

The morning Josie arrived at the wharf in Darwin, she found Alberto waiting near the berth of a 40-meter stern trawler, the *Talo*. Hands on his hips, his brown eyes surveying her approach. Anyone who didn't know Alberto like she did might mistake his narrow grin for disdain. He'd gained some weight. It looked real fine on him. But – why'd he think that mustache was a good idea? Josie's attention careened toward the *Talo*. Alberto's new vessel was a shitbucket. Yeah nah, not leaving port on that. His crew, those poor fuckers.

"Hola, diosa del desierto y del mar!" Alberto greeted Josie as she dropped her duffel by the gangway. One look at her – strong, pissed off, dark skin glowing in the dawn sun – confirmed for him that she was still as glorious and unstoppable as the day they'd met, when she'd saved his life on the Nullarbor Plain fifteen years ago.

"Captain." Josie exhaled and matched his akimbo stance. "Whatever you got in mind, you can't pay me enough. Let's get that outta the way right now. I hate that I actually packed my gear. And I *hate* the mustache, mate. You look like you stapled a deck rat to your upper lip."

"Jo." Alberto stepped forward, and he wanted to hug her, but didn't. Instead, he murmured, "I missed the way you smack me around verbally."

"I'll smack you around literally if you don't stop flirting." She missed his smell. Clean sweat and marine grease. His mustache twitched as she added, "This is bonkers. You been too long in Karumba. You gone troppo. Hell, why not just buy one of the cruise ships over at Fort Hill, too? Tell me you didn't pay for this – this – rusted out *monstrosity*. I can't believe she floats."

"She's paid for, and she's registered. She's seaworthy. And we need her."

"We?" Josie snorted. "Need?"

But Alberto had stopped smiling. Now to the sorry business, so he took care. "Josie. Te necesito. Y lo siento. I know who killed your brother. And we're gonna go find those bastards."