

A person is captured in a dynamic pose, splashing water upwards and outwards. The scene is set against a vibrant sunset sky, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a strong silhouette of the person and a shimmering, golden glow on the water's surface. The water droplets are frozen in mid-air, creating a large, circular splash that frames the central text.

*In*  
**the**  
**Depths**

Tara Eldana

**They had to come up with a story to tell her parents, but he made it so hard to concentrate...**

He smoothed her hair away from her face. “You are with me again,” he said, smoothing her hair back from her face.

She caressed the golden skin on his chest. “I always want you,” she said.

He trailed her hand to her waist, then her hips.

Crap. Tension shot through her. He sat up, sat her on his lap, then stood, wrapping her legs around his waist and carried her to the bathroom. He put her in the bath tub and turned on the water. When the tub was filled, he got in and pulled her against his chest. She felt the familiar tingling and giggled when her tail unfurled. He laughed as he also took sea form, tugging on her necklace to settle it between her breasts.

“We talk now,” he said. He held her breasts in his hands. “I always want you,” he murmured against her ear.

Focus. She had to focus. “So we tell my parents you’re a marine biologist who also studies oceanographic patterns.”

Becca Paxton spends her days trying to cover news and write stories for a newspaper on Hawaii's Garden Island to please her bitchy editor. She spends her nights asleep in the arms of a dream lover with sandy brown hair, turquoise eyes, and a toned surfer's body who takes her to sexual heights she never knew existed. Problem is Ethan is a merman who knows Becca's destiny lies with him under the sea, and she's afraid of vast expanses of water. He's wanted her and waited for her since he first glimpsed her in the crystals many earth years ago. Can he convince her she really is a sea form, as he is, and he is really the man of her dreams? And can she leave her life on land and the parents she loves to be with him in a strange world?

## KUDOS for *In the Depths*

In Tara Eldana's *In the Depths*, Becca Baxton has left her home on the US mainland and moved to Hawaii's garden island to work for a newspaper and deal with erotic dreams that make her think she's going crazy. What she doesn't know is that the man in her dreams is real, a merman, and waiting for her beneath the waves, a place she is terrified to go. But if he is to claim her, she must overcome her fears and accompany him to his underwater world of her own free will—something she isn't sure she can do. Like the first book in the series, *Under the Riptides*, the story is filled with charming characters, intrigue, and steamy sex scenes. What more do you need on a rainy day with a hot cup of tea? ~ Taylor Jones, *The Review Team of Taylor Jones & Regan Murphy*

*In the Depths* by Tara Eldana is the second in her mermaid series. In this installment, Becca Paxton is a reporter for a local newspaper on the garden island in Hawaii. By day, she struggles to please her persnickety editor and, by night, she has steamy sex with a dream lover. But dreams are harmless, right? Unfortunately, Becca isn't sure, since her mother suffers from a mental condition and Becca's afraid she might be getting it too—especially when she starts seeing her dream lover in the daytime. Ethan, the dream lover, is really a merman who has left his underwater home to claim his woman. But “sea forms” are only allowed on land for three days, so he doesn't have much time to convince her to leave her entire life behind and travel with him to his home in the depths of the sea. Will the passion they share and the bond that connects them be enough? Ethan doesn't know, particularly when her parents interfere. *In the Depths* is a worth ad-

dition to the series, with charming characters, fast-paced action, and very hot love scenes—a fun, exciting, and arousing escape into the world of “if only” and “I wish.” Don’t miss it. ~ *Regan Murphy, The Review Team of Taylor Jones & Regan Murphy*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Lauri Wellington; fabulous Faith; Jack, the art wizard; and everyone at Black Opal Books for giving me a chance to tell my stories.

And the Greater Detroit Romance Writers of America. Without you, this would not be.

And my family, for their patience and understanding with deadlines, edits, and quiet time for writing.

*In*  
**the**  
**Depths**

Tara Eldana

*A Black Opal Books Publication*



GENRE: STEAMY ROMANCE/PARANORMAL ROMANCE

This is a work of fiction. Names, places, characters and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to any actual persons, living or dead, businesses, organizations, events or locales is entirely coincidental. All trademarks, service marks, registered trademarks, and registered service marks are the property of their respective owners and are used herein for identification purposes only. The publisher does not have any control over or assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their contents.

IN THE DEPTHS

Copyright © 2017 by Tara Eldana

Cover Design by Jackson Cover Designs

All cover art copyright © 2017

All Rights Reserved

eBOOK ISBN: 978-1-626946-42-2

First Publication: APRIL 8, 2017

All rights reserved under the International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

**WARNING: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. Anyone pirating our ebooks will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law and may be liable for each individual download resulting therefrom.**

**ABOUT THE E-BOOK VERSION: Your non-refundable purchase of this e-book allows you to one LEGAL copy for your own personal use. It is ILLEGAL to send your copy to someone who did not pay for it. Distribution of this e-book, in whole or in part, online, offline, in print or in any way or any other method currently known or yet to be invented, is forbidden without the prior written permission of both the publisher and the copyright owner of this book. Anyone pirating our ebooks will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law and may be liable for each individual download resulting therefrom.**

IF YOU FIND AN EBOOK OR PRINT VERSION OF THIS BOOK BEING SOLD OR SHARED ILLEGALLY, PLEASE REPORT IT TO: Bob at [legal@blackopalbooks.com](mailto:legal@blackopalbooks.com)

Published by Black Opal Books <http://www.blackopalbooks.com>



## DEDICATION

*For everyone who has looked at the shimmering ocean  
or lake and wondered...what if?*

# Chapter 1

**D**amn her editor. She was such a hard ass. Becca Paxton tried for the fifth time to reach a town councilwoman for a comment following a stupid remark she'd made at the council table during a meeting. Councilwoman Franks was obviously dodging Becca's calls and the copy desk was waiting.

The council meeting had run past midnight after she'd pulled an eight-hour day before the meeting. Becca was at the end of her eight-hour shift—and her patience.

Her focus was shot. She couldn't write another word if she had to.

Sleep—she wanted sleep and the delicious, blue-eyed, sandy-haired man who'd taken over her dreams.

They were so real she felt herself flushing and wet just thinking about him.

“Cheryl,” she called to her editor, “she won’t answer or call back. I left her my office and cell number.”

Cheryl peered at her over her reading glasses. “Did you text her?”

Mike, her colleague, looked over at her, rolled his eyes, and winced.

Becca gritted her teeth. “I don’t have her cell phone number. City Hall wouldn’t give it to me.”

Cheryl stared at her laptop and didn’t answer her.

*Fuck this.*

“I’m heading out,” Becca said. She packed her laptop in its soft case and slung it and her purse over her shoulder.

Mike followed her out. They both paused for a beat in the parking lot. Becca felt the island breeze on her skin and watched as the sun slipped closer toward the ocean.

“It’s easy to forget this, isn’t it?” Mike said.

They were both island transplants from small towns in the Midwest and hired in at the *Kauai Gazette* on the same day.

“Got any plans?” he said.

She and Mike were only friends. He was deliriously happy with Cerissa, who Becca found offbeat, quirky, sweet, and delightful.

“Sleep,” she said. “Lots of it. I may actually use my comp time tomorrow.”

“Glenn from sports keeps asking me about you. Have lunch with the guy. Put him out of his misery.”

Becca laughed. “I’ll think about it. Go home to Cerissa.”

He waved goodbye, and she stowed her computer in the backseat of her Corolla. She glanced in her rearview mirror and cringed. Haggard blue eyes ringed with dark circles stared back at her. She'd pulled her shoulder-length blonde hair, which had lightened a bit in the island sun, into a pony tail which only drew more attention to her pale skin.

She'd only dated a couple guys since she got the staff writer job a year ago. Eager to get a foothold and make a name for herself, she'd focused on her job and worked a lot of nights on her beat. She should let Mike fix her up with Glenn.

He was hot and real. An island native, his dark hair and eyes and firm, heavy-set build turned more than one female head.

So why did she only want to shut her eyes so a guy with a lean, surfer's body and amazing hands could do things to her she'd never done with anybody when she was awake?

She pulled into her apartment complex as her cell phone pinged.

It was a text from Councilwoman Franks.

*Fuck.*

She texted Cheryl the councilwoman's response, copied and pasted it into Cheryl's email, called her editor's desk phone and left a message. She called Councilwoman Franks back, but she didn't answer.

Her text had been delivered. She sent another asking her to confirm receipt and added that she'd called Franks, but got no response.

Cheryl texted back *yes*, no “good job,” no “nice follow up,” or even “thank-you.”

Becca rested her head on her steering wheel. She loved Kauai, known as the Garden Island, even though she was terrified to swim in the vast expanse of the ocean, something she’d only discovered after she moved from the mainland.

She did fine in pools. She’d grown up in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and had made occasional trips with her family up to Lake Michigan when she was growing up. She never went in past her waist and only put her feet into the Pacific.

Her younger brother and sister, Keith and Cara, who were inseparable as children and still close, dove without fear into the whitecaps while she dogpaddled close to shore, the odd one out.

Her father spent most of his time making sure her mother took her anti-psychotic meds. Becca wasn’t asked to join in her younger siblings antics, which seemed silly to her, anyway.

So Becca grew up with her nose stuck in a book, magazine, or newspaper and joined Keith and Cara outside for a game of horse or burn, only at her parents’ urging.

Someone tapped on the window.

She jumped. Cold sweat trickled down her back. How could she have left herself so vulnerable? She kept her hand on her cell phone.

The police she talked to on the crime part of her beat always said not to fight for property.

She turned her head to look at the person who knocked.

It was him—the guy from her dreams.

Was she falling prey to her mother's mental illness?

"No," she screamed.

Another car pulled next to her and the guy standing beside her car was gone.

The older lady in the other vehicle didn't spare her a glance as she got out of her car, her ear glued to a cell phone.

Shaking, Becca got out of her car, stood on unsteady legs, grabbed her stuff, walked into the building, got on the elevator, and made her way to her third floor apartment. She dropped her stuff on her tiny kitchen table.

She didn't think her dreams could be a sign of psychosis. Her dream man did not ask her to harm herself or others.

The last thing she wanted now was to shut her eyes. She sank into her couch and did a search on her cell phone on symptoms of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

Was she experiencing a brief psychotic episode? Some of the symptoms fit—seeing and feeling things that weren't there. The information said these episodes were triggered by severe stress, such as death of a loved one or a natural disaster. A cranky editor didn't qualify.

Her heart, which had been hammering in her chest since the knock on her car window, slowed and against her will her eyes closed, pulling her into a dreamless sleep.



Ethan paced the great hall of the Garnet City. What was he thinking startling Becca like that when she was so mentally exhausted? His sire Thobian said he was impatient and

told him to wait, but his need to touch her in her waking state was too strong.

It was easy to slip through the portal and bridge time and space because the autumnal equinox drew near. He'd looked into the quartz crystals a full earth year ago and saw Becca, his twin flame. His life and world had come alive and made sense.

She didn't know her destiny was with him under the vast expanse of ocean that she feared. He had taken her in her dreams, repeatedly, to their mutual delight.

Lovion, the ranking member of the Ruling Council, smirked. "She screamed at the sight of you. She must come with you *willingly*."

"Her mother's illness makes her fearful," Thobian said. Ethan's sire held a seat on the Ruling Council but cast only one vote. In cases of deadlock, Lovion cast the deciding vote, and he hated land dwellers, even those who could take sea form.

"She is mine," Ethan said it quietly and calmly. The members of the council, except for Thobian, looked shocked at Ethan's words. Lovion sneered.

"He can be spared from his duties for a time," Thobian said.

Sea forms ensured to their best ability that under water ecosystems remained viable in the wake of natural disruptions and those caused by land forms.

Ethan's mother Lara and his sire Thobian chanted ancient words of protection. Ethan bowed his head in thanks. He grabbed a triangular quartz crystal and the ruby necklace

he would give to Becca to signify their joining, sheathed his lucky knife, and headed through the winding caverns to the portal.



Becca sat on the beach and watched the surfers. She tried not to think about work. Things were heating up in the local election coming up in November in the town she covered as part of her beat. She loved writing about crime, education, and human interest stories, but she didn't like the government part of her beat. She checked the time. She had agreed to have lunch with Glenn from sports. He covered high school sports and worked lots of nights, so lunch worked out best.

Becca glanced at the surfers. One caught her attention. He had golden skin over a lean, toned swimmer's body and sun streaked hair like the guy in her hallucination. How many surfers looked like that in Kauai?

She gathered her things as the surfer drew closer. She needed to get ready for her lunch date.

She sat inside at Zeke's restaurant, a Kauai institution, waiting for Glenn. He'd texted to say an editorial meeting had run late and he was on his way. She looked at the mermaid carved of wood that hung near the bar.

An exquisite necklace had been carved so it hung just above her bare breasts. Her tail was resplendent in shades of crimson and turquoise.



“It’s a persistent legend.” It was Glenn. He kissed her cheek and took a seat across from her. “Sorry, my editor—”

Becca laughed. “Say no more.”

They placed their orders, shrimp for her and Mahi Mahi for him. Her eyes were drawn back to the carving.

Glenn smiled and squeezed her hand. Disappointingly, she felt no spark. He felt warm and comforting, like a friend. “The old-timers say their elders believed they existed.”

Her thoughts strayed to her dream lover and the surfer. “Do you surf?” she said.

He kept hold of her hand. “Sure.” He chuckled. “I grew up here, so yeah. Went to U-H then came right back to this rock. Borin’ huh? Why did you come?”

“I don’t think it’s boring,” she said. “I don’t know why I came here. I needed a job, but there are newspapers and TV stations in Fort Wayne, where I grew up.”

“A Hoosier.”

“Yep,” she said, making her voice sound as flat and Midwestern as she could.

He laughed, still holding her hand. “You’re beautiful. You could be on camera.”

She shuddered. “I barely passed my speech class at I-U. If you put a mic in my face, I can’t string two words together.”

“I’m glad you’re here,” he said, letting go of her hand when his cell phone vibrated.

“My editor,” he said. “One second.” He ended the call quickly and they finished their food. The shrimp was succulent and beyond delicious.

She stared at the carving of the mermaid. “The detail is unbelievable,” she said, popping the last bite of shrimp into her mouth.

“There are males, too,” Glenn said, “allegedly.”

She laughed at his reporter-speak.

“Do you miss your family?” he asked.

Did she? “I was never especially close to my brother and sister. They’re still in college, I-U and Purdue. My parents—my mother’s fine when she’s on her meds.” She dropped her gaze. “She doesn’t always take them, she feels good, and then she stops. And Dad has to keep a sharp eye on her. He’s a cop, so he doesn’t miss much.”

“That’s rough,” he said.

“Not always. She’s great when she’s great,” she said.

He reached for her hand as his phone vibrated again. “Deadlines,” he muttered. He put cash on the table. “I got to get back. Stay and have dessert if you want.” He kissed her cheek and squeezed her shoulder. “Are you busy Friday night?”

Before she could answer, he said, “I’ll call you, ’kay?”

She smiled and he left her. She admired the way he moved through the room with an athlete’s grace for such a big, solid guy, but she felt—nothing, not one tingle.

She didn’t want dessert so the waiter brought her a selection of tea bags.



Ethan wanted to physically remove the island dweller's hands from Becca's skin. He forced himself to take deep, even breaths until the dark-haired land dweller put his mouth on her cheek and hand on her shoulder. Ethan stood so fast the chair he sat on fell to the ground behind him, startling some elders sitting near him.

He smiled in apology, righted the chair, and made his way to Becca.

## Chapter 2

**S**he picked out some oolong tea and dropped it into her cup.  
“Becca?”

It was him—dream/hallucination guy. He wore a black T-shirt, cargo shorts and flip flops. His shoulder-length streaky blond hair was tied back off his face revealing a square jawline and smooth-shaven face.

She watched in horror as he sat across from her. She rubbed her temples and shut her eyes. This couldn't be happening.

“Anything for you, sir?” the waiter said.

She gasped. The waiter could see him?

“I think there is water, enough,” he said, taking the cup Glenn had not used. The waiter left them.

“He can see you,” she whispered.

“We must speak,” he said.

She struggled to breathe.

He grasped her hand, the same one Glenn had. A jolt of heat shot straight to her core. She stared at him.

“May we leave this place?”

The waiter returned. He looked concerned. “Are you okay?” He looked only at her, not sparing dream guy a glance. “Are you afraid of him? We can call the police.”

Was she scared of the man holding her hand as if he would never let it go? She felt her hand curl into his. No, she wasn’t scared of him. This felt strangely right.

She smiled at the waiter. “No, I was just surprised to see him is all. Thank you for asking.”

“Okay,” the waiter said, taking away the dirty plates.

“We may leave?” He said it like a question, keeping firm hold of her hand.

There were benches overlooking the water a bit past the parking lot. She wanted to stay in a public place. “Yes.” She pointed to the benches and they walked hand-in-hand.

“I am Ethan,” he said.

“How do you know my name?”

They reached the bench, and he drew her down next to him so they were touching.

“You are not ill.” He touched her cheek. “You do not share mother’s sickness,” he said.

She pulled her hand out of his grasp and stood up. This was beyond weird. “Who are you, and how do you know this stuff?”

He stood, too. “Your dreams, our dreams, are real.” He held out his hand. “We go to water. I show you.”

She locked her purse in the trunk of her car and he led her to the water’s edge. Amazingly, there was nobody on the beach.

“No surf here,” he said, as if he could read her thoughts. He ran his eyes over her bare legs and short skirt. “We sit in sand so I show you.”

He crouched down, uncaring if the waves soaked his shorts. He patted a spot in the wet sand between his legs. “Here, Becca.” He said her name melodically.

“My skirt,” she said.

“You could keep it on if you slip off your underthings,” he said.

She looked around. The beach was deserted. What the hell?

“Okay,” she said. She stood, slipped off her sandals and pulled down her panties, keeping her skirt in place. Feeling daring, she pulled her shirt off, leaving her lacy bra on. He kicked off his flip flops, took off his shirt, pulled something out of his cargo shorts then pulled those off, too. He wore only a loin cloth. He hid their clothes and flip-flops under some huge rocks and came back to her.

His eyes blazed silver. Smiling, he held his hand out. She took it and felt the spark again. He chuckled, tugged her down onto the sand, and settled her between his thighs. He moved her hair aside, pressed a kiss to her nape, and fastened a long, heavy necklace of huge red stones around her throat.

Its weight felt oddly right. She fingered the stones that glittered like red flames in the Hawaiian sun. “It’s like the mermaid carving in the restaurant,” she said.

A wave pounded into the sand up to her waist. The skirt billowed in the water and her legs felt sticky and tingly from the salt water.

Tingly?

He pinched her hip when another wave crested, dragging then a bit farther into the ocean. Her chest felt tight with fear, although her butt still touched the bottom. When the wave ebbed she glanced down.

Her legs were gone.

She had a tail, a beautiful crimson and gold tail. It felt so right. Amazingly, her fear dissolved as she wiggled her tail and squealed in joy. If this was a dream, she didn’t want to wake up.

He slipped his hands under her bra and tweaked her nipples until she groaned. “You like sea form?” Ethan said against her ear. “We are the same—” He said a word she didn’t understand.

Was it an endearment? He took hold of her chin. “The dreams when we join are real,” he said. “My home is Garnet City.” He ran his tongue over his straight white teeth. “Would you like to see it?”

She clutched his rock hard thigh. “But you aren’t—your legs.”

“Because I do not wish it just yet.”

How could this be real? None of it made logical sense. What if this was all a hallucination?

He pressed his mouth to hers for the briefest moment. “You are not ill, Becca. This is real. I am from under the sea. There is a sea form we believe makes her home here with a land form. We have not confirmed this.”

Cerissa, Mike’s girlfriend, immediately came to her mind. He was so protective of her and she used odd turns of phrase like Ethan did.

Becca stared into his eyes, feeling like she could drown in the turquoise depths. “It’s like you are reading my thoughts,” she said.

She traced his firm mouth with her fingers. His words came to her, although he didn’t move his lips. “Sea forms must do this under the waves. Twin flames, joined sea forms, may also do this when they wish. We have joined partly in our dreams.”

“I heard you but you didn’t speak,” she whispered.

He kissed her fingers. “You come to Garnet City?” He had taken sea form in magnificent shades of midnight blue and sunset orange.

She looked out over the vast sea and panicked. Her chest hurt. “Ethan, I don’t swim in the ocean.” Her throat was closing up and she struggled to breathe. “All this water. I’m so sorry. I can’t.”

He caressed her cheek. “Look at me, Becca. I keep you close, always. There is portal. We don’t swim far.”

She wanted to go and make him happy. She had never cared this much about any guy before. If she didn’t count the sex dreams, she still had her V-card.



But why did he want her? How was this happening? She was just a girl from Indiana who got on a plane to work for a tiny newspaper on a rocky island.

“I see you in crystals,” he said. “You are untouched.” He phrased it like a fact, rather than a question.

“But our dreams?” she said. She’d given herself to him without restraint repeatedly. But she’d felt no pain. Didn’t it pinch the first time?

His lips quirked into a smile. “Is different in waking state. Is better.”

Her cheeks flamed. She’d lost count of the times she’d awoken in the throes of powerful orgasm—nothing like her college roommates talked about—but alone.

“We are destined,” he said. “Will you come to my home?”

She forgot about the endless expanse of ocean that she was nothing in. She forgot about the story on the zoning ordinance she hadn’t started. She let herself get lost in his smile and the feel of her glorious tail. She smiled. “Yes.”

He took hold of her waist and kissed her. His tongue plunged in and out of her mouth the same way he slid inside her in her dreams.

“No dream, Becca.” His mouth fused to hers and plunged them under water. She struggled and he pulled his mouth away. She gasped then calmed, realizing she could breathe under water.

But everything was murky. She was swimming blind. He had tight hold of her waist and propelled them powerfully through the water to an underground cave infused with light.

He kissed her and she was lost to everything except his touch.

He released her and lifted her shoulders out of the water. Her breasts were bare. He had removed her bra at some point in the journey.

“We are home,” he said.

Pink crystal formations stood stark against a pink sky. He helped her out of the water and pulled her against him. She shivered with nerves.

“You are not ill as your mother,” he said.

“How do you know about my mother?” she snapped, pulling away from him. Always she felt protective of her mother. Janet suffered from schizophrenia and was also bipolar. She was sweet and funny and kind—when she stayed on her meds.

“I see you suffer when she is ill,” he said.

Her tail tingled and her legs, now completely hairless, took shape. Her sex felt different against the sodden skirt and she looked under it. She was smooth everywhere. Only the hair on her arms and head remained.

She looked at his honed, hairless chest.

“You are sea form now,” he said.

She forgot he could read her thoughts. He stood, clad only in a loincloth. A sheath also hung loosely around his rock hard abs. Did all the males here look like him?

He pulled her gently to her feet, scowled, and tugged on her necklace. “In Garnet City this means I claim you, Becca. You belong to me, only me.” Pulling her close, he lifted her

into his arms and wrapped her legs around his waist as if she weighed nothing. Was he jealous?

He kissed her as if he was starved for her. His erection pressed the apex of her thighs, more sensitive now that she was smooth. She rubbed her sex against him. When he lifted his mouth, he was breathing hard.

She caressed his face. “There’s only you. I haven’t been with anyone but you, on land or sea.” She giggled at the trite “land or sea” phrase.

He raised his eyebrows, looking puzzled. “Land or sea is cliché, overused.”

“Never mind,” she said. “I was curious about this place, is all.”

He slid her down his body. “I need to sink inside you but we must say words in joining in great hall, first, I think.”

He threaded his fingers through hers as they walked toward the glittering red pillars. She stopped each time they passed a waterfall or burst of floral blooms that reminded her of hibiscus.

Her mother loved flowers and dolphins. They walked along deep channels to what she assumed was the entrance to the city proper. He stopped her.

“Look,” he said. A dolphin swam alongside them in the channel and lifted its head out of the water.

She laughed. “You read my thoughts.”

“So did she, it seems,” he said. “She welcomes you.”

Becca crouched down to touch the smiling mammal. “She?”

“I will teach you how to see if dolphin is he or she.”

The dolphin made a noise. “She’ll give you a ride if you want,” he said.

She’d never swam with a dolphin. It was on her bucket list of things to do in Hawaii, but she hadn’t gotten to it.

“Come,” he said. He eased her into the water and pinched her waist until her tail unfurled. She squealed in joy. He chuckled and the dolphin made a high-pitched wail.

Ethan chanted words in his language. His voice was as good, or better than the finalists on “American Idol” or “The Voice.”

“It’s beautiful,” she said. His eyes traveled from her face to her breasts, to her russet and powder blue tail. “Yes,” he said.

“I love my...how you say?...sea form. But, your voice. It’s awesome.”

He palmed her breasts. “What is awesome?”

“Good, but better, best,” she said.

He kissed her until the dolphin nudged them apart.

“She is jealous, like I am when island dweller touch your skin and you smile at him,” he said, scowling.

She kissed him, trying to show him with her mouth what she couldn’t put into words, yet. She was cautious by nature. The guys in college said she was a cold bitch, some thought she was gay because she had no real interest in any of them.

She knew now she had been waiting for Ethan. The dolphin nudged them apart again.

Becca petted her long nose. “I’m going to name you Nudge,” she said.

Ethan showed her how to hold onto Nudge's fins so she could swim on the dolphin's back. "I will be near," he said.



"You wish this?"

Her answer meant so much to him. She looked toward the Garnet City and at him. Her eyes went soft—gray-blue like the sea above the waves under a sky filled with clouds.

"Yes, I wish this," she said.

He longed to kiss her but the dolphin lurched forward, impatient to be on their way.

"Holy hell," she said.

Nudge plunged the water for brief spurts so Becca's head was mostly above the water, as if the dolphin knew Becca was a new sea form, yet to learn her fins.

"Ethan?" she cried out in alarm as she lost her grip on the dolphin's fins.

He took hold of her and lifted her, them, out of the channel, hauling her into his arms so he could kiss her. How had he done without her?

The more he tasted her lips, her skin, and felt her go boneless in his arms, the more he wanted her. He could not wait until after the ceremony. He had waited long enough.

He pulled himself free of his loincloth and plunged his finger into her sex. She was so wet for him, he nearly spilled his seed. He set her on his lap so she straddled him and lowered her onto his rigid cock as slowly as he could.

When he came to her barrier, he looked into her beautiful eyes in question.

“Yes,” she whispered.

He pressed his thumb to her sensitive pearl and thrust into her, breaching her barrier. She took long, deep breaths. She was tight and he restrained himself from thrusting deeper because he did not wish to cause her further pain.

“It’s good, I’m okay,” she said, lowering herself deeper onto his cock.

He groaned. “Becca, I must go slow.”

“No, darling.” She caressed his sac and he was lost.

He plunged into her silken sheath, lifting her up and down, pumping into her until she rained on his cock, shimmering in his arms. He emptied himself inside her and held her, finally forcing himself to lift her and settle her between his legs.

She glanced down and gasped when she saw her virgin’s blood on their bodies.

“We can’t go into the city like this,” she said, biting her lip.

He moved her hair aside so he could kiss her nape. “I care not,” he said.

She looked around at the deserted pathway along the channel. “What if someone had seen us?”

He shrugged. “All wait in the great hall.”

She’d called him darling. He knew that to be an endearment. He loved that word on her lips. It warmed his blood. But did she feel shame in their joining because she believed all would see the evidence of it?

She tugged her skirt down. His mother said female land dwellers exercised modesty and explained how it was different in different places on land.

“You are modest and not with shame for joining with me?”

“Yes—no,” she said. “Yes to the first part and no I am not ashamed. But will those in your city will think I am easy—that I would join with many males since we joined here where anyone could see?”

“No one saw us, darling,” he said, watching her smile when he said darling. “But it will be known we have joined and you are only mine. I will later explain.”

Grasping her around her waist, he lowered her legs into the channel then pulled her up. He splashed water onto his legs, removing evidence of their first joining in their bodies, except for the spot on his loincloth. He’d keep that scrap of cloth until he ceased to be.

She shivered.

“The skirt makes you cold.” Over her protests, he removed it. “We will be given garments before we speak words in great hall.”

“Okay,” she said, yawning. He picked her up and carried her the rest of the way into the city while she laid head against his shoulder and drifted into slumber.

For the first time since he learned his fins, he felt at peace.

# Chapter 3

**S**he opened her eyes in a room filled with crystals in every shape and every shade in the rainbow. Flat on her back, naked, on a raised platform surrounded by males and females with long white hair wearing blue robes, she didn't see Ethan.

She tried to sit up. She felt hands on her shoulders, Ethan's hands. "I am here."

She turned to look at him. He wore a purple robe. His blond streaky hair was tied back from his face. He stole her breath away. He looked like a movie star. She caressed his jaw and he pressed a kiss into her palm.

Those around them smiled.

"What is happening?" she asked.



“Healers ensuring you are unharmed,” he said, smiling. “You are perfect.” He slipped a purple robe that matched his over her head, tugging her necklace over the silky fabric. “You must prepare for great hall.”

He helped her down from the platform and led her to a chamber, then left her. She sat on a cushioned bench while two young females swept her hair into an elaborate updo threaded with tiny sparkling crystals. Then they rubbed oil that smelled like lilacs onto her arms, legs and feet and gently patted it on her face.

Was this the sea form equivalent of a wedding ceremony?

They smoothed a pink tint on her lips and cheeks, murmuring words she didn’t understand. Were they talking about her? Were they angry she was there?

As if they sensed her anxiety, they smiled—genuine, sweet smiles—and she let out the breath she didn’t realize she’d been holding.

“Our English bad,” the smaller sea form said. “French better.”

Becca smiled. “My French sucks.”

Both sea forms made sucking noises and they all erupted in peals of laughter. The taller sea form touched the ruby necklace. “Ethan learn English when he see you in crystal. He no join with female in Garnet City after that.”

Another female in a turquoise robe with eyes the same color as Ethan’s and streaky blonde hair that hung in a thick braid over one shoulder entered the chamber and the young sea forms smiled and left.

The older female carried a flower that looked like hibiscus and held it out to her.

Becca closed her hand around the stem and smiled. Was this her bridal bouquet?

“Ethan my son. I am Lara. Ethan so happy. He wait so long for you. Is time.”

Fighting nerves, Becca followed Lara through a series of chambers on a floor that felt like marble and walls that looked like opaque rose quartz. Lara’s feet were also bare and looked somewhat web like. Glancing down at her own feet, Becca noticed they seemed wider than before.

They entered what she assumed was the great hall. Lara touched her shoulder and looked at a male standing on the platform with a dozen other sea forms. “Is Lovion. He opposes joining. Ethan’s sire Thobian and I watch him, protect you.”

Protect her?

Lara lowered her head and chanted words in the language of the sea forms. The crowd, at least one hundred by Becca’s guess, joined in the chant.

Elaborate chandelier-like formations hung from the cathedral ceiling, somehow reflecting light into the space. The crowd wore robes in shades of white, blue, and green. Only she and Ethan wore purple. Lara urged her forward to where Ethan waited. Lovion glared at her with such hatred as she approached, she shuddered and her steps faltered.

Ethan made a move toward her but something Lovion said stopped him. Lara was at her side. “Free will,” she whispered. “You must do this with free will.”

Ethan looked angry.

He insisted she did not share her mother's illness. But what was this? What was happening to her?

Feeling faint, she swallowed hard as the room went black.



“Becca?” Ethan said her name in the musical way she loved so much. She opened her eyes, and felt his breath against her cheek. She was settled between his legs on a bed in a chamber she hadn't seen before.

She tried to swivel and look at him but he pressed his cheek to hers, selfie-style, and held a bite of shrimp to her lips. “Eat, darling. I wish so much to join with you, I forget you must take food.”

On cue, her stomach rumbled. He chuckled as she chewed the succulent shrimp. He pressed a small crystal goblet filled with amber liquid that smelled like peaches to her lips and she guzzled it down. It was light, sweet with a bit of tart, and fruity.

Ethan sighed. “I rush you and not take care for you. We join in great hall when you feel strong.”

He continued to feed her bites of shrimp and something white and crunchy that reminded her of water chestnuts. “You are well?” he said.

“Yes.”

Was she? He kissed her nape and moved her to the edge of the bed. He stood first. His turquoise eyes raked over her. She stared at his movie-star jawline and firm, full lips. Her

mouth dried and heat flooded her core. How could he, or this, be real?

She was a bookworm from Fort Wayne covering City Council meetings for a tough editor on a tiny island in paradise.

That part was magical. She'd applied on a whim and beaten out dozens for the job.

He held out his hand. She took it and picked up the hibiscus. They walked a different route to the great hall than the one she and Lara had taken, this time along channels and narrow, winding corridors.

He swept her into his arms and kissed her. His erection pressed against her and she rubbed her body on his.

He lifted his mouth from hers and groaned. "Always around you, I am like this," he murmured. "For no other female, I am this way."

"It is the same for me," she said.

He took her mouth again when a loud squeal erupted from the channel. She instinctively sought protection in his arms. He grunted as if it pleased him then laughed. "It is your dolphin. She is telling you, how you say, best wishes."

Nudge squealed, then smiled.

"She is your fan."

Fan, he said fan?

He frowned. "Is that right word?"

She traced his beautiful mouth with her fingertips. "Your English is wonderful. And your voice, I could listen to it forever. But I must learn your language and your ways," she said.

"We have forever, darling. Come, they wait."

The great hall was as it was before. Had the sea forms waited all this time? How long had it been since she first arrived here?

“I’m sorry for making you wait,” she said as loud as she could, clutching her bloom.

A collective gasp went through the crowd. Lovion roared from the platform. Ethan stepped away from her and walked stiffly to the platform. Was he angry with her?

Lara moved from where she had been standing near the platform through the crowd to her side. “You say ‘sorry.’ Sea forms know this word. They think you sorry to be in Garnet City, not wish to join with Ethan.”

“No,” Becca said loudly. “I made everyone wait. That is what I meant.”

Lara held her hand up, as if to silence her. “You must show joy to join with my son, that you do so with free will.”

The crowd cleared as she made her way to Ethan. Facing him, unsure of what to do, she sank to her knees and just let the words come from her heart. “I choose this. I wish to join with you. I—”

A woman with white hair who stood next to Lovion held up her hand, as Lara had done, then nodded to the crowd, bowed her head, and chanted in a clear, soprano tones worthy of the opera stage. The sea forms around her joined in. Ethan held out his hand to Becca and pulled her to her feet.

Lovion ignored them. She turned to Ethan. She had so much to learn about the Garnet City. She squared her shoulders. That was what she did...wasn’t it?...go into new situations, figure out what was happening, pick out the threads of

a story, and write it in such a way that people could understand. She could make sense of this.

The chanting stopped. Ethan smiled. "Forever, it is done," he said.

Was she supposed to repeat those words, like wedding vows?

"Forever, it is done," she said.

Applause erupted. Ethan released her hand. She glanced at Lovion, still blatantly ignoring them. She raised her middle finger at him, although he likely didn't see it and probably had no idea what it meant.

Ethan lifted her into his arms and carried her to a chamber filled with food. Hundreds of crystals set in various spots reflected light. The final part of the joining ceremony took place there. Her cheeks flamed.



He sealed the chamber and shrugged out of his robe. A feast awaited them. Shells piled high with the bounty of the sea were arranged on a sideboard. He would never overlook her need to take sustenance again and would see to her every need for the rest of his existence.

Joy, such as he had never known, swamped him like the waves the land forms who surfed so coveted. She stared at the food, then at him. Her hand strayed to her hair.

Was she shy of him?

He took her in his arms, eased her out of her robe, and took hold of her chin. Her eyes held the gray color of the sea

during a storm. Was she afraid? Did she regret joining with him?

He said her name in the musical lilt that seemed to soothe her. She went soft in his arms and pressed her cheek to where his heart thundered in his chest.

“What happens now? I don’t know what to do,” she said.

He chuckled and eased them down to the bed. “My scribe wonders what comes next in the story.”

He palmed her breasts, teasing her nipples into stiff points begging for his mouth. “This—us,” he said pressing kisses to her nape.

She sighed and he was lost. Wrapping her legs around his hips, he plunged into her slick, wet channel. Her tightness felt like softest silk. She was always wet for him. Would he ever get enough of her, of this?

He pumped into her, hitting the back of her womb and the spot she loved until she clenched around him, raining her sweet honey on his cock, and screamed his name. Only then did he empty himself inside her.

Spent, he collapsed on top of her, then moved so they were side by side, but he was still inside her.

“Always I am impatient,” he said. “I rush you.”

She covered his mouth with her soft hand. “That was amazing. I thought this, the way you make me feel only happened in books. I didn’t think it was real. I’m still not sure it is. My mother has bad spells when she thinks things are happening that aren’t.”

He pressed a kiss into her palm and slowly pulled out of her and went to the sideboard. He set a shell of food next to the bed then filled a goblet with the liquid she enjoyed before. "Take food and drink. You mostly doubt when you need these things."

She sat up and looked at him in surprise. "I do?"

He gave her the goblet and she drank it all. He smiled. "I think, yes."

He settled her between his legs and fed her bites of lobster and seaweed until she waved him off. "I'm stuffed."

He turned her so she was on her lap and he could look at her. "Is stuffed bad?"

She had color in her cheeks and her eyes shone like the skies above the sea on a stormy day.

"No, I am not hungry, not for food." She stroked his erection. He dispensed with the food and circled her nipples with his finger.

"I love you, Ethan. I know this is beyond fast, but I do."

His heart soared.

"I see you in the crystals," he said, moving his hand lower to her smooth mound. She sighed. "I love you from then," he said. "Others laugh."

She arched into his hand, and he pressed down on her clit. She came, moaning his name.

"We are fully joined," he said. "You are as me. I make you so."

She trailed kisses down his chest to his waist, then lower, sucking on the tip of his cock. She looked up at him through her lashes. "I want to please you."



She took him in her mouth and he slid in and out of her beautiful lips before he pulled her away from him to fuse his mouth to his and piston into her. He pressed her sex as he spilled his seed. It dripped down her leg. He burned the sight into his brain.

He thought of her belly round with their child. She wanted his baby, didn't she? They'd never spoken of it.

He took hold of her chin. Her eyes were wide. "Becc—" "I heard your thoughts," she said. She smiled. "Yes, I want your babies. I never did before. You're my game changer." She frowned. "But how does that work now that I'm like you. I don't know anything about your home. And why does Lovion hate me?"

Ethan picked up a quartz crystal, settled her in his arms, and set the crystal on her forehead. It would transmit scenes of life in the Garnet City. "Our home, darling."

He would explain about Lovion's nonsense later.

She giggled. "The children must learn to swim."

"Is fin class," he said, loving the way she fit perfectly against him. "You must also learn your fins. Is same as babies learning to use legs."

"Will you teach me?" she said.

"Yes," he breathed into her ear.

She closed her eyes and touched the crystal. "It's like a foreign movie when the voices don't match the pictures. But the sound is in my mind, like your thoughts are sometimes."

She went stiff against him and gasped. "Now I'm seeing the newsroom where I work. Ethan, my mother is there,

alone. My father's not with her. Is this really happening? She looks upset. This is not good."

Cursing, he donned his robe and held hers out to her. "We look in other crystals."

She slipped the robe over her head. He sheathed his knife then took her hand and led her out of the chamber. Her hair was mostly swept off her neck although some strands hung against the beautiful lines of her throat.

Fighting a sick sense of dread they would have to leave the Garnet City, he kissed her nape as they made their way to the hall of crystal. Thobian and Lara were there. His sire put his hand on Ethan's shoulder. "She has electronic messages from the other scribe about her mother," Thobian said in the language of the sea forms.

Lara squeezed Becca's hand. "Your mother, she is alone and your sire worries for her. For the next three rotations of the earth, you may bridge time and space through the portal." Lara looked from Becca to him. "You are fully joined?"

Ethan nodded. Sea forms had one chance every four of the earth's months to enter the portal—if they weren't needed on eco missions under the sea—go on land for three earth rotations, and return to the Garnet City. Ethan had spent his chance to bring Becca to the Garnet City.

She was fully joined with him and had shifted to sea form. So she had the same chance to return to land then come back to the Garnet City. If they were together, touching one another as they entered the portal, they could make the journey back to the Garnet City together.

As a new sea form she could adapt to living on land if she decided not to return. However Ethan, as a mature sea form, had to come back to his life under the sea for the pure essence of water that sustained his life form. He could live on land for three earth rotations at a time. If Becca stayed, he would face peril swimming through the deep to return as he would be unable to go through the portal without her.

There were reports that a female sea form lived on the island group that Becca had lived on, and it was not known how she did this without the infusion of the pure essence of water.

Becca trembled. "I have to go." She turned to Lara and Thobian. "You have been so kind and welcoming."

"We will soon see you," Thobian said. "The portal is clear for your journey."

Ethan took off his robe, ensuring his knife was in place around his waist and stood in his loin cloth. He tugged on Becca's robe but Lara stopped him.

"Wait until you reach the portal," she said.

Ethan linked his fingers through Becca's and they followed Lara and Thobian through ancient caverns along the channel. Becca's dolphin swam noisily alongside them, popping her head out of the water to screech at them.

His mother laughed. "She is angry you leave."

Lovion waited at the entrance to the portal, his face twisted into his usual sneer. "Free will," he said. "She must return—"

Thobian cut him off, speaking harshly in the language of the Garnet City, telling the old windbag to leave his family

alone and threatening his position on the ruling council, and his being, if he did not do so.

The color had drained from Becca's beautiful face. "What are they saying?"

"Is of no matter," Lara said.

She pressed her hands to Becca and Ethan's shoulders, lowered her head, and chanted words of protection. Thobian joined in as Lovion sidled away. Thobian and Lara left them and Ethan lifted Becca's robe from her trembling body.

He took firm hold of her waist and crushed her to him. His cock was hard as granite against her softness. He fused his mouth to hers, and she went soft and still in his arms. With a force of will he didn't know he possessed, he set her away from him and led her through the portal.

Want to read more? Get the full version of

*In the Depths* by Tara Eldana

Available at Amazon, B&N, Smashwords, Kobo,  
iTunes, BlackOpalBooks.com, and other fine bookstores

## About the Author



Tara Eldana, pen name, is an award-winning staff writer for a weekly community newspaper chain in metro Detroit. She became hooked on romance fiction when her eleventh grade English teacher rejected the book report she wrote, saying the book was much too easy for her, and insisted she read and report on Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*. She had read Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* that previous summer.

Eldana took a long road through J-school, graduating from Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan in '95, just shy of 20 years after she finished high school, raising a couple kids, working part-time, and doing her homework while her husband and kids watched TV. Still she found time to read what her kids called her "mush books."

She loves the romance genre and loves letting her characters take control of their stories. Eldana is a member of the Greater Detroit Romance Writers of America. Contact her at [taraeldana.com](http://taraeldana.com), Facebook or Twitter.