



Kim Lawrence

A Passionate

PORTMEIRION  
PROPOSAL

MILLS & BOON

MODERN

The deep cloudless cobalt blue sky and the silvered azure sheen of the sea lent an authenticity to Italianate architecture of the village that appeared to be suspended above the beach where Eleri stood, a lonely, solitary figure among the couples and families enjoying the sun.

The illusion didn't withstand the water temperature. Eleri gasped a little as she waded into the shallows, but then this was not Italy where she lived these days, it was Portmeirion, a little corner of Wales where Italian dreams were built - actually a whole village of them.

Eleri's own Italian dream had begun here, in this exact spot.

You will *not* cry Eleri she told herself gritting her teeth as she pulled down the shades from her glossy dark hair to cover her swimming blue eyes. Behind the tinted lenses her glance slid to her left hand and the white slightly indented band that stood out stark against the golden tan of the rest of her skin.

Angrily she dashed away the moisture on her cheeks and, tucking her hand behind her back, trained her gaze on the blue of the sea...five years ago she'd been staring out in the same direction when a collective gasp and scattered murmurs had made her turn just in time to see what had caused the *wow* reaction.

She saw and understood - *totally!*

It was a man stood waist deep in the water and he was walking slowly out of the waves.

Her own reaction to the impression of raw male power had been less verbal and more *visceral*, spreading through her nerve endings like a shock wave. Her knees shaking, literally shaking, as she had watched him lift both hands to push the saturated jet black strands of hair off his face before shaking his head and sending out a shower of silvery drops, every minute detail of the moment imprinting itself indelibly in her memory.

Each step he took had revealed more of that deeply toasty gold bronzed skin, a body that was...well...*perfect*...broad shoulders a light dusting of dark hair across his powerful chest, a lighter dusting across his belly that was ridged with slabs of taut muscle. The low-slung dark swim shorts hugged thighs that were athletic and muscular. The muscles bunched as he bent forward to reach for a towel on the sand when he suddenly lifted his head and looked directly at her.

He stared then blinked as though he too had felt the same irrational stab of recognition she had experienced before he began to walk towards her.

She waited mesmerized by the way he moved - just mesmerized by him.

His voice turned out to be deep and sexy. She didn't understand a word he said but she could have listened forever or at least until she fainted which she would do if he didn't put some clothes on.

It wasn't until she tried to reply that she realized she'd been holding her breath, after a few raspy false starts she managed a husky. 'Sorry I don't speak Italian.'

His eyes widened drawing her attention to the crazy length of his dark eyelashes and the golden specks swirling in the dark depths of his eyes. 'You look...' His English was barely accented, there was nothing *barely* about the sensuality in his scrutiny as his dark eyes swept upwards from her feet to her face. 'I assumed that like this place you were a delightful piece of home transported here to Wales.'

'No I'm...Welsh...' Hating the fact she sounded breathless and girly- she despised both - she strove to inject a casual note her voice as she added after a brief moment of panic-yes she *had* forgotten her name. 'Eleri.'

'So Welsh Eleri.' He rolled his tongue over her name his voice a scalp tingling velvet purr. 'You know Portmeirion?'

She nodded, she had grown up a stone's throw from Sir Clough Williams-Ellis's famous village. 'I'm not an expert,' she said watching as he pulled a white t-shirt over his head.

'I would appreciate a guided tour...?'

She looked at him and saw danger in capital letters, every instinct in her was screaming run.

A yell from a child nearby made Eleri jump, self-consciously wiping a tear for her cheek as she adjusted her sunglasses. She hadn't run, and the rest she mused, as she rubbed the white band on her finger, was history - or more accurately her life.

It was in the Gwyllt, the Edwardian wild garden, that they shared their first kiss. She closed her eyes and shuddered now at the memory of the heart-thudding anticipation, his long cool fingers framing her face, stroking her cheek, standing close enough for the heat of his body to make her feel dizzy with desire. Then when his mouth had covered hers she had melted into him.

'He tasted salty like the sea,' she whispered.

A wet hand on her shoulder jolted Eleri free of the memories.

'Have you been crying?'

'No,' she lied as her left hand was dragged out of the pocket of the floaty shirt she wore over her swimsuit.

The grinning, dripping figure doing the dragging was just as gorgeous as he had been five years ago.

'Told you I'd find it!'

Staring at the ring he held between his thumb and forefinger, the ring he'd designed for her, Eleri gave a broken sigh.

‘I thought I’d lost it forever and I...’ Her voice quivered as she sniffed flexing her finger as he slid the ring back in place. ‘I don’t know what’s wrong with me I *never* blub.’

Her husband’s kiss tasted of salt this time too, but it was more intimate, more *everything*...time had not diminished the passion and mutual hunger.

It had grown.

They came back here every year to celebrate that first time they met...but this year was extra special.

‘I’m told, cara, that pregnancy will do that to a woman.’ He brushed her lips his hand tenderly resting on her still flat belly. ‘And you are a very special woman my Welsh Eleri.’

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