

# Foam on the Crest of Waves

by Silke Stein

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DAN

Dan lifted his binoculars and grinned: his shift for the Mendocino Abalone Watch was over, but he still watched Abalone. The girl capered about at the waterline, tall and slender, but developed. Almost a carbon copy of her mother. After she came to land in her small boat, she had sat on one of the boulders. Long legs slightly bent, monofin flat on the stone. Her gray-brown wetsuit glistened like seal skin in the afternoon sun. Her dripping hair reached almost down to her waist. Waves licked all around the dark rock. Quite picturesque. Now she pirouetted in the glimmering surf while seaweed wiggled between her feet.

A surreal scene. To think this stretch of the shoreline had been a garbage heap for nearly sixty years in the last century. The Dumps. They finally got cleaned up by the end of the Nineties. The skeletons of old cars and appliances were long gone, everything else washed away — except for the colorful pebble-sized pieces of glass. These days the beach was a destination, coveted by the visitors, who thought its sparkly covering a commodity. A handful of people dotted the area between the rocky cliffs right now, their searching and shoveling activities suspended as they gazed in awe at the twirling girl. It would make a great closing scene for a tourism commercial. Filmed as an angled view from the cliff or maybe an aerial shot coming in off the ocean: Glass Beach, where mermaids dance.

Dan lowered the binoculars again and wished he had brought the camcorder instead. He could use it as filler material for the documentary his boss was planning. But of course, even if he got footage of this alluring beach performance, Dan doubted they would ever receive permission to air it, for, sadly, the girl was mental, refusing to speak, living in her own world, obsessed with the sea. You could see it in her absent bi-colored stare.

Now she picked up one of the thick brown kelp strings and made it dance with her. She looked just as smashing in a wetsuit as her mother, who had been a major attraction when she went out with Fuertes for his freediving events, on a boat full of stock brokers and computer nerds.

Once, Dan had shot a short promo video for the website of Abalone Adventures. Ruben Fuertes had been pleasant to deal with and paid well, a nice guy, not arrogant at all. Some dudes at the harbor, though, guessed he had been in the poaching business, using his diving outfit as a disguise. A few even believed he was involved in the drug trade, connected to the grow ops sprouting like malignant lesions in the forests of the backcountry.

The liberal fashion in which he handled his money, the yacht used for his excursions, and the wealthy clientele he attracted had rubbed some people the wrong way.

All hearsay, though. People talked too much and cared too little.

The girl stopped twirling and dragged her boat out of the water, along the small sandy path that led up from the beach. In the cliff face, just above the high tide level, was a small opening. She shoved the dinghy into it.

The people on the glass still watched as she tossed her weight-belt to the ground and shed the neoprene skin, revealing a one-piece bathing suit. She pulled a bundle out of the boat: a long brownish gown, almost medieval in style, and a pair of black rubber boots.

After dressing and carefully braiding kelp strings around her waist, she went up the last part of the path, carrying her pelt over one arm. She stopped at the edge of the bluff to behold the sea, solemn, rapt — hair, dress, and the leaves around her waist moving in the gentle wind — looking as if she had just stepped out of a fantasy novel. A princess disguised as a peasant girl.

Dan sighed; the camera would love her. What a waste. The sea glass collectors on the beach finally returned their attention to the ground as the girl walked toward her backyard out of their sight. She threw the wetsuit over the weathered wooden pickets that marked the end of the property, before she grabbed the pink children's bicycle leaning against the fence, mounted it and vanished down Glass Beach Trail.