

Chapter 4

Jewelle had been on deck to see the ship pull out of the port in Barcelona after spending two days there. *What a gorgeous, fascinating city*, she thought. The 1992 Olympics had given this antique city a facelift and revitalized its tourism industry. The boulevards were wide and clean. Sidewalk cafés that offered endless dining choices were busy with relaxing, imbibing customers.

Barcelona was a street city. People walked, sat, ate, and watched. It was a friendly city; a city of history where bullfights were fought, where Christopher Columbus left for his celebrated adventure, and where the Cathedral de Familia was still under construction after two hundred years.

It was also a city of love. But the adventure did not start for Jewelle in Barcelona. It was just an appetizer. The real meal was just being served as the eighteen-story tall cruise ship sailed into the dark, blue waters of the Mediterranean, through the Straits of Gibraltar towards the Atlantic Ocean.

She was in her cabin unpacking when the captain's announcement came over the loudspeaker.

“Ladies and gentleman, this is your captain speaking. We hope you all enjoyed our last port of call, Barcelona, Spain. Those of you who have just boarded our ship, on behalf of Royal Oceanic Cruise Lines, I would like to welcome you aboard the *Emerald of the Seas*. Our ship is headed for Morocco, Algiers. We will cover a distance of four hundred and fifty-six nautical miles. We will be cruising at twenty-one knots and expect calm seas at four to six feet. My crew and I will do everything we can to ensure that the next four weeks on our way through the Mediterranean with a final destination

of Port Canaveral, Florida, in the United States of America, will be exciting but safe.”

The captain continued, explaining the upcoming muster drill. “I will now blow the ship’s whistle. When you hear six short blows and one long blow, this will be your indication to commence the muster drill.”

When Jewelle returned to her cabin after the drill, she found a gorgeous young, uniformed man in her cabin. “My name is Gyula, Miss Dawson. I will be your cabin steward. My goal is to make you comfortable, and fulfill any needs you may have while you are on board our wonderful ship.”

Gyula outlined his services to Jewelle, and told her about her dining room assignment, that her table number was 44. He also gave her a copy of *The Ships Coordinates*, the daily newsletter that explained each day’s activities, dress suggestions for the dining room, and other general information.

Jewelle studied the itinerary for the first day at sea. Dress for dinner was casual, the sheet said. *Screw casual*, thought Jewelle. *I didn’t spend twenty-five hundred on a new wardrobe to dress casual*. She’d dressed casual for the last seven years. Duluth, Minnesota wasn’t exactly a fashion Mecca. She looked at her watch. It was three forty-five in the afternoon. Time enough to catch a few rays and get acquainted with the pool deck. She changed into one of her bathing suits and grabbed her sunscreen, visor, and sunglasses. She tossed them into the beach bag she’d purchased at Target. Once she’d seen the “Bon Voyage” script on the side, she couldn’t resist buying it. She slipped on her flip flops, threw the beach wrap over her suit, and headed for the tenth floor of the ship.

As Jewelle stepped through the automatic doors, which acted as a barrier from the air-conditioned part of the ship to the hot, windy elements of the ship’s pool deck, she was surprised to

The Exchange

see that many of the ship's passengers seemed to have had the same idea as she. The sun-bathing area with two large pools was a bustle of activity. There were three hot tubs with huge metal umbrellas to provide shade. On the far end of the ship, toward the port side, a five-piece steel band played island music.

Waiters in tropical floral shirts tempted the sunbathers with the drink of the day. Before Jewelle had even found a place to sit, one of the waiters approached her, "How 'bout a Bimini Boat, lady? It's the special of the day and you get to keep the glass. Only four ninety-five!"

"Not yet, thank you," Jewelle demurred. She wanted to find a good lounge chair and get comfortable first. She visited the towel stand and asked the attendant for three towels, then scanned the area for a seat away from the pool. It was filled with a group of teenagers who were playing some loud game.

About six rows back, she spotted a chair which looked just right. Sitting in the adjacent chair, was a middle-aged woman, about forty-five, surmised Jewelle. She had muscular arms and flawless skin. "Anyone sitting here?" asked Jewelle.

"No, please feel free to sit down," responded the passenger.

"Thank you. I didn't realize everyone else on the ship would have the same great idea I had of getting some sun before dinner. It looks like the ship has a full load by the looks of the pool deck," said Jewelle as she stretched out the towels and stepped out of her pool wrap.

"I heard the ship is sold out. Not an empty room to be had."

"My name is Jewelle. Did you get on the ship in Barcelona or have you been on it since Italy?"

"I'm Randy Harrison. Nice to meet you, Jewelle. Is it Jewel like in J-e-w-e-l-r-y?"

"No, it's actually spelled J-e-w-e-l-l-e."

“Cool,” commented Randy. “We just got on in Barcelona. We almost missed the ship. I’m with my mother. She’s very ill, and this is her last journey before her final journey, if you get my drift. I’ve seen too many of my friends die in some sterile hospital or hospice. I promised Mom that I wouldn’t let her die that way, so I decided to take her on this trip. Unfortunately, the careful arrangements I made to get her on the ship didn’t come off like I planned. By the time I pulled it all together, the ship was getting ready to sail. But we made it! That’s all that counts,” sighed Randy.

Jewelle studied Randy when she wasn’t looking. *Everyone had some cross to bear*, she thought. She was trying to get her life back; the life that had been stolen by the Gambrellini Family. Randy was trying to give her mother a last few special moments. She glanced around the deck and wondered what secrets other passengers hid or what burdens they carried in spite of their carefree appearance.

Her thoughts were interrupted by one of the pool waiters. “May I bring you something, Madame?” asked an extremely good-looking black man who stood at the foot of her lounge chair.

Jewelle strained to see his name tag. “Yes, Ol...Oliver. I need a drink. Not just any drink, but The Drink!”

“What kind of drink would make it The Drink?” asked Oliver.

“Something frozen with bananas...and liquor. Lots of liquor! Can you come up with something great?” teased Jewelle.

“Yes, Madame. I know just the thing. If it’s not the best drink you ever had, the next one is on me,” said Oliver with an enchanting Jamaican accent.

“Oliver, I have a deal for you. I’ll be on this pool deck most every day for the next four weeks. I want you to be my personal waiter. I’ll add forty dollars to your check for the drink

The Exchange

you're bringing me today. At the end of each week, I'll give you at least another fifty. What I want from you is to check on me every hour while I'm out here and see if I need anything. Can you handle that?"

Oliver broke out a warm smile. "You got it, lady."

Jewelle and Randy both laughed. Jewelle felt like she had two new friends. "Oliver, I'm Jewelle and this is my friend, Randy. I'm counting on you to take care of both of us this trip."

"Miss Jewelle, it will be my pleasure. Anything for you, Miss Randy?"

"No, thank you. I'm fine for now," Randy said as she lifted up her bottled water.

Oliver bowed slightly, turned and worked his way to the bar while twirling his round tray on his left index finger as an experienced basketball player would spin his ball.

"I can't believe what you just did," commented Randy. "I could never have been so bold. You did it so easily...like you've been friends with him forever."

"Well, we will be friends...at least for the next four weeks," smiled Jewelle.

"From your comments, I assume you are traveling alone," inquired Randy.

"Yes, I did come alone, but look; I've already got two new friends. I expect to have many more before we dock in Florida!"

"You're not married, then?" asked Randy.

"Not yet! Marriage isn't my number one priority. Romance and intrigue are!" giggled Jewelle as she leaned back on the chair and closed her eyes with her face lifted up to capture the warm, inviting sun.