



where
the
Light
Plays

C. F O N S E C A

Chapter 1

Andi Rey meandered along the windswept beach and inhaled the sharp, salty air as the boom of breaking waves echoed in her ears. A gentle breeze ruffled Andi's dark-blond hair and swept it into her eyes. She pushed it away instinctively. The tide was on its way out, exposing new treasures and leaving ripple patterns in its wake. Andi nudged her red Converse boot into the pale, golden sand to reveal tiny sparkling seashells. Plump balls of cottony-red seaweed blew across the water's edge, and newly created blue-green rock pools glistened with washed orange and brown pebbles. Ripples and reflections. This was nature's own magical canvas.

The beach was almost deserted, but Andi didn't feel the loneliness she'd experienced while living in Melbourne. In the city, she'd felt suffocated, hemmed in by thousands of people. She lifted her face and listened to the roar of the incoming tide, inhaling the fresh, clear air. Inspired by wide-open spaces and the beauty of her surroundings by the ocean, she had the latitude and breathing space she required; anything was possible.

Seagulls glided and swooped over the wave tops, shrieking as they followed shoals of fish. She marvelled at the tube-shaped spinning clouds; their movement cast ghostly shadows along the towering ochre cliffs that skirted the beach. Located between Gull Rock and Rocky Point, where the creek enters the strait through undulating sand dunes, Hakea, Andi's home, was renowned for its surf. The booming swells steeped over the shallow reefs and produced outstanding waves that dropped into the powerful Southern Ocean.

She picked up a smooth piece of sea-foam glass, rolled it through her fingers, and tucked it into her jacket pocket. As an artist working towards her first solo exhibition, she was experimenting with finely ground glass and sand mixed with acrylic paint. She used it to enhance the texture and increase the vibrancy of colours.

There were fewer tourists around than usual. The cooler-than-average temperatures and higher-than-average rainfall resulted in a slower start to spring and fewer visitors to Hakea.

A sudden gust of wind blew briny mist across the beach. Andi pulled the hood of her rain jacket around her damp hair and jogged towards the stairs.

As the rain started to fall in heavy droplets, she bounded up the wooden steps and reached the well-trodden path at the top of the cliff in record time. She dropped her hands to her knees and slowed her breathing. The rituals of running the steps, walking the beach, and surfing kept Andi healthy and connected to her surroundings. These activities provided structure to her otherwise free-flowing existence.

She jogged towards home along the shale track through lush ground layers of coastal grasses and wildflowers. Gold dust wattle trees dripped with clusters of bright-yellow balls, the abundant flowers that attracted flocks of yellow-tailed black cockatoo and crimson rosella to this coastal mosaic.

As she approached the popular wooden viewing platform that overlooked Gull Rock, she noticed a pair of shapely legs, clad in formfitting trousers, teetering unsteadily over the guardrail. She stared, wide eyed, momentarily mesmerised by the perplexing vision before her. It took far too long for Andi to register that the top half of the woman dangled over the cliff.

What the? The guardrail protected viewers from a ninety-metre drop onto the rocky foreshore and pounding waves. If she didn't take immediate action, the woman could fall and be injured. Or worse.

She ran towards her and grabbed the woman's calves firmly just above her two black leather ankle boots.

"Arrah...crikey, what the hell are you doing?" the woman yelled as Andi pulled her to safety. Andi didn't release her until her feet rested safely on the wooden deck. Before she could respond, the woman continued her rant. "Get away with you. What on earth did you do that for?" the woman cried out, her singsong Irish accent mimicking the shriek of the silver gull circling above.

Andi stepped back, letting her hands fall to her sides. Why was this woman so angry with her? She wasn't the one leaning over a safety rail trying to get herself killed. Was it too much to hope for a simple thank-you for saving this ridiculous

woman's life? She swallowed the heated words that threatened to escape from her mouth and looked directly into fiery, dark-blue eyes.

Andi averted her gaze when she realised she was still staring into the eyes of a stranger. The woman was elegantly dressed and wore plaid wool trousers, but who wears *plaid* wool trousers to the beach?

"I was *this* close." The woman held up her hand centimetres from Andi's face, her finger and thumb almost touching each other. "My lens cap... I nearly had it... I was *this* close!" she repeated. Her voice was lilting and sweet, almost lyrical despite her angry words. She drew her graceful body to full height and leaned towards Andi menacingly. She was tall, undeniably beautiful, and *furious*.



Before Caitlin Quinn had time to stop her, the woman discarded her rain jacket and tossed it casually onto the ground. In one sweeping movement, she launched herself effortlessly over the barrier with the agility of a deer and disappeared into the void. It was startling to witness, even though she knew there was a ledge on the other side of the railing where her lens cap lay.

Why the hell did she go and do that? It was just a silly lens cap. Okay, she did make a fuss about the situation but really didn't expect the other woman to leap over the barrier after it. Caitlin wiped her hands on her trousers. Her clothes were wet and clung to her skin uncomfortably. She retrieved her camera from where she'd placed it under the bench on the platform, removed her jacket, and used the garment to protect it. Her white linen shirt soaked through in moments and was embarrassingly translucent. Tiny rivulets of water trickled along her neckline and down her back.

She moved towards the wooden handrail and sighed with relief when a hand came into view, clutching the lens cap. Caitlin blinked in disbelief as the woman swiftly leapt back over the barrier to land a few centimetres away from her.

Through the drizzle, a few persistent rays of sunlight hit the woman's short, wavy, dark-blonde hair. She wore a sodden, red T-shirt that hugged her subtle curves. Her loose fitting cargo pants sat low enough on her hips to show a hint of tanned, smooth skin along her midriff. She stood three or four centimetres shorter than Caitlin and grinned triumphantly as she presented her with the lens cap.

Caitlin's anger dissolved. It was impossible to hold on to it when standing face to face with this attractive woman and her irresistible smile. She allowed herself a moment to stare, and why wouldn't she? Caitlin wouldn't be alive if she didn't notice her agile, graceful figure and natural beauty.

A sudden flash of lightning and a rumble of thunder caught Caitlin by surprise. She looked up at the threatening sky with alarm, before she accepted the runaway lens cap from the woman's outstretched hand.

The woman stared at her. "You're not exactly dressed for what's coming. The rain will most likely get heavier." She spoke confidently as she angled her head towards the sky laden with heavy clouds. "Maybe you should take your lens cap and get under cover ASAP...and I hope your camera kit is waterproof."

Caitlin breathed a sigh of relief; she'd thought the woman was going to tell her to shove it.

Instead, she pulled her discarded raincoat over her wet clothes, dismissed Caitlin with a wave, and raced away along the pathway.

"Hey wait," Caitlin called. "I didn't thank you...What is your name?"

Rain pelted down on her; the huge drops forced Caitlin to clutch the camera gear and run to her car.

"I'm Andi. And you're welcome," she yelled from a distance.

"Thank you, Andi," she replied, but Andi was already gone. Caitlin hit the key fob, hastily opened the door, and fell into the plush leather seat of the BMW Roadster.

She grabbed a towel from the back seat and quickly wrapped it around her wet, tangled hair. She pulled the cold, drenched shirt away from her body as she turned the ignition and brought the engine to life with a low-pitched purr. She revved the car and pulled out onto the side road.

Her stereo came to life in the middle of London Grammar's latest release, and Caitlin hummed along with the smoky voice of the lead vocalist. The weather had caught her by surprise, and she hoped the rain wouldn't spoil her entire weekend. On the positive side, the woman, Andi, was just as unexpected but also thoroughly appealing.



Five minutes later, Caitlin slipped her Roadster into the garage, gathered her belongings from the rear seat, and walked towards the house as the timber garage door automatically closed behind her.

Her clothes were saturated and unpleasantly clammy in places. She needed a hot shower and a cold drink. Or should that be the other way around?

The encounter on the viewing platform was still on her mind. Andi had delivered the weather report as though she was a local. She was cute in her delivery, cheeky, and possibly excitable.

A shower would relax Caitlin's muscles, help her escape a fleeting dash of loneliness, and chase away the memory of those chocolate-brown eyes that flashed in sheer exasperation.

Caitlin was accustomed to rain. Spring on the Victorian coast was milder than at home in Cork. South-West Ireland experienced plenty of rain, averaging one hundred and fifty days annually—and there was the fog. She pictured the way the fog, moody and romantic, would lift over a patch of woodland as she crossed the River Lee and made her way from her apartment to the arts campus of University College. Caitlin grew nostalgic for her parents' house, situated near the dramatic and picturesque university grounds where it overlooked the river. Patrick, her English professor father, loved to quote Jerome K. Jerome, and he often did.

"But who wants to be foretold the weather? It is bad enough when it comes, without our having the misery of knowing about it beforehand."

Caitlin thought it wise to reserve her judgment on the mildness of this coastal climate. After all, she had yet to experience an Australian summer and all of this region's other weather extremes. She wasn't looking forward to facing the peak of the summer heat.

She climbed the stairs, unlocked the door, and punched in the alarm code as she stepped inside. Her eyes were drawn towards the floor-to-ceiling windows that enhanced the remarkable view from the cliff-top house. From this elevation, it was impossible not to notice the stunning outlook. No matter how many times she saw it, the rolling dunes and sweeping expanse of ocean took her breath away.

She kicked off her boots and peeled away her rain-soaked clothes as she walked into the luxury, ground floor bathroom.

Caitlin made it a point to exercise regularly. She ran at least three times a week and practiced yoga daily. She looked forward to running along the beach to improve her stride and was adamant about taking advantage of the pure sea air whenever she spent time at her grandaunt's house. Her grandaunt Isabella had named the property Kinsale, after her birthplace in Ireland.

Next April, Caitlin would be thirty-nine years old. Not quite forty, but not far off it. Thanks to a combination of exercise, a healthy diet, and good genes, she was in fine shape. Caitlin intended to stay that way.

The cascading double shower, built to cantilever over the cliff edge, was the perfect place to indulge herself. The 180-degree view was spectacular and one of her favourite features of the house.

Caitlin stood under the massaging jets, and the water soothed her restless spirit. She thought about Andi and grinned. Andi? Bambi? She's certainly as nimble and light footed as a deer. Caitlin hoped she wasn't offended by her outburst, because if she were a local, it would be nice to see her again. The way Andi stared at her with those passionate eyes made Caitlin wonder if she had a hot-blooded temperament to match. *She's attractive and fiery. Definitely cute.*

It was dinnertime when Caitlin finished her shower and pulled on her favourite pair of faded jeans and a sage-green, ribbed T-shirt. The sea air always made her hungry. A glass of red usually went down nicely too.

On her way from Melbourne to the coast, she'd abandoned the idea of buying fresh fruit and vegetables at the Queen Victoria Market, trying to avoid the heavy afternoon traffic. Shopping for provisions would have to wait until tomorrow. It was her fourth visit to Kinsale, and she looked forward to preparing simple meals from the fresh seafood and locally grown produce. But not tonight. Tonight, she was weary from her hectic week and the two-hour drive from Melbourne. Birdie's, the only café in Hakea, would provide a light meal, a glass of Pinot, and the possibility of some local distraction.



The sound of clinking glasses and laughter greeted Caitlin as she stepped into the café. She waved to the chef, Birdie, who dispensed drinks from behind the

main bar. Birdie waved back and nodded in welcome as Caitlin made her way to one of the small tables by the window.

"I'll have a glass of Jack Rabbit pinot noir, the salmon with roasted fennel, and a spinach salad, please." Caitlin thanked the server as he moved away. She scanned the room, drawn towards the chatter coming from a group standing at the bar.

Andi?

There she was, the woman Caitlin had met earlier. She leaned against the bar with her thumbs casually tucked in the loops of her black cargo pants. As if she sensed Caitlin's presence, she turned. Their gazes met across the room, and Andi grinned shyly in recognition. She lowered her eyes, absent-mindedly pushing a lock of hair from her face.

Caitlin watched as Birdie handed Andi a glass of red wine and a schooner of pale ale.

"Two glasses? Who's the wine for, Birdie?" Andi asked.

Birdie replied, "Would you be a darling and deliver the wine to the table by the window?"

Andi took a quick gulp of the amber ale before she strode across the room. As she looked directly at Caitlin, she fumbled and nearly spilled the wine.

That was a close call. Luckily it didn't land in her lap. Caitlin was relieved she wasn't wearing the wine, but she enjoyed the flush that crept across Andi's face.

Andi placed the glass down gently and stood at the table. Her hand trembled as she circled the icy rim of the beer glass with her index finger. Caitlin wondered if *she* was making Andi nervous.

"Hi."

"Hello again, and thank you. It is Andi, isn't it? I'm Caitlin." She casually picked up her wine glass, lifted it to her lips, and let her gaze roam over Andi's body. "I didn't expect to see you again so soon. Do you work here?"

"Kath-leen?" asked Andi.

"That is the correct pronunciation, but you can call me Cait-lin; everyone I've met in Australia does."

"Nice to meet you, Caitlin."

Andi shifted her weight from one foot to the other, her canvas shoes squeaking against the wooden floorboards. She placed her drink on the table and wiped her

hands along the front of her trousers. "I do live here, and I've been known to assist Birdie from time to time but not generally, no." She smiled shyly. "I'm not on staff."

Caitlin grinned. "So I'm just lucky, then?"

Andi looked relieved when the waiter delivered Caitlin's meal and said, "Can I bring you anything else now? Condiments?"

She shook her head. As the waiter stepped away, he winked at Andi, and Caitlin wondered about the significance of his gesture.

"Maybe you'd consider joining me? I'd like to thank you for saving my lens..." Her voice trailed off as Andi turned towards the door. A woman had just stepped inside the café.

"Sorry, I can't tonight. I'm actually waiting for a friend, and here she is." Andi gestured towards the woman who shook out her raincoat and pulled off her speckled beanie to reveal a head of short, brown hair.

"So much for our sunny spring weekend," the newcomer said, as she looked around the room and briefly focused on Caitlin before her gaze finally settled on Andi.

Caitlin could tell by the way she smiled affectionately at Andi that she was a special friend.

Birdie called out, "Doc, it's good to see you... It's been ages. Too busy playing doctor and saving lives, eh?"

She turned towards Birdie. "Of course, but more like working double shifts and being too darn tired to move when I get time off. Now," she placed her hands on the bar, "I could use a Scotch, single malt, straight up, and some of your excellent food." She moved to Andi's side, grabbed her around the waist, pulled her into a crushing embrace, and lifted her off the ground.

Caitlin watched as Andi wriggled and moved her feet in the air.

"Ellie, put me down," Andi cried out. Caitlin observed the exchange and contemplated the nature of their friendship.

"Is that any way to greet me?" The woman returned Andi to the floor. "Are you ready for dinner? I'm starving."

Andi's friend peered over Andi's shoulder and stared at Caitlin curiously.

Andi spun around and looked at Caitlin, one hand clutching Ellie's arm. "I should introduce you. This is Ellie. Ellie, this is Caitlin. I met Caitlin today on the platform above Gull Rock."

Caitlin held out her hand. "Nice to meet you, Ellie."

"Likewise, nice to meet you too." Ellie smiled charmingly and took Caitlin's hand.

She glanced at Andi and then back to Ellie and wondered if this was Andi's girlfriend. Disappointing as it was, she supposed it was inevitable that Andi would have a girlfriend.

"Tim has my order already," Andi said to Ellie. "Seeing as you're starving, why don't you tell him what you'd like, and I'll be with you soon?"

Ellie shrugged casually and headed towards the bar.

When Andi turned her attention back to her, Caitlin raised her glass and said, "I won't keep you, and it was nice to see you again. Thank you for saving me this afternoon."

"No problem. Enjoy your dinner."

"Since you're from around here, we may run into each other again," Caitlin said. Her gaze followed Andi as she made her way across the room and sat at a table for two. She thought it would be grand to know Andi, even if she was not available for further exploration. A woman, especially one as attractive as Andi, would have been perfect to help her wile away the evening hours here in Hakea.



Andi waited patiently for Ellie as she chatted to Jim and Dave at the bar. They were tradesmen, local plumbers, who spent all their spare time surfing. Dave swept his shaggy, bleached-blond hair off his forehead as he made some statement about Aussie rules football and speculated about their team's chances of making the finals later this month.

After she finished her conversation, Ellie approached her with a mischievous grin on her face. She had lost even more weight, and her hazel eyes looked tired with dark shadows beneath them. Probably a result of too much work and not enough play. All the same, she looked striking in denim jeans and a black turtleneck sweater, and Andi hoped that time away from the hospital over the next two days would help Ellie relax and get the rest she obviously needed.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Ellie smiled as she leaned over to brush her lips across Andi's cheek.

"Since when have you been interested in football?" Andi asked.

Ellie pulled her chair closer and grinned. "Who do you think she barracks for?" She inclined her head towards Caitlin.

"Don't be ridiculous. She's Irish," said Andi with a smirk.

Ellie raised an eyebrow. "You know what I mean. Does she play on *our* team?"

Andi blushed.

"Well, who is she?" Ellie asked as she ran her hand through her hair. "Come on, spill it... and please start at the beginning."

Andi sighed. "Not much to tell you. I met her this afternoon on the platform at Gull Rock. I don't know much more than that, sorry." Andi leaned across the table and lowered her voice. "She's interesting, don't you think?" She pretended to survey the room as an excuse to glance across at the intriguing woman.

Ellie's gaze followed Andi's, and she gave Caitlin a quick once-over. "Very, with those long legs and lovely wavy strands of dark hair. She's gorgeous. Big blue eyes, *very* nice body, *and* an Irish accent... Is that what you're asking about?"

"Ellie, you're staring." She agreed. Caitlin was gorgeous, but it was easy to get caught up in the whirlpool of attraction when someone was so far out of reach. And Caitlin was clearly out of Andi's league. Dream on.

Ellie placed her hand over Andi's and gave her a comforting squeeze. "Pity, I think she's leaving. We should have invited her over to our table for a drink. What do you think, Andi? Shall we?"

They both watched as Caitlin stepped out the door.

"Too late Ellie. She's gone."

Chapter 2

Andi woke to spring sunshine filtering through the slatted blinds. She rubbed the sleep from her eyes and flattened the pillow with her fist so she had a better view of Ellie, who was burrowed snugly under the covers, sound asleep. Andi smiled and reached over to gently trace Ellie's cheek with her finger, careful not to wake her. She looked so content and peaceful.

Something tickled the back of Andi's knees, and she placed her hand on warm, silky fur. She lifted back the sheet to see Koda curled up, and at the touch of her hand, the cat purred loudly.

"Good morning, Koda," she whispered. Koda gave her finger a friendly bite. "Ouch!" Andi pulled her hand back and rolled out of bed. Koda settled next to Ellie and nestled in along the curve of her hip.

Andi reached for her clothes, dressed quietly, and made her way through her studio and into the living room.

Half an hour later, Ellie appeared at the doorway. Andi peered over the newspaper from where she sat on the sofa and smiled as Ellie pulled her long, white T-shirt down over her legs. Her feet looked snug in Andi's worn, woollen Ugg boots.

"Hmm...just what I need. There's nothing better than the smell of freshly brewed coffee," Ellie murmured.

"Good morning, sunshine. Sleep well?" Andi held out her empty mug and gestured towards the kitchen. "Coffee's on. I'm ready for a refill."

Ellie rolled her eyes. "What did your last slave die of?" She filled two mugs from the drip coffee maker. "I slept so well, I may even join you on your run this morning." She placed the steaming beverages on the side table and elbowed Andi. "Shove over," she said as she sat down and stretched her long frame beside her. "Yum, this is good."

"Yeah, thanks to you." Andi would have never bought a coffee machine as expensive as this one for herself. It had been Ellie's present to Andi just a few

weeks ago, on her thirtieth birthday. It was easy to use, made great coffee, and was beautifully designed. Andi loved things that were beautifully put together.

“Are you up for the seven k run along the cliff-top? I’d like to check the swell down at the point. The rain and onshore wind has kept me out of the surf for ages,” Andi said.

“I could easily crawl back into bed and sleep for the rest of the day, but yep, I’m up for it. Just let the caffeine work its magic.” Ellie laid her head back against the sofa and sighed as she hugged her coffee mug against her chest.

Andi folded the newspaper and placed it on the table. “I’m glad you could make it this weekend. I’ve missed you.” She gave Ellie a concerned look. “You’re exhausted. Are you still working those ridiculously long hours? You were asleep five minutes after your head hit the pillow last night.”

Ellie rubbed her eyes. “These are the joys of surgical residency. I’ve missed you too, but it will get better. I’m nearly through the worst of it now.” She raised her eyebrows and playfully prodded Andi with her toe. “Tell me more about Ms. sultry, seductive Ireland. She did ask you to have dinner with her, didn’t she? She’s not shy.”

“I guess. She was just thanking me for saving her life,” Andi said. “Look, I don’t even know where she’s staying, and I’ll probably never see her again.”

“Aww...Didn’t she slip you her phone number? What is her story, I wonder? Hey, maybe she dropped in on a paraglider. Or rode in on her white horse.”

Andi bent down to run her hand over Koda’s soft tummy. The playful Burmese cat sat pressed against her leg and nudged her lovingly. “Or maybe she’s a traveller just passing through or has a husband, children, girlfriend. Look, the possibilities are endless.”

Ellie placed an arm around her shoulder, and Andi shifted into her embrace. Ellie asked, “How long’s it been. Andi? Over a year since Martha went back to Germany? Don’t you think it’s time to get back out there? Start dating again.”

She rested her head against Ellie’s shoulder. “I think about it sometimes, I do. It’s not like I *haven’t* dated since Martha left, but there’s been no one special.”

Ellie smirked. “Let’s see. First there was your weekend with the Hawaiian pro surfer. That was a *wipeout*, wasn’t it? Then your fling with Freya, the Danish backpacker. An international smorgasbord.”

Andi scowled. “Anyway, I’ve been trying to work on my exhibition and build some financial security. You know how it is. Things just get in the way.”

“I understand all about financial security, but a girl’s got to have some fun. And that woman looks like a *lot* of fun.”

“More like a lot of trouble,” said Andi as she bounced up from the sofa. “Come on, let’s get a move on. Are you running in a T-shirt and my Ugg boots or slipping into some track pants?” She grabbed Ellie by the arm and pulled her to her feet. “Let’s get out there and see if you’ve improved your running times.”

“Just go easy on me; remember, I don’t get a chance to run as often as you do. Especially on the sand in the fresh air by the sea.”

“Excuses, excuses.” Andi laughed and headed out the front door. “I’ll wait for you out in the sunshine, *sunshine*. Don’t be long.”

It was so good that Ellie had finally taken time out from work. Andi had hardly seen her over the last few months. She knew that Ellie was dedicated and loved her work, but lately, when they had spoken on the phone, she’d sounded so tired. Andi hoped that their time together this weekend would give her friend the respite she needed.



Caitlin steered the blue Roadster along the winding road towards Aireys Inlet. With the rooftop down, she revelled in the warm morning sun as it danced against her skin. The day had warmed considerably to a comfortable twenty degrees. After yesterday’s rain, the air was fresh, and everything appeared lush and pure. She looked forward to visiting Black-Tern, the art gallery Isabella had told her about that showcased the works of established and emerging artists from this region.

The fresh smell of eucalyptus trees and a hint of ocean air filled her senses. As the road zigzagged out of the ironbark forest, with its sparse understorey of wattles and shrubs, Caitlin caught sight of the stark, white tower and the red cap of Split Point Lighthouse against the clear azure sky. She was far away from home, but the sight of the lighthouse was a comfort. It stood like a beacon, a symbol of strength and a safe harbour. She intended to photograph it later in the day.

Caitlin had her day all planned out. After she'd visited the gallery, she would treat herself to a late lunch at one of the nearby restaurants and then take a walk along the beach. She'd done her research and knew the short track to Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary would give her the best views west, towards the wide beaches of Fairhaven and Lorne.

Caitlin pulled into the empty car park; she appeared to be the only visitor. She entered the foyer and had little chance to take in the environment before an elegant woman, who Caitlin guessed to be in her midsixties, appeared by her side. The woman had the imperious look of an art gallery curator. Caitlin knew it well.

"Welcome to Black-Tern. I'm Cynthia." With an enthusiastic smile, she handed Caitlin a catalogue. "Have a look around and let me know if I can help you at all."

"I'll be fine, Cynthia. I'm looking forward to exploring, and I'm in no hurry." She accepted the catalogue. "I'll take my time and come back to you if I need more information."

"Oh, you're Irish, aren't you?" she stated the obvious and tilted her head quizzically.

Caitlin nodded. "Hmm...that I am."

"Are you holidaying in Australia?" Cynthia asked.

"I'm currently working in Melbourne, but I like to spend time here on the coast when I can."

"In that case, I'm so glad you found the gallery, and I hope you enjoy our collection."

Caitlin moved towards the front room. The space was filled with a mixture of small seascapes in oil and acrylic, print works of flora and fauna, some mixed media, and a few framed black and white photographs of Split Point Lighthouse. She ran her fingers gently over the small carvings of echidnas, wombats, and lizards made of ironwood. Caitlin frowned and pushed her hair from her eyes. Nearly everything she'd seen so far was aimed at the tourist market. Quaint and well executed, they nevertheless lacked the complexity and cutting-edge freshness that she looked for when visiting an art gallery.

As she turned back towards the entrance, a luminous glow drew Caitlin towards an open doorway. "Wow," she exclaimed. She walked into an intimate space that displayed only four works of art. "Now, this is more like it—the good stuff."

Three landscapes that focused on the environment graced the left wall. But it was the radiance and luminosity from one sizeable painting on the opposite wall that really captured Caitlin's attention.

"You have a good eye."

Taken by surprise, Caitlin turned around and blinked. Out of nowhere Cynthia had reappeared.

"Simply magical, isn't it?"

"It is," Caitlin agreed and turned back to move closer to the painting. A sweeping receding tide, wet sand, ochre cliffs, and a majestically undulating sea drew her into a seascape reflecting intensity and passion. It looked as though the broad textured strokes were produced through direct use of a palette knife. Whoever had done this knew what he, or she, was doing.

"It is one of my favourites of *this* particular artist's work. The painting is part of my own collection," Cynthia commented.

Caitlin dragged her gaze away from the canvas. "Who is the artist?" She glanced through the catalogue.

"Andréa Rey. We have shown a number of her smaller works over the last few years. Andréa did take a hiatus for over twelve months before producing this particular piece. I am impressed by the quality of her work."

When she found the details of the painting in the catalogue, Caitlin's skin tingled. What luck, Andréa's studio was in Hakea. "It says here she's based in Hakea. Do you think it would be okay for me to visit? Looks like it worked, whatever she did during her break."

"She does live close by; I'll be happy to give you her email address." Cynthia moved towards the front desk, and Caitlin followed. "Perhaps you can arrange a visit. Andréa is truly a delightful woman; I'm sure she wouldn't mind." She handed Caitlin a business card on which she had handwritten Andréa's email address. "Do you know Hakea?"

Caitlin nodded. "Fortunately, I'm staying there at a friend's house." She didn't feel inclined to tell Cynthia that she was Isabella's grandniece, because she wanted to avoid the inevitable interrogation. Her aunt was too well known for a local not to be curious about her.

"You're in luck, then."

"If you don't mind, I will go back and take another look at the painting. Thank you so much for giving me Andréa's email address."

"You're welcome. You may be interested to know she is currently working on her first solo exhibition. I can't wait to see the direction she's taking," Cynthia said and then added, "If you're looking for a place to eat this afternoon, Demetrio's at the lighthouse has an utterly marvellous lunch menu."

"Thank you so much." Caitlin smiled. "Sounds wonderful, I may just do that." She turned and walked back towards the painting that had both soothed her and sparked pleasure.



The risotto of local seafood cooked with arborio rice, white wine, and dill, finished with mascarpone, was absolutely delicious. Caitlin licked her lips in appreciation. Cynthia had been right about the views from the restaurant and Demetrio's menu. The risotto was cooked to perfection. She sat back, took a sip of her espresso, and relished the smooth, rich Marocchino with a sprinkling of cacao and milk foam.

Caitlin reached into her pocket to extract the business card with Andréa's email address. She was intrigued by the artist's work, and now that Caitlin knew Andréa lived in Hakea, she was keen to meet her. She picked up her iPhone, added the address into her contacts list, and tapped out an email. So, who is she? There was only one way to find out.

To: a.rey@gmail.com

Subject: Come To Light

Hi Andréa,

I just visited the Black-Tern Gallery, where I had the pleasure of seeing your painting, Come to Light. Cynthia, the manager, mentioned it might be possible to visit your studio? I'm in Hakea for the next few days, and if it's convenient, I am interested to view more of your work.

Yours sincerely,

C. Quinn

P.S. Your painting has brought A. Rey of light into my day.

Half an hour later, Caitlin descended the narrow steps from the lighthouse to the beach below. She wandered along the sand, shoes in one hand and camera around her neck, simply taking pleasure in the rolling surf and spectacular views of the Otway Ranges. Her phone vibrated, alerting her to incoming email.

To: cquinn@bella.org

Subject: Come To Light

Thank you for your interest. If you are in the area tomorrow, I currently have a small number of paintings at the studio and will be happy for you to view them. A ray of light?

Thank you. I hope you won't be disappointed.

A.Rey

P.S. Studio A. Rey. Follow the road to the end of Surfview Court, at the start of the reserve. Any time after midday.

Caitlin returned her phone to her pocket. With a new burst of energy, she lifted her camera to her eye. Using the razor-sharp lens, she set about taking photographs of the coastal landscape. She captured some interesting rock formations and, from a changed perspective, took several shots of the lighthouse set against the horizon.

She recalled the absolute radiance and force of Andréa's painting. There was something about it that made her feel less solitary and heightened Caitlin's awareness of her surroundings. Cynthia mentioned Andréa had a tendency to be a bit reclusive, but she hadn't hesitated to invite her to the studio. Caitlin was curious, and her visit tomorrow would be a sure way to find out more about the mysterious artist.

Chapter 3

Caitlin glanced at her watch and was surprised that her walk along the pathway from Kinsale to Andréa's studio had taken less than twenty-five minutes. The path was a scenic route that traversed the cliff from one end of the town to the other, with fantastic views of the ocean.

She entered through a garden filled with native flowering shrubs and a scattering of sculptural, black-trunked *xanthorrhoea* grass trees. Caitlin approached the studio under a canopy of graceful hanging branches, soft green leaves, and clusters of feathery flowers. She brushed past the foliage, and the air filled with the sweet smell of lemon and lime. She inhaled deeply to enjoy the perfume. The fragrance was tangy and intoxicating.

The exterior of the studio was modest but striking. Caitlin wasn't surprised to see solar panels on the blue-grey, sloping roof. They were a feature on nearly every house in Hakea.

A small, beige cat wearing a bright-red collar and tag greeted Caitlin at the top of the timber stairs. The cat stared suspiciously and slinked towards her with slow, graceful movements.

"Hello, little one. Aren't you beautiful...are you a Burmese? I think you are." She bent down to stroke the cat, and it closed its eyes and rubbed its head against Caitlin's wrist.

Before she reached the brass bell, the door swung open. Caitlin stared with a mixture of surprise and disbelief.

"Andi?"

The puzzled look on Andi's face soon gave way to a broad grin. Time stood still as they gazed at one another, and when Andi blinked, her intense brown eyes fleetingly disappeared behind long lashes.

"C. Quinn?"

Caitlin returned Andi's smile. "It is I, Caitlin Quinn. Well, this is serendipitous." It really was. Caitlin had envisioned the reclusive artist Cynthia had spoken about to be many things. She had pictured an eccentric, antisocial, spectacled woman with wild hair. Wrong, wrong, wrong. Andréa Rey was gorgeous.

"It is unexpected, isn't it?" Andi asked. "Please, come in. I see you've already met Koda. Just watch out. If she likes you, you'll have beige hair all over those dark trousers." Andi ran her hand through her hair as she stood aside to welcome Caitlin into the studio. They both stepped inside, followed closely by the friendly little feline.

"She is beautiful, and a bit of fur doesn't bother me. Thank you so much for letting me visit today," Caitlin said as she took in her surroundings. Visiting an artist's studio allowed a glimpse into their private world, and she certainly was curious about *this* artist's private world. Andi appeared to have a quiet strength. A body that was strong, yet fluid in movement. As Caitlin stepped closer to her, electricity seemed to spark through her own body.

Andi grinned shyly. "That's cool. I haven't had any visitors at the studio for a while. I was pleased to receive your email and surprised to see you again."

A happy surprise, she hoped. "Cynthia explained that you're recently back at work after taking some time off. Is this your home too?" she asked as she looked around the large room that included a comfortable lounge area and a doorway leading to a small kitchen. The high roof space, ceiling fans, and natural light filtering through diffused, overhead skylight panels created a perfect space for painting.

"Yes, this is my studio and my home."

Caitlin couldn't help but admire Andi's bohemian attire—paint-splattered jeans and a polka dotted T-shirt. She was sexy. Caitlin averted her gaze; she had been staring. "You've created a fantastic working environment here." She smiled warmly at Andi. "It really is nice to see you again, and bizarre, don't you think?"

"It's totally random," Andi said. "So, would you like to look around now?"

They stood before the rough-hewn planks that formed Andi's workbench. It was covered with splashes of paint and, like a canvas, told its own story. Two stainless steel trolleys held art supplies, multiple pots of acrylic paint, boxes of

brushes, rollers, and palette knives of all sizes. On the top of the bench lay a large rectangular painting.

“Work in progress,” explained Andi.

Caitlin looked at the painting. The unfinished work appeared to consist of urgent gestural strokes that conveyed the energy and movement of the sea, of shifting light, and of blurred skies.

Andi slowly traced one finger over the canvas surface. “I love the water. But when it’s like this, big and turbulent, the moody sea and the sky is ever changing. I’m in awe, and it terrifies me.” She looked directly at Caitlin. “This is a piece for my exhibition next December.” Her voice had an enticing rhythm, a mix of calm and fierce energy. She spoke with such passion, and Caitlin wondered if that intensity was only reserved for her art.

“And the exhibition would be where?”

“At the Watershed in Geelong, a private gallery that exhibits mainly artists from this region. It’s on the old pier, and the harbour is an excellent backdrop. Do you know Geelong at all?”

Caitlin shook her head. On her visits to Kinsale, Caitlin took the ring road that diverted around Geelong. It was the second largest city in Victoria, located on the shores of Port Phillip Bay, but she hadn’t yet taken the time to explore.

“The waterfront is worth visiting. Lots of good restaurants and cafés, the art deco pool is fun for a dip in summer,” Andi said.

Caitlin hovered over Andi’s shoulder to examine the painting. She felt unusually tongue-tied. It was unsettling being in close proximity to Andi. Her sun-streaked hair was just long enough to brush the base of her neck. With her finely muscled shoulders just a few centimetres away, Caitlin inhaled her subtle fragrance of citrus and sandalwood. She breathed out slowly, reminded herself she was here to look at the artworks, and placed a serious look on her face.

“The painting at Black-Tern is breathtaking. I’m curious—would you tell me what inspired you to paint *Come to Light?*” That seascape was a combination of intense light and raw emotion, and it exuded the same visceral physicality and energy as Andi’s unfinished work.

Andi turned, and Caitlin stepped back to wait for an answer. Andi leaned up against the workbench with her arms folded tightly across her chest. “My

inspiration? I don't know if it was any *one* thing." She pushed her hands into her pockets. "I went through a bit of a slump, and I couldn't paint for a while. At the time, I was so disconnected that I was only just managing to keep up with my design work."

Caitlin tilted her head to one side. What had caused Andi's separation from something she was clearly so passionate about? "What changed?" she asked softly.

"After months of no motivation and wandering around aimlessly, I started reconnecting with the landscape, especially the sea. And it suddenly became important to create something tangible and familiar. I pulled out a large canvas and thought, 'This is it.'"

Caitlin nodded. The painting reflected the absorption and scattering of light. "That's why you called it *Come to Light*. It was you emerging from your fog?"

Andi hesitated. "Yes, that was the turning point. I was lucky Cynthia appreciated my shift in style, especially since I hadn't shown her anything new for over a year."

Caitlin recalled that Cynthia displayed quite a proprietary attitude to the painting. "She must really love it, because she immediately told me it was not for sale." Smiling, she added, "I am really looking forward to seeing more of your work."

Andi grinned and lowered her eyes self-consciously.

Caitlin watched, amused, as Andi shifted from one leg to the other, her gaze fixed down at her bare feet. She looked vulnerable, a little uncertain, which made her even more intriguing. Passion seemed to simmer below the surface. Caitlin moved back to the art trolley. She needed to change her focus again.

"I see you are mixing your own pigments," she said. Many jars of dry powders, mediums, additives, and fillers such as mica, quartz, and ground glass were arranged on the art trolley.

Sixteenth century Renaissance pigments and painting techniques had fascinated Caitlin during her research sojourn in Venice. "Are you using glass in your paintings as a reflective medium, like the paintings of the old masters?"

Andi glanced at Caitlin curiously. "I've been experimenting with ground glass, mixing it in with raw pigment. It alters the shade and luminosity. Making my own paint allows me to get the precise hue and shade I need." She gestured

towards the canvas on her workbench. “I can’t always do it, but I did for this painting.”

“It must give you a much finer degree of control and exactness.”

“That’s it exactly. Of course, mixing my own paint is much more affordable. Art materials can be so expensive.”

“How do you manage? This piece is large. It takes a lot of paint to cover a canvas this size, and the finishes are costly too.” Caitlin hoped that her question wasn’t too personal.

Andi moved away from her art bench. Hands in her pockets, she appeared deep in thought. “I manage.” She shrugged. “When I lived in Melbourne, I worked for a small graphic design company. They do a lot of work for businesses on the Surf Coast—surfboard manufacturers, clothing designers, and sports travel. When I moved to Hakea, I continued to work with them on projects from home. It gives me flexibility and earns me enough money to pursue this.” She spread her arms wide to encompass her studio.

“It must be fantastic to live and work in a purpose-built space,” Caitlin said.

“It definitely has its advantages. I love the feeling of stepping over the threshold each morning from my living space into my own creative space.” Andi pointed to the various areas of her home. “A small galley kitchen is on the right. My bedroom and bathroom are on the left, and the storeroom and laundry are off the back deck. I don’t need much more,” she concluded. “I spend a lot of time outdoors, surfing and walking. I don’t usually run off at the mouth like this. Please, excuse me.” Andi spun around on one foot. “Can I get you a coffee or tea? Then, if you’d like, I can show you some of the paintings in the storeroom.”

“You look like a surfer girl,” Caitlin said. The words escaped before she could stop them. “I would love a cup of tea.” Andi did look like a surfer girl, with her hair all tousled and kissed by the sun and her golden skin visible below the hem of her T-shirt. Caitlin cleared her throat and met Andi’s shy but amused look.

“Okay, I’ll get the tea. Make yourself comfortable, and I’ll be back in a minute.”

Caitlin wondered what drove her creativity. She looked forward to learning more about the artist and the woman who seemed so refreshingly natural and connected to her surroundings.

Filtered sunlight filled the entire space with even natural light. The room was divided into three functional areas. On one side, a rectangular table held a large iMac, A3 printer, assorted notebooks, and colour swatches. Caitlin glanced up at the high-angled roof and floor-to-ceiling windows; they made the area seem much larger than it actually was.

To the left of the entrance, tucked into a corner, were a small log burner, a half-wall library, and a reading nook. It looked really cosy.

Caitlin sat down at one end of an orange sofa. Andi's home was stylish and eclectic and felt homely and comfortable. The afternoon's visit had taken an altogether more interesting turn the moment she'd discovered Andréa Rey's identity.

Andi poured tea from a red and white spotted teapot into two matching cups. "If you had signed your email as Caitlin, I may have guessed who you were," she said. "But C. Quinn? That gave me no clue at all."

Caitlin laughed. "I am sorry. That was my mistake. When I sent the email from my iPhone, I must have removed the digital signature with my full name."

"Well, that explains it. Are you a *quin*?"

Caitlin smirked as she accepted the cup from Andi. "No, there's only one of me. I'm not a twin, nor a triplet, or a quadruplet. I am, in fact, an only child."

Andi looked over at Caitlin. "And you have a sense of humour too."

Caitlin raised her eyebrows. She hoped to convey that she was enjoying their easy banter. "I try. This is grand. Thank you for the tea."

Andi settled herself into a chair across from Caitlin, her tanned legs tucked up under herself and one arm draped over the back of the chair. "No worries."

"Have you lived here long?"

"I found this half-acre block of land just over four years ago. I loved it straight away, because it borders the reserve. The green belt runs through Hakea down to the beach, where the creek ends."

"You are so close to the surf beach. That would be a huge advantage for a surfer girl," Caitlin teased. It was good to see Andi relax and be comfortable with her.

"Yes, it was perfect for the lifestyle I wanted. Before I changed my mind, I used my savings and bought it. Then I lived in a caravan on site for the first six months while the studio was being built."

“Was it designed by an architect? It seems perfectly laid out to suit your needs.”

“I knew what I wanted, so I drew up the plans.” Andi shrugged her shoulders like it was no special achievement.

Caitlin leaned back into the sofa and allowed herself to admire Andi, who had placed her hands gracefully in her lap. She had beautiful, expressive artist’s hands. Strong and slender. Just the thought of those hands on her sent a shudder of longing through her body.

As Andi held her gaze for a fleeting moment, Caitlin wondered if she could read her thoughts.

“My brother, Luc, was the builder. His company specialises in eco-friendly builds, so it was a no-brainer.”

“Does your brother live in Hakea too?”

“No, Luc and the rest of my family live in country Victoria, near Ballarat. Have you heard of a small town called Navigators?” Caitlin shook her head, and Andi continued, “It’s not far from an extinct volcano called Mt. Buninyong. The area is known for its rich volcanic soil; it’s perfect for vegetable and fruit growing.” Her eyes twinkled. “Am I sounding like a travel brochure?”

“That’s good. I want to learn all I can. Navigators, that’s an interesting name.”

“I think it has something to do with the rail link from Melbourne to Ballarat.”

“I’ll add it to my growing list. It sounds like another place to visit.”

Andi stood with the teapot poised over Caitlin’s empty cup. “Top up?”

Caitlin nodded and waited for Andi to settle back into her chair. For a few minutes they sat quietly and listened to the occasional shrieking of birds, while Koda scuffled across the timber floor in pursuit of a soft toy.

“She’s pretty cute. Is she still a kitten?” Caitlin asked, as Koda leapt onto the back of the sofa, almost causing her to spill her tea.

Koda slinked over and purred as she headbutted Caitlin’s shoulder.

“She’s four years old, very energetic, but she’ll always be my baby,” Andi said, looking affectionately at the beige ball of fluff.

Oh yes, there was no doubt that Andréa Rey could be a very attractive, enticing diversion while Caitlin was in Hakea.

TO CONTINUE READING,
PLEASE PURCHASE

WHERE THE LIGHT PLAYS

BY C. FONSECA

This excerpt is offered by Ylva Publishing.
Its primary function is the orientation of interested readers.
Ylva Publishing | www.ylva-publishing.com