michael had come to her door more and more frequently when Eli was away and thus she had learned another side of him. His heart.

She crossed her arms over her tender breasts and looked out along the coast. There was no one on the beach and the sun had crept up on them. Everything had gone south too fast on her. Eli was behind bars and now Michael wanted a confession of love? Neither of them had begun this thinking it would be love.

"You know we have to be smart. My brother trusted us. He's all I have in the world." She cut him down with angry eyes. "I'm all he has. Can't say I'm wise enough to know the difference in love, you being my... first love. Now Eli's caught in this. I may be a lot of things but I can't ignore that fact. I'm not that selfish."

"Loving me doesn't make you selfish. It makes us brave, Vivian."

"You saying that you ready to parade me in front of your family and the Navy for *love*?"

"I'm saying I'm not willing to give up. I'm not that man. You're a part of me. I can't cut you out of my heart any more than I could cut off my own limb. I've seen the world, many parts of it, anyway. There's got to be a place in it for you and me. For us."

Seagulls circled out above their heads. She watched as their white wings sailed higher in the wind. "We could fly away," she smiled. "Like those birds. Just pick up and fly away."

"I should have been a pilot," Michael said. "I would have loved to grant you that wish."

"Then grant me another." She glanced to him. "Let go."

"Why should I? You think I can go on after what we shared? Just walk away? I'm changed because of you, Vivian."

She returned her gaze to the circling gulls. "Then there is no hope for us, because you've changed me too, Michael."

"There is hope. If we choose..." His hand slid over her bared thigh, the wind having tossed her skirt up further than she would normally allow. She shook her head, dropping her gaze. His open palm slowly caressed and warmed her skin. She tried to suppress the curl of arousal that wound tightly inside her belly from his touch. She felt the shame fade and her heart

fill once again with his love. He was a gentle lover, and a caring friend. His touch, his first touches, had always been the very best between them. Her breaths shortened when his hand inched up her thigh and under her skirt.

"My question, Viv. Can you answer it for me?" he asked.

"It's not even legal." Vivian inhaled sharply when his fingers reached the crease between her thighs. She reached down and tried to grab his wrist through her skirt. But he gave her a look that stopped her. She moved her hand away, her gaze glued to his.

"Answer my question."

"Don't Michael, stop..."

"Do you love me?" he asked. Feeling the beginnings of disappointment, rejection, he removed his hand from under her skirt.

"It doesn't matter!" she mumbled, fixing her skirt and closing her knees. The flood of moisture forming between the lips of her sex wasn't easily soothed. Now she burned for him. That was her problem. She burned for Michael, constantly. How did she not expect her life to go up in smoke?

"I'll confess. Tell them of my feelings for you, my plans to be with you." Michael tossed out the words as casually as a boy throwing the morning paper.

"They won't punish you. They'll just take it out on Eli, you know that!"

"I won't let that happen."

"Stop it, just stop with your empty promises."

"I'll fix things with Eli and if you want, *leave you be*." Michael got to his feet, dusting away the sand. She knew he meant it. His abandonment would be far worse. She crawled in the sand and managed to stand. Vivian caught up with him and snatched at his arm, forcing him to stop, to turn and face her.

"What do you expect me to do? Ruin your life and his? And what will they do to him? My shame has destroyed what little pride he had left. It's not just that we fell in love. It's that we did this behind his back, the only two people he thought he could trust deceived him. And what's worse... what's worse is I'm not sorry. That makes me a terrible sister. And you want me to rub his face in it by running with you?"

"Slow down, Vivian." His strong hands pulled her forward and she went to the wall of his chest for comfort. Warmth and security were always found in his embrace. She felt so exposed, so helpless.

"It's worse than when Gram died, Michael, worse than when the bank told us we couldn't keep the house. This is far worse. There's more at risk than you know."

"This isn't just about Eli, is it?"

Vivian averted her gaze.

"Viv, what's going on with you? First you wanted to end things with me, said you were going back to Inglewood. Then you told me didn't want to. Why, sweetheart? What's really going on?"

"I can't say," she whispered, shaking her head.

"He loves you. He's scared for you. But you haven't lost him. I should have never acted on my desire for you, not behind his back." He curled a finger under her chin and drew her face upward. "Worst of all, I should have never brought pain into your life. But you're in my heart, darling. I love you. Now what are you keeping from me?"

Chapter Three - *Passion, Pain, Love*

She blinked up at him in disbelief. His smile sparked. That light of love glowed in his clear, pale eyes.

"I- I'm not keeping anything from you," she said, unable even to verbalize the news.

"I'll be discharged for our affair, if I won't discount it. And I won't. We could stay here in Pearl. I could fix boats, work, you could teach—"

"Michael! That can't happen! You know it."

He cupped her face. "Hawaii is one of the few states that don't have anti-miscegenation laws on the books. We could make a life here. Make a stand. Vivian, all I know is I'm not sorry for loving you. I'll never apologize for it, and now that Eli knows I don't care who else does. I *love* you."

She closed her eyes and let his promise soothe her. She was so lonely before he came along. So empty inside.

"I love you too, Michael," she confessed, and the tight coil of heat around her midriff loosened. She could breathe. "I wish it mattered." She finally looked back at him. "I wish it did."

Michael Daniels was 23, fun, exciting, and so different than any of the men she'd ever known. It was Michael's kindness and generosity that she noticed at first. He brought her books to read, and then he'd come and have a glass of lemonade on some days. She'd loved him, in the purest sense, long before he became her lover and the father of the child she was concealing in her womb.

"Vivian, look at me."

She did as he asked.

"Will you come with me, if it comes to that?"

She heard the question and her heart answered first. "Yes."

He drew her into his arms. "I'll think of something. I will. I can't predict what the CO, the Navy, or any of them will do. But I'm not giving up. Not now." He kissed the top of her head as he held her by the sea.

Vivian closed her eyes and let silent tears drop. "Michael, I..."

When his lips found hers, she felt her chest tighten. All her senses came alive. Michael slid his fingers effortlessly through her tangles, and her hands gripped the sides of his shirt for

strength enough to remain standing. A slow, meaningful kiss began, draining her lungs of air and her mind of any residual resistance.

His hand gave a tug to her thick strands, forcing her to tilt her head back and her scalp to burn. The action exposed the slender curve of her neck, the spot he worshipped on her body first, before their passion bloomed into much more. First he brushed his lips across her skin and she inhaled his maleness.

That's how it had begun for Vivian. The simple touches. At first his hand brushing hers when passing an item or a glass between them, then he'd boldly capture her open palm to help her out of a car or from a chair. The feel of his warm palm pressed into hers sent a current through her being, making her, for the first time, respond with accessibility she should have avoided.

And of course there was always the playful banter, which made her bolder and more confident. She'd offer for him to come inside from the heat and reward him with lemonade for the trouble. Or just happen to have a fresh-baked cherry pie cooling on the windowsill, ready for the cutting.

Soon she was sharing her love of Ethel Waters. How on her sixteenth birthday her brother had bought her Ethel's record. Michael had never heard of Ethel. Vivian would play the record and hum along. And he'd ask her to sing.

Who knew her voice would be the opening of his heart, and hers?

Yes, she'd sing for him. She didn't have a church any more, or friends to sing to. Michael loved her voice. Later, he told her it was how he fell in love with her.

And then came the dancing. That was the catalyst to it all. Just playful spins around the room to Sinatra's orchestra, which ended with her in his arms. They were not just unable to prevent destiny, they were unwilling to.

"Wow, you are a good dancer," Vivian laughed. Michael held her close, enjoying the sway of her hips when she was in his arms. "I need to catch my breath," she joked.

"Used to dance with my sisters back home," Michael said, smiling. He, too, was out of breath, and strangely unable to let her go. Things were progressing steadily with them and even now he denied what that truly meant. Except in moments like this one.

"Never been to Northern California, though I hear it's real nice."

"You should come. They got flowers just like here in Hawaii. Name a color, dream a color, it's in Redwood. You'd love it." Michael gazed into her eyes. They were a dark brown swirl with a hint of amber. They grew moist, as she stared on, unblinking. He could see himself in her questioning gaze. The desire he carried in his heart reflected back at him. He should release her. She was showing him a dance move, nothing more. Eli trusted him to be her guardian. He treasured that role. Nothing more.

He should release her.

The record stopped. The needle bobbed and scratched the center of the disc, and the phonograph player echoed static. She, however, still swayed in his arms.

"Anybody ever tell you, Vivian Scott, that you are the prettiest girl in Pearl Harbor?"

"No, I don't think anybody has."

"Then let me be the first," he said, spinning her out and bringing her back to his arms. She giggled freely. Her hands rested on his shoulders. Her touch was so light, so soothing, he felt his nature rise between his legs.

"Aw, the music stopped," she said, with a shrug.

Michael let her go and Vivian turned her bashful smile away. He stepped back and executed a quick gentleman's bow. "Then, ma'am, let me be the first. Miss Vivian Scott, you are the prettiest girl in all of Hawaii."

"You so silly, Michael." But she curtsied, the way she'd seen it done in Citizen Kane, at the movie house back home. "Why thank you kindly, sir."

She turned toward the record player. "If I scratch the needle on the player Eli will kill me. He done replaced it twice already."

When Michael didn't respond, she glanced back at him from her over her shoulder. "You sure are good on your feet, Michael. That was fun."

"You inspire me."

Michael stepped aside so she could see her gift. Placed on the coffee table was a small, crystal kitten. At first he didn't think she saw it. He was wrong.

"What is that?"

"For you."

"What for?" she asked. He boldly took her hand into his and pulled her forward. She regarded the gift with caution. "Why would you do this, Michael? I can't accept it."

"You can. For all the lemonade afternoons. The warm pie you always keep coming out of the oven. The ear you lend me when I need to unload. I wanted to do something special for you."

He picked up the tiny figurine. When he first saw it, he'd immediately thought of her.

"It's beautiful." She took it into her hands. "Beautiful."

She stared into his eyes while he dared to caress the side of her cheek. It wasn't enough. He cupped her face in both hands and again fell into the temptation to taste her lips. She could deny him. Push him away. But he hoped that this time she'd find the irresistible chain of desire between them too hard to break.

He was right.

To his delight, she initiated the kiss, boldly rising on her toes and pressing her lips to his.

She couldn't stop herself. His lips, his clean, manly smell, those beautiful baby blues of his were as soothing as summer rain. And the kiss wasn't like ones she'd shared with Titus. He was her first boyfriend. Back in Inglewood she'd believed him to be the one. So much so, she'd given him something special, her, and on more than one occasion. She'd kept that secret from Eli, fearing he'd be enraged. And Titus turned out to be a cad. Several months later, his attention waned. Then she saw him walking Simone Elliot home.

But this kiss was the kiss of shared passion. It was soft and hard, wet and dry, long and slow. Things she read about in pulp novels, the ones she bought when Eli wasn't there to tell her no.

Vivian opened her mouth wider for the exploration, wanting to experience more, and in that moment it was natural. She didn't think about propriety, race, the rules that governed her life. She just kissed a man and let the pleasure of it in.

"You are so wonderful, Vivian. So beautiful," he sighed between kisses, his lips then going to her neck. Vivian smiled, giggled when his kisses tickled her. She stepped back, still seeking his mouth. She wanted to kiss him more. To feel that tingling in the pit of her stomach again.

The buttons on the back of her dress loosened, but she paid it no mind. In fact, she smiled and devoured his mouth, taking over the kiss. Through the passionate exchange her dress parted, cooling her back. Michael took hold of the short sleeves and drew them down from her arms. Vivian lowered her arms, continuing their kiss, allowing him to slide the fabric off, away. She'd made the hand-sewn dress only weeks ago, copying it from a magazine, and wondering the entire time if he'd like it when he saw it on her. It dropped to the floor, leaving her in her slip. She felt utterly free with Michael. It was a strange feeling, one she enjoyed.

Then he grasped her by the shoulders and pulled back. Panting, he put his forehead to hers. "Forgive me, Miss Vivian. I- I shouldn't have."

"Michael," she said, touching his cheek. His forehead slowly lifted. Vivian searched his eyes and saw such conflict there. "I understand. It's why I kissed you."

"This is wrong."

Vivian nodded. "I know." She kissed him once more. "I know."

Swept into his arms, she felt herself being lowered to the sofa. It was going to happen, dear God help her, but she wanted it to.

Michael lowered his head and pressed another kiss against her mouth. When he broke the kiss, he hovered above her. She panted. Her chest, heaving with each breath, was so lovely. The satiny fabric of the slip clung to her cleavage, her small waist. Its hem was pushed up high on her thighs. He wanted the time to enjoy and savor every moment with her. How many nights had he laid in his bed alone and dreamt of this skin, those breasts, her thighs? Vivian shifted beneath him, parting her legs for him so he fit more comfortably between them.

The invitation was unmistakable. He centered his hardness between her thighs, against her core, and came down on her. She blinked and held his gaze. With those round, long-lashed

eyes staring up him and her pouty lips slightly parted, she'd never looked sexier. Michael swallowed hard.

When his mouth met hers for a second time, he felt the pressure in his chest tighten until the breath was squeezed from his lungs. Her lips were silky petals brushing against his and her breath was laced with cinnamon and a bit of lemon from the tea she'd had earlier. Her lush breasts pressed against his chest. Those nipples he longed to lick were pert and erect against him.

Michael's hand went under her neck and he gathered her thick hair into his palm to lift and tilt her head back and deepen their kiss. She moaned as her tongue moved over his, retreated, then pushed further into his mouth. And he felt all the blood in his veins rush to the head of his cock. He dragged his lips from hers, taking in deep breaths.

"Michael, don't stop."

"We shouldn't," he moaned.

"Don't stop," she whispered.

His face hovered close, their lips just a fraction of an inch apart. Their breaths intermingled; their heartbeats matched, sharing a rhythm. She was part of him. She belonged to him. There was no way he could deny it now.

Her small hands went between them and she broke the stand-off by pushing against his chest. Michael drew away. Vivian closed her thighs, rose from the sofa. Her hair now wild and poufy from his finger play. She extended a hand to him. Michael stared at the hand. He recalled the promise he'd made to Eli. The vows he made to himself when she didn't stop visiting his dreams. None of it mattered in that moment. The feeling of belonging and having the woman of your desires was the strongest aphrodisiac he'd ever felt.

Michael accepted her hand.

Vivian led him to her bedroom.

Chapter Four – *Love and War*

"I treasure you. Give me a chance to prove it. Let me find a way."

Trembling in his arms, she pulled in a ragged breath. "I know, Michael."

"You taught me a lot, Vivian. The future we want is the one we make. What if I can give you the dreams we shared with each other? What then? Either way, how can we not try?"

Vivian had never been more desperate than she was in that moment. Wrapped in his arms, he freed her from her shame, her fear. When his lips glided over hers again she believed anything was possible. The sun bathed them; their kisses deepened and the gulls flew lazily past, out over the cobalt blue waves. But there was one heart-stopping untruth between them. A secret Michael didn't know. His child.

Vivian's hands eased up and around his neck. Her fingernails scraped his scalp. Her legs and belly trembled with anxious want. He returned her passion with a burning desire of his own. His hand slid down her back and then gripped her rear, pushing her into him. Was it her plan to make love to him again? Vivian nearly laughed in the kiss. Nothing between the two of them had ever been planned. It just happened.

Her mouth sought his kiss and her blood heated.

Pulling at him, she caused them both to lower backward on the sand. He was in his uniform and she clawed at his shirt, trying to free him from it.

The privacy of the remote beach location and the beauty of the new day fueled their passion. Even outdoors as they were, there was little worry of being discovered. He rolled over in the sand, onto his back, pulling her on top. She straddled him, feeling the water lap at her ankles as the morning tide rolled in.

Neither of them cared.

She worked her way out of her dress, pulling it over her head. Since he'd arrived so early, she didn't have on her slip, or her bra. She sat up on him in nothing more than her panties, smiling. Again the sun kissed her skin and this time she warmed all the way to her heart, which ached for him.

Her face was still wet with tears. Tossing the dress, she threw it in the sand, away from the water. Michael rose to a sitting position, snatching at the buttons at the front of his shirt. He pulled it off with her help. She grabbed the tail end of his t-shirt, lifting it over his head, causing

his dog tags to flop against the hard muscles of his chest. Tracing her hand along his chiseled rib cage, she sucked in a breath as her fingers spread and enjoyed angles and cuts of tanned perfection. Her stomach fluttered with excitement and moisture gathered between the lips of her sex, just from touching him. When they were like this, she felt so cherished. Nothing could divide them. Not the sea roaring behind them nor the world full of rules and restrictions that loomed threateningly ahead of them. Neither deterred or extinguished the undeniable love they shared.

She rose up, allowing him to kick off his pants as she removed her underwear, the last barrier between them. She had to have him now. She wanted to have him, now and forever.

Returning to his lap, she sank down on his thickness, taking him in. She felt his erection respond and she smiled while she captured his mouth and tongue for another kiss. The sun now burned onto her back, but the wind soothed her fever. She shivered as she lifted her hips to take him in again and again, taking time to lower herself slowly upon each descent. Her walls stretched and clenched around his girth. Vivian closed her eyes to the mixture of pleasure and pressure mounting with her ride. He raised his hands, capturing her ribcage as she placed her hands flat on his chest.

Tilting her head back and moving up and down, she opened her eyes to see a fighter fly overhead. The plane was close enough to know who they were, but they flew low enough to see what she and Michael were doing, and she didn't care. She could feel Michael's hands on her hips now, guiding her. She wiggled her toes in pleasure into the sand on either side of him. Just as she felt she was ready to explode, he rolled her over.

Now they were in the water. And the warm waves that broke over the shore lapped across them, bubbling upward, making her hair wet and sandy. She wrapped her legs around him and dug her nails into his back, moaning at the way he commanded her. He was raised up on his elbow, looking into her face, as he drove himself deeper and deeper, and she fought to hang on so she could climax with him. His free hand roamed her wet, sandy body, sliding back to her chest to squeeze her nipple. Arching his back while inside her, he lifted her breast to his mouth and devoured it, never breaking his rhythm.

His strokes began gently, strokes so slow and measured that Vivian gritted her teeth. She dug her nails into the mounds of his ass.

Lowering his face into her now-wet hair, she heard him whisper over the rushing sound of the water. His voice was hoarse with desire. "I love you. I don't care what it costs me. Nothing can make me give you up."

"I love you too, Michael," she said softly. Hearing his passionate moans in her ear drove her closer and closer to the edge. She loved how heavy he was, how she could feel him everywhere, and she moaned in return. His hips circled and the spray hairs at the base of his cock tickled her clit to near-delirium. Vivian sucked down several deep breaths through clenched teeth while tightening all over below for him. The ways he moved, the way his cock stroked over the right spot, it was maddening.

"Come for me, sweetheart. Let go."

Beneath her palms, she felt his muscled cheeks of his ass clench and was crushed now by his weight. He pumped fast and furious, driving deeply. Then he plunged hard, his hips pistoning to make each strike even more glorious.

She cried out, arching up against him, no longer able to resist the swirl of pleasure pooling between them. Hot waves of passion rolled over her and her legs cinched tighter around his waist. Vivian shuddered through her climax, watching his eyes the entire time.

When he finally joined her, she smiled, and let her lids fall closed. This was theirs, theirs alone. She didn't care what the future held. She had found true love and she would not let go.

It was 1941 and their love was forbidden. Yet what they felt was bigger than they were. It was bigger than race or class. It was bigger than the Navy, Nazis, segregation, and World War II. Neither one of them could deny that now. And they would both risk it all to preserve what they'd found in each other.

Vivian dressed. Sand was in her hair, her clothes, almost everywhere. But she smiled at him. He buttoned his shirt and smiled back. "Michael, I have something to tell you," she said.

"Okay."

Vivian opened her mouth to tell him of his pending fatherhood, when he frowned and looked to the sky. Her gaze followed his. A loud squadron of planes was approaching the island, very fast. "No, no..." Michael said, as he looked on in disbelief.

"Michael, what is it—"

He grabbed her and brought her down to the sand. The wind was knocked from her lungs. Planes flew far lower than they should over them, nearly blacking out the sky. Michael covered her. It all happened so fast. But her question was answered when the first explosion shattered the morning tranquility of the Navy base nestled just beyond the next inlet. Michael rose, dragging her to her feet.

"Vivian... let's go. Run!" She reached for her scarf, but he pulled her, hard, toward the path.

She blinked up and saw bombs fall from the planes as everything in the near distance went up in flames. "Eli, what about Eli?"

"Run! Come on!"

With her heart lodged in her throat, she faced an awful realization.

This must be war.

Vivian squeezed Michael's hand, and ran.