



Lured By the Siren

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Description: Kai's brother is lost at sea, leaving him the sole heir to a fortune he never wanted. Desperate to escape his impending responsibilities, Kai embarks on a voyage to find his brother, hoping against all hope that he's still alive. But when a vicious storm attacks his ship, Kai is knocked overboard, washing ashore to a paradise.

Evelyn has spent her life dreaming of escaping the island that's both her home and prison. Kafigda has been ensnared by an eternal storm ever since she can remember. Trapping anyone who gets caught in its grasp, she's never been able to leave—no one can. When a shy, injured sailor named Kai washes up on her beach, Evelyn's world is shaken. As she nurses him back to health, an unexpected bond develops between them. As their attraction deepens, they begin to uncover dark secrets buried deep within Kafigda—secrets that threaten not only their newfound love but their chance of ever leaving the island.

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Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:36 am

Prologue

The storm came like a ghost in the night. One minute, we were sailing on clear water, and the next, we were being attacked by the sea as it threatened to rip us apart.

I grip the portside railing, my knuckles white with the strain as the wind howls around us. Rain pummels us in torrents so heavy that I can barely see what is directly in front of me. Waves crash over the deck, loosening my grip on the railing with every blow.

The storm rages like an angry dragon, roaring and sending its fury down upon us. I can't hear the commands of the Captain and crew.

I look out over the sea, spotting a blurry mass in the distance.

Is that land?

We are miles away from any charted piece of land. It isn't possible unless we veered off course, but the compass holds true. We have taken this new route as a test. It is supposed to save us a full day's worth of travel. I look down at the map now soaked with rain, and there is no land, only an endless sea. So what have we sailed into, and what is beyond the storm's clouds?

A bolt of lightning splits the sky, sparks fly, and I spin at the sound of cracking wood, watching in horror as the foremast falls into the churning sea. I watch it sink below the waves with a whimper. We are doomed.

A glimmer flashes in the sea, something pink and sparkling. I lean over the railing to get a better look. The ship lurches, and I hear a loud crash before I fly overboard. Gripping harder, I hold onto the railing with one hand, dangling over the furious, white-peaked waves of the ocean. We hit something massive, and the entire front of the ship is gone. We are sinking. We aren't getting out of this alive.

Suddenly, I hear a beautiful sound echo through the howling of the wind, a song sung by a heavenly voice. It draws me to it, and I search for its owner. It is absurd, but a sudden sense of serenity washes over me, even as I plunge into the icy water and the sinking ship drags me further beneath the waves. That euphoric calmness is all I can feel. So, when I take my final breath, pulling the salty sea into my lungs as I fade into the cold, dark depths of the sea, I feel no fear, only an overwhelming sense of peace.

1

Kai

I push my spectacles up my nose, pulling my hood down further to shadow my face as I open the door to the pub.

It has been a month since my elder brother, Dru, went missing—lost at sea. What was supposed to be a basic shipping expedition, taking no more than a week, has turned into a catastrophe. Dru is the heir to our father's empire. The entire province is in mourning, assuming Dru and the crew are dead, swallowed by the waves, forever lost. I, on the other hand, don't believe it. It just can't be true.

My father was teetering on the edge of life long before Dru went missing all those weeks ago, but now the end is truly near. I can feel it. My father's days are numbered, and I have absolutely no interest in taking on the title of province leader or being head of his shipping enterprise.

My father created the Ivarrson Shipping Company from nothing. Starting out with a single battered ship, transporting goods for small businesses that couldn't afford large trade services, my father worked hard acquiring new ships and clientele with every trip. Over the past two decades, the company has become known far and wide, making us a major player in the shipping and trading industry in Halvendorf. My father is the only reason our small settlement of Renyir is now a legitimate province within the Kingdom.

Becoming the province leader of Renyir and the face of Ivarsson Shipping is a huge responsibility, one I'm not ready for. I am no leader. I haven't spent my entire life training for it. Not like Dru has. In my hands, the province will fail, I know that for a fact.

I'm much more accustomed to a quieter existence, preferring my botany, science experiments, and other hobbies to a life behind a desk commanding an entire company. The life of the second son suits me. The lack of stress and pressure has kept me youthful and sane. I'm not ready to let that go, not now and probably not ever.

Plus, I have no interest in ships. I don't even know how to swim. How could someone with no knowledge of the maritime industry or the ocean run a shipping enterprise?

No, life is better spent tucked away in my greenhouse on the manor grounds, where I can work on my plants and hone my herbalist skills.

My father always calls my interests 'dalliances', but my little slice of peace and privacy in the garden greenhouse is my greatest passion. It is my entire life's work, and it is the only reason I am currently outside a rather shady establishment located on the east side of town. This is a place my brother always told me to steer clear of, but desperate times call for desperate measures.

I am willing to do quite literally anything not to be the heir to my father's legacy, and

if that means coming alone to the East End Dockside Pub, known for its riff-raff and crime, I will do it.

A little over a week ago, a member of Dru's crew was miraculously found, and I tracked him down, setting up this meeting with him in an attempt to find out what happened and if Dru could be out there somewhere, still alive.

The dim lighting of the pub is an adjustment from the bright sunlight of the warm day outside, and it takes my eyes a moment to adjust.

No longer seeing spots, the inside of the pub comes fully into view, and every single person in the establishment turns to look at me.

Dread pools in my stomach as I suddenly realize how terrible an idea this is. It probably would have been smarter for me to insist that the man come to me somewhere closer to home.

"Too late for that now," I mumble to myself.

Pushing my spectacles up again, I pull my heavy wool black cloak tighter around me, feeling too exposed under the onslaught of stares.

"Aye, boy!" A man calls from a table in the corner.

He's alone, two glasses of ale on the table in front of him. I hope to the gods this is the man I'm here to meet. He does look a little rough around the edges, malnourished, with a wildness in his eyes that openly shares the shock of what he's just gone through.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:36 am

The skin around his eyes crinkles as he greets me with a seemingly crazed smirk. His cheeks are laden with red, either from the drink he's currently guzzling or from days spent exposed to the sun on that island. His blue-grey eyes are distant and strained, but there is a look of recognition that flashes through them as he motions for me to join him.

Though my brother and I are several years apart, we share several of the same features. We both have the Ivarrson family's sharp nose, high cheekbones, and emerald eyes, but whereas Dru has the dark brown hair of our father, I have a head full of golden curls to match our mother's.

Still, I see a moment of remembrance pass over his features. He has a story to tell, and I'm not sure I'm ready to hear it. His clothes hang loosely off his malnourished frame, and I make a note to order him a bowl of stew before I shuffle over to him, trying my best not to make eye contact with anyone in the place.

I nod my head at him before taking a seat. "Are you Merrit?"

"The one and only. Here, drink," Merrit moves the second pint of ale across the table to me. It sloshes, spilling pale brown liquid across the sticky wooden surface.

"Thank you," I say nervously, sipping lightly on the hard brew. I've never been one for alcohol, and I try not to cough as the bitter, bubbling drink burns down my throat.

"No, thank you, boy. These are going on 'ur coin," He laughs, a gurgling sound that makes me cringe at the roughness of it.

“Right,” I say. “I did set up this meeting after all.”

I wave down the bartender and order two bowls of whatever stew is on the menu, hoping the warm liquid will help satisfy the gnawing feeling churning in my gut.

A heavy silence stretches between us, and his yellowing eyes bore into me, making gooseflesh crawl along my arms. I bypass any small talk and get to the root of our meeting. The sooner I can get out of this place, the better.

“What happened to the Golden Serpent?”

Merrit’s eyes darken, “She’s gone, ‘fraid. Swallowed by the spirits in the sea.”

I frown, “But how? Did something attack you? Was it a storm? Did anyone else survive?” My final question sounds more like a whisper. It is the most important question and the only answer I really want to know.

“There was a storm. Came from nowhere. One second the seas were calm, sky clear. Next, it were crashing waves, winds so strong they ripped through the sails. It weren’t natural, boy. I dived into the sea, swam my way as far as I could to where the seas were calm again,” Merrit pauses, a shutter from the memories racking through him. “If anyone survived, the sirens have ‘em now. Their terrible wailing song would have lured ‘em further to their doom. The storm was full of their song. Ain’t no one left if they haven’t come back by now.”

“Sirens?” I scoff. They’re a myth, nothing more than a children’s tale. Merrit was probably talking about the sounds of the wind in the storm. The province encountered its fair share of intense storms, and I know that the whistle of those ferocious winds can play tricks on your mind, sounding like something else entirely.

“Aye, boy. Sirens.”

This man's mind clearly isn't fully there. He was lost for weeks at sea after all, found half dead on a small island off the shore just over a week ago. There is no way his mind was fully recovered in such a short time.

I think back to the stories my mother read to Dru and I as children. She read us the tale of the sirens and their call. They are dangerous monsters that lure sailors to their lair, never to be seen again, but those are nothing more than stories spun of mythical creatures that didn't exist.

There were other bloodthirsty creatures in those fables. There were tales of orcs, trolls, dwarves, and more, but no one had ever seen these creatures, so who was to say they existed at all?

I don't believe in fairy tales. I believe in science and tangible proof.

"You survived, though," I continue, prodding. "So there could be others out there. Is there anything you remember seeing? Did anyone else make it out of the storms?"

The bartender interrupts me, placing two steaming bowls between us. I inhale the rich, spiced aroma and am immediately comforted by the familiar scent of a traditional meat stew. It reminds me of the one my mother used to make when we were children. It was always Dru's favorite.

I let the silence stretch between us as Merrit dives into the hearty meal, devouring it in front of me, slurping every last bit. I can't imagine what he's been through, and a sudden sense of looming dread drops in my gut, souring the stew I've eaten as I wait to hear what he says next.

Merrit's eyes glaze over as he leans back in his chair, an empty bowl before him, and stares at a spot behind me. I look over my shoulder, but then he says, "There were land somewhere in those storms. I saw trees and rock, but it was gone as soon as I

seen it. Even so, weeks have gone by. No one could survive out there for weeks. Not with the sirens in those waters.”

My brows shoot up. An island? If there truly is an island in those waters, then there is a chance that Dru is there—still alive. Hope blooms inside me.

I look down at my watch, noting the time. The sun should be setting soon, and I don't want to be here when night falls. With a sigh, I think about what Merrit has said. He does have a good point. It was now over a month since the ship went missing.

If they weren't back by now, they were probably gone, but I can't give up hope yet, not if there is even a chance Dru is out there.

I need to find him.

My brother is strong and smart. If anyone could survive an extreme storm, it was Dru. He's alive out there. I just know it.

“How much would it take for you to lead me there?”

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:36 am

Merrit snorts, “Ain’t no way I’m goin’ back to that part of the sea, boy. It’s cursed.”

“Name your price, any number.”

The man narrows his eyes, tilting his head slightly before he says, “Ten thousand silver pieces.”

“Done.”

Merrit’s eyes go wide.

“We leave tonight. You’ll get half now and half once we’ve made it to the destination you last saw the ship. After that, you can choose to leave. We’ll have a small boat just for you to travel back here with your silver.”

“Seas, I should have asked for more,” he laughs heartily, bringing his tankard up for me to cheer with him. I oblige, ale sloshing from both our glasses before Merrit downs the rest of his pint in one big gulp. “Let’s sail, Cap’n.”

The sea has never been my friend. In all the years I have spent sailing with my father as a young boy, learning the ropes of his business beside my brother, I never got used to the rolling waves and unpredictable nature of the ocean. My stomach roils as I empty its contents over the starboard railing, clinging onto the damp wood for dear life.

Why did I want to do this again? Oh yeah, so that I can live a quiet, comfortable, stress-free life.

Merrit laughs heartily, smacking me on the back, “Aye, boy. Sea life ain’t for everyone. I hope we do find Master Dru for yer sake.”

He continues to laugh as he walks away, and I vomit again into the sparkling blue waves below. We have to find Dru. There is no other option for me.

With a sigh, I push away from the ship’s railing and stumble my way to where the Captain of the vessel is up at the helm. Merrit stands next to him, working as the navigator, taking us directly to the spot where he had last seen my brother’s ship.

“How much farther out is it?” I ask. It’s day three at sea, and I’m not sure my stomach can handle much more of this. Not a single thing I’ve eaten during this time has stayed down, and I am starting to see double from the lack of sustenance.

“There!” Merrit calls, pointing over the portside railing to a part of the ocean that is much darker than its surroundings, almost black. “We sailed ‘cross those inky waters, that’s when the storms hit us.”

A shiver travels through my body. This is where Dru’s ship, the Golden Serpent, was lost, and we are about to sail right into it.

“This is as far as I’ll go, boy,” Merrit says, handing me the map and compass he used to navigate. “I hope you make it back.”

A solemnness in his eyes causes me to squirm under his stare. He knows this is a suicide mission, and he’s just taking my money and running. Wonderful.

I watch as two crew members begin to lower the small boat I made sure was ready for Merrit, filled with his earnings, down into the calm waters. He turns to me and frowns before climbing down the rope ladder and rowing away, back toward home.

Clearing my throat, I turn to the gray-haired man who is Captain of the ship and say, “Head for those black waters, please, Captain.”

The man raises a busy brow at me, but does as he’s told. He’s being paid handsomely to listen to me after all.

The tension on the deck heightens as we sail closer to the strange waters, but everything stays perfectly calm.

No sign of a storm, no change in the sea’s currents.

Everything is perfectly normal.

I half run, half stumble to the bow of the ship, leaning over the front far enough to look straight down where the sea's darkness meets the cerulean blue.

It's as if the ocean has swallowed all the color. The stark contrast from crystal clear blue to pitch black is startling. It’s like a disease bleeding into its filth into the sea.

Merrit was right. This place is cursed.

I hold my breath as the ship cuts through the water into the black, and chaos erupts.

Lighting strikes behind me, and I spin just in time to see the main mast of the ship splinter before it falls into the sea. The Captain is yelling commands at the helm, turning the wheel in a desperate attempt to escape the storm. Waves crash from all sides, spraying salty water onto my face. I wipe at my spectacles, unable to see clearly, squinting into the stormy haze before the ship. Something is out there, large and imposing in the distance, but I can’t quite make it out.

I lean slightly further over the bow, straining my eyes to see, when a large gust of

wind comes from nowhere, and suddenly the peaked waves are coming closer.

With a final shout, I plunge into the inky waters. I flail my arms and feet, anything to try and get above the water's surface, but I don't know how to swim, and even if I did, my body is being pulled down by the forceful current of the sea.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

This is it, my end.

I choke, my air supply fully depleting as the outline of the ship overhead fades from view, and my final thought before I succumb to the closing tunnel of darkness clouding my vision is that I'll never know if my brother truly survived or not.

2

Evelyn

The waves crash in the distance as boisterous laughter and chatter fill the Elder's hut. The abundance of plush blankets, intricately crafted seashell chairs, and walls lined with woven straw have transformed this large hut into a cozy haven for us to spend our days. In this space, we lounge in comfort when not busy entertaining the men who have wound up on our island of Kafigda.

A soft ocean breeze rustles the straw, whispering its way around my siren sisters as the sun shines happily through the large open doors, creating a serene atmosphere of relaxation and warmth.

Many of my sisters will be preparing for the ceremony tonight, and their male conquests, but it's been many moons since I've taken a lover. My interests have drifted to the lush forests and wildlife that cover our rocky shores.

Spending a hundred and twenty-seven years on the island of Kafigda has given me plenty of time to become familiar with our lavish home. I hadn't paid much mind to our surroundings, but in recent years, I've become obsessed with learning more about

the island's vegetation and new ways to use it for medicinal purposes.

So, instead of spending my days lying in bed with all the other sirens and men, I've been exploring the dense jungles and discovering new plant species.

My half-sister Katarina would rather I take her advice and spend more time free of my clothes and indulging in what the village has to offer, but I'll never be what my sister wants me to be.

I've grown tired of bedding men just for a mere moment of pleasure, I long to feel something real, and have someone all my own to spend my days exploring with.

I take a moment to soak in the peace of the early morning and look around the room at all of the sirens enjoying this time of peaceful tranquility in the Elder's hut. A small fire burning in the center of the room makes it even more welcoming. We all like to spend our mornings wrapped in warm blankets and lying on the cushions that line the floor before our evening events. I try to imagine myself as one of them, content with spending each day tangled in the sheets with a sailor who's never interested in more than a tryst.

But I can't, I can't imagine myself wanting anything less than a true connection. I ache for genuine conversation and someone who's passionate about the same things I am.

I yawn, standing and walking to the open doorway to watch the sprawling sea beyond the beach.

While Kafigda may be home to the sirens, we are much different from what the stories say. For one, we can walk on land. As soon as our legs touch the waves, we transform, but on dry land, we have two legs like anyone else. Secondly, our song doesn't lure men to their deaths. Some of us can use our voice to heal, change the

tides and weather patterns, or even manipulate the mind.

Though we spend most days surrendering to the passionate energy and wild abandon of our island's vibrant culture, we have also created a flourishing cooperative community here.

Everyone pitches in, using their talents and strengths to transform this place into a vision of paradise. Working together, we have constructed new homes for those who fall victim to the storms surrounding us and find themselves stranded on our beaches, ensuring they are comfortable in their new home. Our communal spirit extends to cooking, where we make meals and host gatherings beneath the starlit sky for the whole island, often leading to freed inhibitions of lust and unity.

Each day seems to blend into the next, and I often feel like there is no end in sight to the routine of it all. Kafigda is a beautiful place to call home, even if I feel like a prisoner stuck in a paradise.

“A ship has been spotted at the border!” One of my siren sisters walks past me into the hut, pulling me from my thoughts.

“Another one so soon?” Katarina squeals gleefully beside me. I follow her as she runs from the Elder's hut to the beach, where a large ship can be seen on the horizon. Like a fish in a net, it's caught within the feverish storms surrounding our cursed rock.

“What did we do to deserve such a treat?” Katarina's strawberry blonde hair flows in luscious waves down her back. I watch her pink and blue scales sparkle in the light as she clasps her hands together, bouncing excitedly on her webbed feet.

She loves it when the storms bring new sailors to the island. I, on the other hand, could never see another ship again and know peace.

The storms that rage in the ocean near our island are not natural. They're a curse, and the reason legends claim us to be monsters. It's not us luring sailors to our shores—it's the island and its storms.

It's always been this way, for as long as we can remember. Kafigda is beautiful, everything we could ever want grows here, and we are thriving. There's just one problem—we can never leave this blighted place.

From the outside, it appears to be a storm that even the most seasoned sailors dare not cross, but past the dark clouds and rain is our paradise, which is nothing more than a gilded cage.

Our island is full of secrets, things that the sirens haven't yet uncovered, or if my suspicions are correct, don't want to expose.

Like my sister, most of them were happy to spend their days beneath the sun's warm rays, swimming in the deep cerulean waters, and enjoying the company of the sailors trapped on our shores. But I'm not content to waste my life in this place. Maybe it's because I was raised by an Elder who told me stories of her youth where sirens were worshiped by sailors and merchants alike.

My childhood was filled with tales of travelers who came and left as they pleased, who were able to experience a world past the small island of Kafigda. Tales of the Elders using their powers to predict storms that could save lives and steer fish into the waiting nets of hungry fishermen.

I longed to know a time before the storms, before we were cut off from the world and legend transformed us into monsters who lure men to their deaths.

The Elders who washed up on the shores of Kafigda all those centuries ago tell us how the mainlanders loved us and how the island became a destination for weary

travelers seeking rest after a long fishing season.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

Then one day, off in the distance, a single storm cloud swirled, dark grey, with streaks of lightning that brightened the sky. The cloud grew and encircled the island, massive waves gathered and crashed against the rocks, destroying all the boats waiting to take the sailors back to Kafigda. Try as the sirens might, there isn't a song that has ever been sung that can lessen the wrath of the storms.

We've learned to survive with what the ocean and the island provide. If any new ships become trapped in the swirling clouds, we work to save all we can, but as soon as they are safe on our shores, they're stuck.

No one can leave.

Ever.

Although many have tried, no sailor or siren has ever made it past the circle of rolling storm clouds alive.

As the years pass, some of us have created ways of coping with this bleak existence, like my half-sister. She has honed her songs and can lure virtually any sailor she wants into her bed. She is well versed in how to pleasure a man and how to demand pleasure in return. Katarina never gets bored of sharing her exploits and tips for how she uses her curves and siren's voice to get men to do exactly what she wants.

One moon ago, a large royal vessel was lured into the storms. Katarina rescued a tall, striking dark-haired man with an air of confidence about him, just before the waves swallowed his ship. I doubt she even remembers any of the names of her many conquests, but with this one, I often find her sneaking him away into the forest late at

night, and I only roll my eyes at her appetite.

I used to be like her, insatiable, but after years of bedding too many men to count, I began to crave connection, deeper conversations, and real feelings. None of the men are interested in anything that serious. While I still participate in the occasional celebration, I've sworn off routinely bedding men until I feel something more for one of them.

I sigh, focusing my attention back on the ship trapped within the tempest of the sea. "I wonder how many men will survive this time, if any at all."

"Hopefully plenty," she winks at me. "I could use another man to entertain me. That royal boy is getting rather predictable."

"You've only had him for one moon, surely you aren't sick of him already. There has to be more you can teach him."

"Sis, I can teach him plenty, but it's more that I want him to know what I want and be ready to give it to me anytime I require," Kat whines, before adding. "Why don't you give him a try and see? You need to see what he's like." Of course, she brought up the same argument we've had for weeks, months, years really.

"I have no interest in teaching a new conquest what I prefer or becoming involved in any other schemes you are cooking up. I crave more from this life. Don't you?" I am already exhausted by the turn this conversation was starting to take.

I can only have the same argument so many times before we talk in circles around each other, and suddenly, I start to believe that I am the unreasonable one.

"You've spent too much time believing the Elder's stories. There will never be a happily ever after for us. We will never be like Aurelia. She was one in a million.

You know that, and Florence putting all these ideas in your head about being just like her makes me worry about you, E.” She spoke softly, her voice lined with a gentleness that I rarely saw, but also a tinge of pity.

Maybe I am being unreasonable.

Kat always brought up our mother during these talks. Aurelia was one of a kind. Fearless. Beautiful. Kind. Clever. Everything I wanted to be.

She was a member of the Elder council and worked so hard to rid our island of the storms encircling it. Aurelia was one of the lucky few sirens who found true love, the kind that sweeps you off your feet, and ballads were written about. She was so desperately in love with my father and he with her, that when she died giving birth to me, he sailed out into the waves, losing himself to the storm.

He could not stand the thought of living without her. Even my birth couldn’t keep him in this world. I was left to be raised by one of the Elders, Florence. She always made sure to keep my mother’s memory alive by sharing stories of Aurelia, and as much as I love her for it, my mother can never be replaced in my heart.

“I will not lie with another stranger doomed to live out the same fate that I am. My heart cannot take it anymore. Besides, I am never able to lure men to my bed in the same way you are.” I jest, trying to keep the conversation light.

I am in no mood to dive deep into all the reasons why I can never feel fulfilled by this life. It is too early in the day for that kind of talk.

“Speaking of, if that royal boy is getting so predictable, why not hand him over to the rest of the girls?” I say, desperate to change the subject. “Maybe it’s time for him to find someone new, and you too.”

My sister has a vicious appetite that never seems to be sated. Being a siren came with its perks, including being completely irresistible to any man she chose to pursue.

"Evie, I'm still having fun! You should try it again sometime. I highly recommend it." She wiggles her brows at me. "There's just something about a royal I can't resist. They're so broody."

Kat looks off into the distance, and we watch lightning strike the ship, sparks flying. "They're always looking for ways to be of service. Trust me, E, once you've had a royal man on his knees for you, you will be singing a very different tune." She laughs and dives into the gentle waves.

3

Evelyn

My heart aches as I stare off at the impending wreck, and I rub my hand on my chest at the very thought of watching another man gasp his final breath beneath the sea, all because we couldn't get there in time. I would love nothing more than to rescue another group of sailors from certain death, but I can't bear to be there if we are too late.

I watch my siren sisters stay just beyond the angry white peaked sea, waiting to see if the ship will make it or inevitably need their help. To the untrained eye, they simply look like shimmering reflections on the water thanks to their scales.

A clap of thunder echoes across the sea and I jump, startling myself and turning from the harrowing scene, deciding my time is better spent preparing medical supplies for a new batch of men who will be resigned to this fate they didn't choose.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

Heading up the beach to the cove where some of my favorite healing plants thrive, my mind drifts to where the men on that ship might be from. The sand shifts under my feet, and I get lost in the musing of whimsical far-off kingdoms, fishermen happily coming and going from our shores, and a whole bustling world just beyond the storm clouds.

Rounding a bend, I take a deep breath and soak in the moments of peace before the chaos. The sky just above the island is a crystal clear blue, and a flock of seagulls pass overhead. I feel a pang of jealousy at their freedom. They seem to be one of the few creatures that can pass undetected through the storms.

If only I had wings instead of a tail.

My favorite hiding spot is a secluded cove just a brisk walk from the village. It comes into view, and I decide to lie down on the damp sand, wanting a few more blissful moments of solitude before gathering supplies.

Gentle waves slowly lap up my legs, and they begin to transform into a tail of purple and green scales. Moments like these remind me of how much I love being a siren, hearing the ocean's call, the feeling of diving under the waves, and my magic, but I would give all of that up if it meant I wasn't born here on Kafigda.

Watching the sea undulate far out on the horizon, I let the sound of the incoming tide lull me to a dreamless sleep.

When my eyes flutter open again, I let out a yawn and stretch my hands above my head, sitting up. The tide has escaped further down the beach while I was sleeping,

and my tail is back to a pair of green and purple scaled legs. I brush off the sand and blink slowly against the setting sun that's just meeting the line of the horizon.

A flash catches my eye, and I see something reflecting off the water. There is an object bobbing up and down against the waves, several lengths from shore. It looks like it could be a person.

For a moment, I think the ocean must be playing tricks on me because it suddenly disappears, but I rub my eyes and stand quickly, making my way to the edge of the water. I feel a pulling need to go out and investigate.

Without waiting to see if it resurfaces, I dive into the shallow water, swimming out to discover the mystery waiting for me in the open sea. The storm must be happy to have an entire ship of new victims, because the further I swim from the shore, the rougher the waters become. The sea here is usually much calmer, but the storm seems to be stretching, possibly searching for the same thing I am.

Being a siren has its perks, but sometimes even having a tail and breathing underwater isn't enough to fight the magic of the storms.

I break free of a rather aggressive current and breach the surface, searching for whatever was bobbing there.

I finally spot it, or rather him—it's a man.

Dark blonde hair is plastered to his forehead, and something reflects off his face. He begins to sink beneath the surface, and I quickly swim to him, but just as I reach out to grab hold of his arm, a wave crashes between us, pulling him completely under.

I dive down in search of the drowning man, and my heart beats loudly in my ears as I see him sinking into the dark depths below. He's tangled in a mess of ropes, only

making him sink faster, and I desperately push through the ocean for him, tail whipping with powerful flicks until I grasp his limp hand. With one robust tug, I free him from the debris and hurry, swimming as fast as possible with a full-grown man in tow to the surface. This man is heavier than he looks, and for all my efforts, might already be dead.

Pulling him onto shore and into my secluded cove, I scold myself, wondering how I could make such an impulsive decision. Did I just doom another man to a life on this floating prison?

Sand sticks to every bit of his exposed flesh, and I take a moment to check for a pulse, inspecting him further. Thankfully, he has a pulse, and I continue looking over him.

His light hair is just long enough to begin to curl at the ends, his high cheekbones and chiseled jaw stir something deep in my belly. A fluttering of butterflies as I examine him further. My hands are still on his wrist, and I can feel his pulse growing weaker beneath my touch.

Blood is slowly dripping down his face from a wound just below his hairline, and I cautiously move his wet hair to get a closer look.

Bright red oozes from the gash and trails down the side of his face, just then the sand beneath him begins to darken into a deep crimson.

Panicking, I roll him to his side, searching for the source and find a large slice across his back. The skin gapes open, and I notice how pale he's become. He's losing too much blood. This man is surely doomed.

As calmly as I can, I begin singing the song I know best, one used for healing, and hope it's enough to stitch these wounds back together. If only I could replenish the

blood he has already lost, but this will have to be enough.

While all siren's magic is similar, some are more skilled at certain aspects than others. I've never mastered mind manipulation like many of my sisters, my greatest gift has always been to heal, and I spend much of my free time practicing and learning all I can.

Whenever I stumble upon an injured creature, I sing my song, letting the words and my voice swirl around them, correcting and healing their ailments. An albatross with a broken wing, a turtle with a crack in its shell, one of the girls or men who had a little too much fun—I work to heal them all.

If I can't leave this place, I want to leave a lasting impact at least and help all that I can while I'm trapped here.

The wound on the man's hairline begins to stitch together, and the bleeding stops as I focus on the second wound along his back. I let the song hum through me, and it tingles on my lips.

It's a melody I know almost as well as the pattern of my emerald and lilac scales.

I watch as both gashes fully knit back together, and I gently lay his head onto the sand. Hurrying to the shoreline's edge, I gather clusters of seaweed that the retreating tide has left behind.

While my song can heal wounds, the magic comes at a cost. I can quickly exhaust myself until I require healing of my own. My healing song pulls from my own health and energy.

Heading back to the cover, I gather additional supplies from the stash I put together earlier in the day and begin to wrap his torso with seaweed. My fingers brush his rib

cage and up along his chest, feeling his warmth. I let my hands travel up to linger just above the side of his face. Resisting the urge to touch him, I take another second to drink him in while he's unconscious.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

His sweeping eyelashes flutter beneath the reflective device sitting on his face, and I can't help but notice how handsome he is. Not in the rugged way most sailors here are, but in a more refined and polished way.

All sharp angles and crisp lines.

His white long-sleeved shirt is plastered to his skin, smoothing over his defined chest and down his flat stomach, leaving very little to the imagination. He's wearing dark trousers and tall boots that look barely broken in. Shiny buttons run along the sides, reminding me of a pair I've seen one of the other sailors wear, I just can't place which one.

As I examine the strange device on his face, I notice a crack on its surface that seems beyond repair. I carefully peel them from him, resisting the urge to caress his smooth jawline and delicately place them on the rock beside me.

While the men I've bedded before have all been attractive in their own ways, I feel a tug deep in my core for this man. A longing that I have never felt before. He stands out from the other men on the island, a striking contrast that draws me to admire his beauty. His features are more delicate, as if he was painted by an artist's gentle touch. Smooth skin glistens in the dying sunlight and is unmarred by the harshness of labor or scars of battle. He is flawless.

His long lashes brush the top of his cheeks, which I notice are starting to regain a healthy pink hue. The golden curls that cover his head look as soft as the fine sand that runs along the beach, and my fingers itch to rake through them. His expansive shoulders and slim hips have me dreaming of matching all of his sharp edges with my

soft curves.

Reaching out, I sweep away the curl that keeps falling onto his face, letting my hand brush along the side of his head before placing another piece of the plant across his wound. I sit back on my scaled legs and wait for him to take a full breath.

My mind wanders to places it shouldn't, as I imagine what it would be like to be pinned down by him as he makes me gasp out in pleasure. What would it be like to try one of those new positions Kat always goes on about, with him?

I close my eyes, falling into a dream of kissing him along his jaw and trailing my lips down his sculpted chest all the way to the curved edge of his hip bone.

A shudder of pleasure moves through me, and I think about all the moments that I've been taking for myself lately.

A woman has needs after all.

I think about how I've explored myself, allowing my fingers to expertly coax the waves of pleasure I seek. The moans I can't hold back as I work my fingers inside my center, finding my release, but now I picture not mine, but his strong fingers in their place. And then my mind shifts to dreams of his thick, hard cock pressing slowly at my entrance, opening me and filling me fully.

I groan at the thought, letting my daydream go farther as I see myself seated atop him, rocking against his length, imagining its smooth feel coated with my desire. I bite my lip as I picture him thrusting into me until my orgasm crashes through me in glorious waves, his own release following quickly.

My eyes shoot open, the daydream vanishing instantly as the man makes a small sound.

“Pull it together, Evelyn. He’s just like every other man who’s come here. What are you getting so worked up for?” I chastise myself, but something about this feels different. I’ve never had such an instant connection to anyone who’s washed up on these shores.

I haven’t even seen his eyes or heard his voice.

Suddenly, he coughs, attempting to purge what seems like the entire contents of the sea out on the beach.

He releases a final cough, squinting in my direction so much that I can’t see the color of his eyes. “Where am I? Wh-what happened?”

“Shhh, it’s alright. You’re safe now. Lay back down, please. You’re hurt.” I pleaded with him, placing my hands on either side of his shoulders, lowering him to the ground.

His eyes fluttered closed again. His breathing is shallow and labored, which worries me, but he seems to have passed out again.

I fear my healing song is not enough to fully fix his ailments. He’s going to need rest and constant monitoring over the next few days.

I look up to the sky, the blue now replaced by the streaks of purple and orange as the sun makes its final descent. I curse to myself, I can’t carry him all the way back to the village myself. Of course, I can always leave him and get help. I’m sure Mathius, the strongest of the men back in the village, can carry him with no problem.

My gaze shifts back to the sea, where the tide is still going out. Looking back at the man, I watch his chest rise and fall with weak breaths. What if he wakes up while I’m gone? I can’t just abandon him, leaving him injured and alone in a place he doesn’t

know.

I've spent many nights in this cove avoiding quality time with the rest of the sirens. This place is my home away from home. It's comfortable enough for a sea dweller, and I've brought a few of my past lovers out here to enjoy ourselves away from the others. I never heard any complaints from them. Sure, we were a bit distracted and they didn't have a head wound, some possible broken ribs, and a gash along their entire back, but still, I can make this work.

Slipping my hands under him, I grab underneath his arms and begin to drag him near my makeshift bed in the dry corner.

This cove is surrounded by rocks that reach up into a peak, creating a large room that is isolated from the elements. The stars twinkle and dance through small holes in the stone ceiling, providing a calming glow to the space, while the tide lures waves to the shore, composing a gentle sea song as they lap against the rocky shore.

This place has always felt like my own private island where I could steal away to think or just get away from it all.

Delicately, I place him on the bed and stare down at his handsome face. A flutter blooms in my chest, and I can't quite put my finger on it. What is this feeling? I've never been so infatuated with a man just from a few brief glances.

I run my hand along his neck and check to make sure his pulse is still strong. His heart beats steadily under the tips of my fingers, and I find myself wanting to curl up next to this stranger and keep him safe. My priorities right now are to keep him breathing and warm him up further.

While my body is used to changing temperatures from water to land, his soaked clothes and fragile human body are not. If I don't raise his temperature soon, he'll

freeze to death before he has a chance to fully recover.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

I drape the only blanket I have available over his unconscious form and look around for the proper supplies to build a fire. Stealing one more glance at his delicate features and soft curls before I begin.

4

Kai

My head pounds as pulsing pain wraps around my skull. I try to open my eyes, but the pain is too great. Each of my limbs feels like an iron weight is holding it down. Fire laces across my back, and I can't take it any longer. I roll to the side and vomit every last thing in my stomach. Salt and bile coat my mouth, and suddenly, smooth, cool hands are on my shoulder, urging me to lie back down, but my back is in agony, and I groan, pushing against the hands.

“It’s alright, let it out. You’re safe now,” a soft, melodic voice whispers in my ear, and I feel the heat of her breath.

“A—are you an angel?” I wheeze, and talking brings a new wave of agony through my body.

A quiet huff of laughter, “No. Don’t talk, just rest.”

I crack my eyes open just enough to see a hazy outline of a woman. Her long hair seems to glow in the dim light of a nearby fire. “What happened?”

I cough and then groan as the stabbing torture intensifies along my back, and I

suddenly feel too hot and too cold all at the same time.

“Your skin is burning,” the beautiful voice says, and I reach out, grabbing her and pulling her down beside me. I crave the warmth of a body beside me to stave off the chill.

She tries to get up, but her skin is like a cool breeze on a scorching summer’s day, and I hold on tight. It chases the chill away, and I breathe in her citrus scent and some invigorating floral aroma I can't place. Somehow her presence, the feel of her against me, and the soothing scent of her lessen the pain coursing through me.

“What are you doing?” she says, and I see her shift in front of me, even though her face is a blur.

“You smell like heaven,” I breathe.

“You’re unwell and need to stay still and rest.” There’s an urgency in her tone that has me leaning my head against hers.

“I can rest with you right here.” I wheeze, and snuggle further against her warmth. “Your skin feels like velvet.”

She lets out a sigh, and I feel her hand travel down my chest. I move to get closer, desperate to feel her heavenly lips against mine, but I stop and yell out as the skin across my back feels like it's tearing in half.

She gasps and sits up, holding me in her arms as she trails a finger just next to where the pain shoots through me, burning up my back.

“You’ve reopened your wound.” Her voice sounds like a song, every word she says weaves around me, prickling over my skin, and suddenly the pain turns to a dull ache.

A heavy exhaustion begins to take hold of me, and it takes everything to lift my head and look at her face. It's still blurry, and I can't make out any of her features, so I lift my hand and touch her parted lips. They are as soft as a rose petal.

"Your lips are beautiful," I croak, and then I kiss her, slow and tender. Everything is melting away until all I can feel is her lips moving as if they are perfectly made to fit mine. Something electric sparks between us, but then the suffocating exhaustion begins to take over me, and I fall back onto the bed mat.

The angel places a hand on my chest and says, "Get some sleep."

As darkness takes over and I begin to slip out of consciousness, I can't help but wonder if this is a dream, and when I wake up in the morning, will I be back at the palace with the weight of leading the province on my shoulders? I hope that isn't true.

5

Evelyn

My finger slowly traces my bottom lip back and forth, wondering if everything that just happened was even real. He kissed me. The butterflies caged in my chest are beating against my ribs, trying desperately to break free, and I might just let them.

This complete stranger kissed me. At least I know he's healing. If he had enough strength to wrap me in his arms and claim me as an angel, then he must be making some kind of a recovery. Although the wound reopening on his back isn't a good sign. I managed to stop the bleeding again and heal what I could, but only time will tell if it's enough.

My head spins, remembering the feel of his firm grip on me. It made my body feel like it was on fire, and I have the urge to dive beneath the waves to quench whatever

feeling is bubbling up inside me.

It's been a long while since I felt the touch of a man, encircled in their arms, with their lips on mine, but it's never felt like that. The spark I felt, the need to taste, touch, and feel him close.

Turning to look at his sleeping form, I'm hoping to all the gods that he makes it through the night, because I know I will never be satisfied with just one kiss.

The rising temperature in his body and his pale complexion have me feeling a deep sense of worry that if I close my eyes for even a second, this stranger I've worked so hard to save will just cease to exist. Thank the seas for the hours I slept earlier in the day.

I continue to stoke the fire and sit in the sands next to the makeshift bed. My fingers keep grazing up and down his arms, checking his pulse and then lingering. I am fascinated by him. His hands are so smooth, not calloused like the men I've been with before. His features are all cutting lines, from the steep slope of his nose to his cheekbones and the sharp angle of his jawline. He's extraordinary.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

His muscled chest shows me that he does not spend his days simply lounging about. He is lean, athletic, and perfectly alluring. The shadows from the fire's flames dance over his toned torso and show off all the planes of his lithe form. Even though he's currently unconscious, I can't help but admire the view and enjoy the feeling of being utterly alone with him in this cave.

It almost feels like with the lull of the waves, the twinkling stars overhead, and the dancing flames casting shadows across the walls, we are the only people in the world.

My night is full of restless sleep, jolting awake whenever my head lulls too far in either direction. The first break of light is cresting over the horizon as the sun's tendrils reach out toward us. The fire has burned down to embers, and the temperature has warmed considerably since last night.

I slip my hand under the blanket and pat down the sailor's clothes to make sure they've thoroughly dried overnight. He's still breathing in a labored rhythm, and I worry he has a major head injury and possibly several broken ribs.

Gently, I pull back the blanket to examine him further. The flutter in my stomach rears its head again at the anticipation of seeing what's barely concealed under his thin shirt. I roll him to the side and my fingertips graze the edges of his hemline as I peel the shirt from his back.

Just as I thought, the gash is scabbed over, but it's angry and red with a purple bruise spreading outward covering a large portion of his back.

As carefully as I can, I press down on the bruise, doing my best not to hurt him

further. I can sing another song to heal him, but that would take more energy than I have after an entire evening of sleeping with one eye open and no food.

There is a flower just past the cove that can help speed up the healing process and maybe wake him from this slumber long enough to learn his name. So, I pull his shirt back down and bring the blanket up to cover him, heading out for what I need.

I cast a parting glance at his serene face before leaving, and I want to know what color his eyes are. I almost roll my eyes at myself. I feel like a love-sick guppy, and I don't even know this man's name.

Making my way around the curve of rocks that encapsulate the cove, I head down the path I know will lead me to the jindera flower. The sand crunches under my feet as I let my mind wander, thinking about the sailor and the life he just lost. He seems well fed, and his clothes are finely made. I wonder who he was and what possessed him to pass through these waters.

Large bright yellow flowers with a dark blue center greet me as I reach the jindera bush. They each have five petals spread out wide, making them look like stars sent straight from the heavens.

I pluck several to carry back, knowing the other sirens may need more at the village if any other men survived from the ship. I need to get him to the village soon, but a selfish part of me wants to keep him here all to myself.

I make my way back to the cove just as the sun is fully seated in the sky and the tide is starting to recede. Coaxing the fire back to life, I gather supplies to boil the flowers in water to create a healing tea along with a paste to cover his wounds.

While I walk around my cove gathering supplies for the paste, I let my mind drift back to the last few hours. I spent so much time healing him, I'm sure he will be fine

and with the heat from his skin finally cooled. I know any creeping infection is vanquished.

When he wakes, will he remember whispering sweet words to me as I healed him, or calling me angel and saying I tasted like heaven, while also telling me all the things he wanted to do to my body? Heat rises through my chest and up to my cheeks at the memories.

I lather the paste over the wound on his head first, delicately brushing back the curls that seem to have a mind of their own. Just as soft as I imagined, I let my fingers linger, resisting the urge to run my fingers through his scalp for the second time.

The man's eyelids flutter open as he begins to wake, and I find myself holding my breath. He was so delirious last night that I'm not sure he actually saw me clearly.

How will he react when he sees me fully?

A wave of nervousness races through me at what he will say when he realizes I'm not a human, but a siren.

He blinks at me sleepily and tries to rise but winces, obviously still in a great deal of pain.

"Don't try to get up." I say quickly, "I've spent all night trying to heal you. I don't want you to ruin all my hard work."

He squints at me, and I don't think he can see me clearly still. I place a hand on his forehead, checking for any lingering fever, but he feels normal.

"What happened? Where am I?"

His voice is gruff, and it sends a thrill through me that I try to shake off as I say, “You were in a shipwreck and badly injured.”

“The storms,” he frowns, and then tries to get up again. “My crew! Where are they? Are they okay?”

“I’m sorry, I don’t know if your crew survived, but you really need to try to stay still. You would reopen your wounds.” I lay a hand atop his chest to try and keep him down and it works. He’s far less restless beneath my touch.

He squints at me again, “My spectacles, where are they?”

“You’re what?”

“I can’t see well without them. Did they fall off in the storm?”

“Oh, you mean that strange device that was on your face?” I reach for the discarded object, but then pause halfway to them. “You can’t see me at all right now?”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

His brows draw together, and he snorts, “I mean, I can see that you are a person in front of me, but without my spectacles, nothing is clear, so you kind of just blend into what's around you.”

An idea forms in my mind, and I leave the strange face object, what did he call them—spec-ta-cles, in the sand far enough away that he can't reach them, and probably can't even see them if he's actually telling the truth. He has to be, because if he could see me, then he most definitely wouldn't be acting this way.

“I'll get them for you in a moment, but first I want to ask you a few questions.”

“I'm sorry, you want to ask me questions?” He places a hand on his chest, brows rising, and then huffs out a laugh, instantly groaning and falling into a bout of coughing. “Gods, my back feels like I've been attacked by a dragon.”

“I don't think we would be talking right now if you had been attacked by a dragon.” I giggle, and he glares at me.

“How about I ask the questions, since I'm the one who is unable to see, badly injured, and obviously your prisoner.”

A sharp stab pierces my heart at that. “Who said anything about being a prisoner? You aren't my prisoner. I saved your life.” I put more vehemence into my words than I want, but the fact that he thinks I'm holding him here against his will sets a fire of anger in me.

“Where am I then?”

My nostrils flare and I cross my arms over my chest with a huff, “You’re on the island of Kafigda. My home.”

His eyes seem to glaze over as he looks at me and whispers, “The island in the storms.”

“Yes, this is the island inside of the storms, and you're welcome by the way. The least you can do is thank me for saving you, you know.” I scoff, thoroughly annoyed by the way this conversation is going.

I much preferred the love-sick, delirious version of him that I met last night. A tingle rushes up my legs and settles deep in my belly at the memories, and I shiver in response.

His face softens, only marking the fluttering in my stomach ignite further. I squeeze my thighs tightly together as he says, “Thank you. Uh, where are my manners? I haven’t even asked you your name yet.”

“Evelyn,” my voice comes out just above a whisper as my anger evaporates almost as quickly as it came. The smile he gives me makes me quickly look away from him.

Gods, but the things this stranger makes me feel.

“Nice to meet you, Evelyn. Thank you for saving me. My name is Kai.” He holds out one of his large hands, the ones that wrapped around my waist only hours ago and held me tightly.

Slowly, I reach for it, placing my small hand in his grasp. Something electric sparks between us at the contact and he must feel it too because he cocks his head and squints his eyes at me. I quickly pull away, the shock of the connection dying as soon as my hand leaves his.

“Would it be okay if I had my spectacles back now?” He asks, and my heart jumps into my throat. I’m not ready for him to see me, to know who—what I am.

“No!” I practically shout, and he jumps slightly in response. “I mean, I haven’t gotten a chance to ask any of my questions yet.”

He huffs, grimacing and touching the seaweed that's still over the healed gash on his head, “Alright, what do you want to ask me?”

“Where are you from?”

“I’m from a small province in the Kingdom of Halvendor, called Renyir.”

My brows shoot up, many of the men in the village come from the large mainland kingdom of Halvendor, even the first of the men, Mathius, came from there centuries ago.

“Why did you sail into the storms?”

He grows quiet before saying, “I’m looking for my brother. One of his crew told me his ship got caught in those storms, and I...” He brings a hand up and pinches the bridge of his nose, letting out a small, humorless laugh. “Well, I’m not sure what I was doing, but now it all seems like the most foolish idea I’ve ever had.”

He closes his eyes, and I reach for his hand, knowing what the contact will do to my senses, but wanting to offer some form of comfort to him. “You wanted to save your brother. That doesn’t sound foolish to me. It sounds noble. I know I would do the same if it were my sister. How long ago did he go missing?”

“Nearly one month now.”

I almost choke on my own saliva. There was a storm almost one full moon ago, and there was only one survivor from it. Could Katarina's current conquest be this man's missing brother? I hope for his sake that it is, but I don't want to offer him false hope, so I stay silent.

"I'm sorry."

"What are you sorry for? It isn't like you cast the storms that caught us both."

Page 11

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

I could laugh at that because no, I did not cast the storms, but Kafigda, my home, did. If only we could find out how to end them, but none of my siren sisters seem to care.

They've never asked questions or searched for answers.

Maybe it was time to change that.

"Are you out of questions?" Kai's voice shifts my focus, and I realize that my hand is still holding his. I pull back quickly.

"For now," I say. "But before I give you this...thingamabob..."

He laughs, and my entire body seems to come alive. I bit my lip against the sensation.

"You mean my spectacles?"

"Yes, your spec-ta-cles." The word feels strange on my tongue and it's hard for me to say. "Before I give them to you, I want to prepare you."

He shifts himself into a more comfortable seated position, and I can tell he's trying to hide the pain. There is a curiosity in his gaze and he does that thing with his eyes that he won't stop doing.

"Does squinting your eyes like that help you see better?"

His lips shift into a smile. "A little, but not enough to see your features. All I know is that your dress is purple." He pauses and cocks his head to the side, "but also

sometimes...green.”

A lump forms in my throat, and I try to swallow against it with little luck. “Well, yes. That’s right, but it’s...well you see, it’s not actually a dress.”

“What is it then?” He raises a single brow and leans forward looking like he might reach out to touch me. I notice then that his shirt has come further unbuttoned. His muscles shift with his movements, and heat pools in me at the sight.

I swallow hard and say, “It—it’s my skin, actually.”

His frown is deep creating a large crease between his brows, “What do you mean?”

With a sigh, I pick up his spectacles and hold them close enough to his face for him to see them, as well as my purple and green scales.

His jaw clenches, outlining the harsh angles of his face, and he looks down at my hand, up my wrist, and to my face. I watch his lips as they part slightly, and he snatches the spectacles from me, quickly putting them on. One of the round sides has a crack, spider webbing from the very center, and I wonder if it affects how well he can actually see.

He’s looking at me very differently now.

No longer is he the flirtatious, kind man I saw last night. His face has transformed to one I’ve seen too many times. It’s the same face of every man who finds themselves marooned on our island. A look of disbelief and possibly horror.

Sirens have been legends, rumors, bedtime stories told to children on the mainland for many moons.

I hate this part.

“I’m a siren.” I say, leaning back on my heels, trying to give him as much space as I can. It looks like he might pass out again, but then he says the one thing I would never expect.

“Beautiful.”

He keeps staring at me like he can’t quite believe his eyes, and his features shift into something that might be awe. He lets his heated gaze roam over the purple and green scales covering the curves of my legs up my hips and across my torso.

The way he clenches his jaw and is looking at me like I’m a puzzle he’s trying to solve, is so distracting. I can see that he is still struggling to fully believe any of this is actually happening. It is always this way with newcomers.

Normally, when I tell them the truth, they don’t believe me, they run in a panic, or try something far more violent. The only way to finally convince them is by using the powers of persuasion—a siren’s call, something a man could never resist. While I’m not as skilled in that aspect as some of my sisters, I still possess the skills to lull a man into submission.

Normally, I like assisting my siren sisters in that task when newcomers arrive, but with this man, Kai, I feel a need to help him understand, to make him understand, and accept his fate. It’s an unusual feeling that sends a thrill through me.

I glance back at his face, and I’m entranced. His eyes are so captivating, green like the deepest caverns of the sea. They pull me in like a strong current, and I can’t break away. Suddenly, I realize I don’t want to have to persuade him with my song. I need him to believe me all on his own.

Who is this man and why do I feel like I will do anything to protect him?

"Thank you," I finally say, and embarrassment spreads through me, because it really has been a while since a man has complimented me. Resisting the urge to get lost in the pools of his emerald gaze, I decide if he's feeling well enough, it might be time to head to the village and see how the others are faring.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

But this impossibly beautiful man is just sitting there, staring at me, with a sliver of what looks like hope in his eyes. I practically melt beneath his gaze and smile softly at him.

To my surprise, he returns the smile and I think maybe we can spend just a few more hours alone before I tell him his new fate.

6

Kai

Sirens are real.

My mind lurches, practically reeling to understand what my eyes are seeing. I blink several times just to make sure my eyes aren't playing tricks on me, but even the crack in my spectacles doesn't keep me from seeing clearly what's in front of me. She's solid and real, staring at me with large, unblinking violet eyes.

I should be scared.

Every single story I've ever heard about sirens ended in death or bloodshed, but for some reason I'm only transfixed. She doesn't look like she's about to eat me or rip out my heart. She seems nervous and she saved me from drowning in the sea. If she wanted to harm me, I don't think she would have saved me and tended to my wounds first.

I let my eyes roam, inspecting every inch of her. Long golden waves cascade down

her shoulders. Her skin looks smooth. It gleams with a slightly purple hue that shifts green when the sunlight hits it just right. She's breathtakingly stunning, and the iridescent shift of her skin reminds me of my favorite flower from back home, the Dahlia. It's always in bloom, but its petals change colors with the shift of the seasons. It's absolutely magnificent.

A memory suddenly emerges from the haze of my mind, and I remember my hands splayed across her back, holding her tight against me. I remember the warmth of her body and how it fit perfectly together with mine.

"A—are you alright?" she stutters, and her voice is soft with a lyrical rhythm, each word flowing into the next. My gaze shifts to her lips, plump and parted. She bites her bottom lip, and I move uncomfortably, quickly adjusting my growing arousal under the thin blanket and reaching up to run a hand through my hair. I wince as pain flares, just below my hairline, and I feel something slimy on my forehead.

"It's to help heal your wounds."

Nodding, I look back up to her eyes. She's waiting for a response, and I clear my throat. The growing bulge in my pants is making me more and more uncomfortable with each passing moment.

Gods, I haven't felt this instant of an attraction since, well never.

"Right," I finally manage, "I'm indebted to you, Evelyn." I try saying her name, and I'm not sure if it's my imagination or if she actually physically leans in at my words. I frown and have the urge to reach out and touch her, desperate to feel her delicate skin again. I want to know if it feels the same as I remember it from my hazy memory of the night.

"Do you think you feel well enough to try standing?" She asks and rises to her feet,

giving me a full view of her svelte body. I almost groan, shifting against the lust rushing through me, and grit my teeth.

Tiny scales cover her entire body like a mesmerizing mosaic glistening under the light, making it look as if she just emerged from the water. Her blonde silken hair falls just below her waist, which I now clearly see is uncovered, and what scant clothing she has on leaves little to the imagination. A thin purple top clings to her ample breasts, and a light-colored skirt hugs her hips, teasingly short and delicately close to revealing what might lie beneath.

Heat begins to spread through me, sweat beading my brow, and I want to throw the blanket from my lap, but then the evidence of my sudden desire will no longer be hidden.

Against my better judgement, I let my eyes travel past the gentle curve of her hips to find perfect, slender legs, and I bite my lip to stop the groan of pure arousal threatening to push free. Finally, I reach her feet, and although they look fairly similar to a human's, I notice that her toes are slightly webbed.

Gods, but there is something about her that is alluring. All of the blood in my brain seems to be rushing further down my body, straining for release.

What is wrong with me?

She's something that, until today, I only thought existed in fairytales. A sudden thought occurs to me, where is her tail? Aren't siren's supposed to have tails?

I rub my hand along the back of my neck and mumble, "I can't believe that bastard was right."

If sirens are real, what other fairytale creatures are?

Slowly, I begin to stand, grunting at the tightness in my back. There is a dull ache there, but it's not bad. Evelyn rushes to my side, helping me up, and I clutch tightly to the blanket, holding it firmly in front of me. Now, at my full height with her in front of me, I can see that I tower over her. I look down at her, and my spectacles slide along my nose. I push them back up, unable to look away from her.

She is exotic and intoxicating, offering a different kind of beauty, like that of a rare flower, delicate and beguiling. The thought makes me take a step away from her, because as it is so often the most extraordinary of flowers are usually the most deadly.

“You saved me, why? Sirens are supposed to be terrifying, bloodthirsty creatures that lure sailors to their watery graves. And aren't you supposed to have a tail?” I clamp my mouth shut as soon as the words come out. That was unnecessarily rude, but I have to know why.

Luckily, she just chuckles, her chest bouncing with the effort, and I swallow hard, feeling seconds away from bursting with the primal need I have for this woman. She has captivated me, and the urge to claim her is overwhelming. I suck in a deep breath and try to focus on the waves cresting, the birds chirping overhead, and the gentle breeze that whispers across the stones of the cavern we're in.

Clearing my throat, I look away from her, “Sorry, that was rude of me. I... It's just all I've been told.”

“We aren't all bloodthirsty, and we only have tails when we're in the water. When we're on land, we have legs just like you...well, almost like you,” she says with a small smile, and I curse under my breath.

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

I don't know what is wrong with me. It's been a while since I've taken a lover. I'd spent much of the last weeks poring over my studies, tending to my plants, and trying to find out anything I could about Dru's ship. Maybe that's all this was, too long without a woman, but I know that isn't true. This is more urgent. It's instinctual and unrelenting.

"I'm still not entirely certain this isn't some kind of dream," I say, trying to laugh it off.

"I promise you this isn't a dream. I'm very real." She says, still smiling up at me.

I ignore the feeling that look creates in my chest, and another memory resurfaces of her lips on mine. Fuck.

Before I let the reminder of just how soft her perfect lips felt take hold of me, I think back to the crew I paid to bring me here.

"Do you think anyone else on my ship could have washed to shore?"

"It's possible," she says, placing her hands on her hips. "If they didn't make it out on the other side, my sisters would have tried to save any they could. If they were able to, those they saved would be back in the village."

A sigh of relief escapes me, and I hope they all made it out alive.

Turning away from the ocean, I decide it's probably a good thing to survey my surroundings. I take a few steps out of the cove we are in, and toss the blanket back to

the spot I was laying. I look out at the towering trees and looming mountains. It paints a vibrant tapestry of color. The deep greens of the forest contrast with the dark gray and browns of the rugged, craggy peaks. Sunlight dances across the landscape, bathing it all in a golden glow, creating a breathtaking harmony of nature.

“Is your village nearby?”

“No, it’s on the other side of the Island. We have to go through the forest and over some rocky terrain to get there.”

“Well, lead the way,” I say, holding a hand out in front of me.

She furrows her brow, and her lips make the most adorable little pout that I bite the insides of my cheeks to try to keep my cock from stirring to life again.

“Are you sure you feel well enough?”

“Yes,” I croak, forcing a smile.

She nods, and a strange look flashes across her face as she says, “There’s something I need to tell you first.” She pauses, taking a deep breath, and opens her mouth to continue, but she doesn’t get the chance because someone calls out her name.

We both turn to the ocean, where another siren materializes from the waves, only this one’s skin shifts between pink and blue, and she is completely naked.

I groan, pinching the bridge of my nose, “This island might be the death of me.”

Katarina saunters up the beach wearing her favorite garment of choice—her scales. My sister has always had an easy confidence about her. She's a fast swimmer, a powerful temptress with the voice of an angel, and excels at making the Elders proud by indulging in all their festivities.

I spent my entire adult life reminding myself that I have my own strengths, and as much as I want to impress the Elders, lately I haven't been able to fully join in their temptations without feeling hollow inside. I crave a real connection.

"E, what are you doing here? We've been looking everywhere for you," she turns her head abruptly to Kai and raises a brow with a smirk. "Oh, I see. You've been occupied."

Kai looks awestruck, unable to pull his gaze away from my sister's naked form, and there is a blush crawling up his neck and settling in his cheeks. It seems not even he is immune to Katarina's charms.

"Who is that?" He whispers, eyes quickly snapping back to my sister, as if he can't bear to look away from her for more than a moment.

Katarina turns to me and quirks a brow, knowing full well I don't usually participate in helping the men understand their new fates. She boldly takes a step closer to Kai, making me flare with an irrational jealousy I've never felt before, but inside my head is screaming.

He's mine. I saved him.

She will not turn this one into another one of her play toys.

"Have you told him nothing?"

“I have, he just woke up. He was injured in the wreck, and I spent the night healing him. I was just telling him about the island before you arrived.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

“Perfect, I love a fresh one. Sweetie, you can follow me, I’ll give you the full tour.” She purrs while grazing her fingers across his chest. “Are you still hurt, sailor? I can cure that right up.”

“I-uh,” Kai sputters, clearing his throat, trying hard not to show a reaction. Katarina is standing so close to him that her large breasts brush against his chest.

“Sister,” I say quickly, grabbing her arm and pulling her in front of me. Kai practically sighs in relief, his hands clenched tightly at his sides, looking like he’s resisting every urge to let this affect him. He shifts uncomfortably and adjusts the front of his pants, attempting to hide what appears to be his growing desire.

“He needs to get back to our village so that the Elders can take a look at him. I did what I could, but he lost a lot of blood. I want to make sure he’s okay and fully recovered.”

“Well, let me show him the way,” she smirks and takes a step back in front of him, flicking her hair behind her back, making sure he can see every inch of her bare body.

I close my eyes with an exasperated groan and then open them to look at Kai again. I’m taken by surprise to see that he isn’t paying Kat any attention at all, he’s looking right at me.

I stare at him, the beauty of his features and the kindness in his eyes. I’m captivated by those green eyes, and the longer I gaze into them, the stronger my need grows to help him, hold him, touch him.

I begin to wonder if he could be happy here with me, on the island forever. Could he be what I've been missing for so long?

Sweet intense heat rushing between my thighs as I imagine all the deplorable things he whispered to me in his delirium the previous evening. Suddenly, the need to taste this man's lips again takes over my senses. His shirt does nothing to hide the strength lurking beneath, and I want to feel his hard chest against mine, to know how he will feel inside me.

Would he be commanding and domineering? Would he let me use my gifts to take control? I have to know.

He coughs loudly and waves his hand in front of my face. How long was I daydreaming for? I really need to pull it together. Katarina snorts at me knowingly like she's aware of exactly what I was thinking about.

"Evelyn," and the way my name sounds on his lips makes that heat spread to the far reaches of my body. "Are you ready to go?"

"Y-yes," I bite out. "I just need to speak with my sister quickly."

I force a smile and yank Kat's arm, pulling her far enough away so that Kai can't hear our conversation.

"Listen, Kat," I whisper, taking a cautious peek at Kai before continuing. "He's mine. I know I haven't been interested in the men who wash up on our shores in a long time, but this one is different. I don't know." I murmur, looking at him again, only to have my heart flutter instantly in response. "I feel... a spark between us."

"A spark? Could it be? My sister, in love?" Her lips spread into a feline smile, "I never thought I would see the day."

“Don’t be dramatic. It’s not love. It—it’s just...lust. An overwhelming feeling.” I blush slightly at my confession. “Have you seen him? There’s something about his features and those...those things on his face. I can’t stop staring. Look at his jawline, his golden curls, and I mean, did you see his chest? He could carry me out to sea any day.” I begin to laugh at the sudden burst of sharing my innermost thoughts. Katarina has never been shy about sharing her conquests and exploits. It honestly feels so freeing to finally share along with her.

“Well, well, well.” She laughs. “It’s finally time for you to join in the party with us again, sis. And might I say,” she looks over her shoulder to glance at Kai and winks. “He is a fine choice.”

We both start to giggle, and I can’t help but steal little looks at the lost sailor, admiring the view. We briefly make eye contact, and I feel it again—that spark, that pulsing need. No part of me has ever felt this carnal yearning for another being, and it feels so freeing.

Knowing that we have a long day ahead of us, full of meeting the other sirens and making sure Kai’s on the mend, a heavy disappointment settles in my gut. I probably won’t have another moment alone with him for quite some time once we arrive there. The Elders will have other plans once they know there is another sailor in our midst.

My sister looks at me knowingly and declares, “It’s quite a long walk to the other side of the island, and I’m exhausted from helping your ship out of the storm. I think I’ll swim to the other side. Can you handle it from here, E?” She winks.

“Yes, absolutely.” I squeal internally, hoping for a chance to get to know this man a little more intimately on our walk over.

“Wait,” Kai stops her just before she dives into the waves, and I clench my jaw at the hungry gaze she sends back at him. “My crew, did they survive?”

Katarina's look of hunger fades momentarily, "Some." She says solemnly. "The ship made it out of the storms on your side of them, the ones that didn't...well, you're the only one on this side still alive."

Kai's mouth is a hard line, but he nods his thanks to my sister, and that sly smirk spreads across her face again as she says, "Don't have too much fun without me," and dives into the waves.

"Well, are you ready?" I ask.

"I think so, as long as you promise to take it slow. I'm still feeling like I swallowed half the ocean, and my back still feels as if I lost a fight to a dragon." He tries to smile, but it falls flat.

I know he must feel guilty about the sailors who lost their lives. For being the reason they were all here in the first place.

Walking back to him, I grab his hand in an attempt to provide some level of comfort and wave my sister off into the dark depths. Knowing her, she will take her time getting to the other side, allowing me an opportunity to figure out what it is about Kai that makes me tingle with an incessant need.

We begin our journey down the beach while he keeps the grip on my hand and lazily begins to draw circles with his thumb against the back of it.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

Each step seems to be slower and more painful than the last, as I wait for him to break the silence. I can feel myself thrumming with the urge to reach up and kiss his soft lips, slip my tongue inside, and taste him again. I want nothing more than to lower him to the sands and peel off every layer of sandy clothes to show him exactly how much I appreciate his form.

“So, how long have you all lived here?” He asks, interrupting my thoughts.

Feeling my face flush, I turn away before answering. “The sirens? For centuries, as far as I know. This island has always belonged to us. I’ve lived here my whole life.”

“And how long has that been?”

“Are you asking how old I am? Don’t you know it’s not polite to ask a siren’s age?” I joke, pushing against his arm. Our eyes meet, and my breath nearly vanishes completely as I say, “A hundred and twenty-seven years.”

Kai’s brows raise and his mouth is slightly ajar, “I—my Gods, what’s a normal age range for a siren? I didn’t realize that creatures...” He stops, rubbing anxiously at the back of his neck. “I mean, well, I just didn’t know that mythical beings such as yourself lived so long. But I’m no expert, clearly. Since I didn’t even know you existed until today.”

I offer him an amused smile to show I’m not offended by his surprise. “No one really knows how old the head Elder of our village, Yvette, actually is. She’s the oldest of us all, but Katarina and I suspect she’s nearly five hundred years old.”

“Gods, that's a long time,” he muses. “Well, we are sort of the same age...minus one hundred years. I'm twenty-seven.” He laughs, and his entire face lights up in a way that causes a spark of desire to shoot through me.

There is a silence between us again as I try to reign in my feelings for this man, and then he goes and asks something that has the heat coursing through my veins, turning to ice.

“When we were on the beach before your sister came, you said you had to tell me something. What was it?”

“Oh!” My voice is far too loud, and I cough, regaining my composure. I was going to tell him that this island is his new home, but now I'm not so sure this is the proper time. There is so much I want to learn about him, do with him. If I told him his fate, he might get scared off, resent me, and never talk to me again, then I would never be able to explore the connection I feel with him. “It was nothing.”

He gives me a curious sort of look that shows he doesn't fully believe me, but doesn't question it further.

Our hands are still clasped together as we walk, something that seems so intimate, yet natural. I think back to last night, and the question is out of my lips before I can stop it.

“Do you remember anything from last night?”

He stops abruptly, pulling me to a halt beside him. Our gazes meet, and his eyes shimmer in the sunlight filtering through the edge of the forest. They are like the rare pieces of seaglass I find along the beach, green and captivating with their vivid color. I could stare into them forever and never get bored.

His voice is shaky as he says, “I—I thought it might all be a dream. I was so out of it, I didn’t know what was real and what wasn’t.” He takes my other hand in his, brings it up to his mouth, and turns it over, placing a delicate kiss on my palm. “I remember everything.”

Words catch in my throat as he gingerly brings his hand up to my chin and tilts my face towards his. “You’re exquisite,” he whispers, moving his hand to my cheek, grazing it with his thumb and trailing down my neck. “The way your skin shifts in the sunlight takes my breath away. It’s so smooth, so delicate. It reminds me of a flower from home. My favorite flower, the Dahlia.”

His lips part as he studies every curve of my face, his wandering thumb caresses along my lower lip. I want more than anything to kiss him.

“My sweet little Dahlia,” he whispers as his hand drops away from my face, but he doesn’t move away, and I can’t tear my gaze from his.

A curl falls into his face, and I move to brush it behind his ear, biting my lower lip. Not wanting to lose the chance, I push up on my toes, feeling the warmth of his lips brush against mine just before I kiss him.

Magic erupts around me. I’ve never felt anything like this before, and I wonder if this is what I’ve been so desperate for all along. Kai doesn’t pull away, but instead leans further into me, deepening the kiss, as his hand slides to the back of my neck, gripping my hair. His fingers weave through my strands, while his other hand snakes around my waist. A soft moan escapes him as he claims me with each slip of his tongue between my lips.

My fingers move through his tousled curls, and I pull him closer to me, burning with an insatiable need to feel every inch of him. I press my hips into him and can feel his growing erection just above my belly button.

While I haven't lain with a man in quite some time, even I know he's large.

Wanting to feel exactly how large, my hand slowly travels to the waist of his trousers, and I brush my fingers along the waistband. One tug on the buttons and his considerable length springs free. He sucks in a sharp breath and breaks our kiss, looking down at me. His impassioned gaze rakes over me, hungry, wanting.

"Evelyn," his voice is hoarse with need. "This is so fast."

"Is it?" I murmur and I grip his cock.

He groans, grasping my elbow and moving to pull my hand away from the smooth planes of his pulsing length. Grabbing his trousers with his other hand, he adjusts himself back into his pants.

I frown, almost hurt by his reluctance. "Do you not want this?"

His jaw twitches and his eyes close tightly before opening again and looking at me, "I want this more than anything, but what kind of gentleman would I be if I just gave into my savage passions and ravaged you right here in the open for everyone to see?"

"Who exactly is everyone?" I say, chewing my lower lip. I try not to laugh at his modesty. "We're miles from the village, and no one ever comes to this side of the island. Besides, what if I want you to ravage me?" I pull him closer, pressing myself against his chest.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

Soaking in the feel of his solid mass, I look at him with want in my eyes, hoping he understands that I feel the same need he does. Kai's nostrils flare, and then he groans just before his mouth crashes into mine.

His hands explore down my body and grip my ass, easily lifting me off the ground. I wrap my legs around his waist, grinding into him. A desperate want consumes me, and I need more. More friction. More skin. More him.

"Kai, I want to see you. All of you. Take this off." I say, tugging at his salt-stained shirt.

He lowers me down on a nearby boulder, stepping away from me, and peels his shirt off so painfully slow, tossing it to the ground. One step at a time, he makes his way towards me, a wild look in his eyes.

I need to see all of him on display before me.

I suddenly notice the bruises peppering his skin and remind myself that I need to be gentle, but before I can tell him to be mindful, he drops to his knees in front of me and possessively pulls my hips to the edge of the rock ledge he set me on.

Spreading my knees apart, he looks up at me, and there is a passionate intensity in that look as he begins kissing up my calves to my knee and nipping at my inner thigh. I shiver at the pulsing ache that's building, and a moan of pure ecstasy escapes as he finally takes my center with his soft lips. Gripping his luscious curls, I arch into his mouth, leaning into the feel of his tongue sinking deeper, playing inside of me.

Pleasure courses through me in waves. Kai is like a man possessed, starved and feasting on his first meal after weeks at sea. He claims every inch of me with his mouth, flicking in and out, grazing me with his teeth.

Then, just as I start to feel my walls tighten, he deftly slips two fingers inside. I am soaked with need, and I can feel myself climbing higher and higher. My legs quiver with the rising intensity as a constellation of stars dots behind my eyes. I'm teetering over the edge that Kai has so expertly coaxed me to, until a cataclysmic surge of pleasure erupts through my body, leaving me breathless and reeling.

I scream out as I come crashing over the edge, and Kai continues to stroke inside me languidly, savoring every last ounce of my pleasure.

Leaning back, I gasp for air, stars winking in and out of my vision, my entire body tingling as I come back to reality.

This man is a god, and I don't think I'll ever be satisfied with anyone else ever again.

Kai glances up from between my thighs, looking every bit like the statued heroes they sing songs about. He starts to kiss his way up my body, taking care to brush his lips over my hips, up my stomach, and finally reaches my aching breasts. He pulls down my top and lowers his mouth over my taut nipples, sucking each one, biting them lightly.

I arch into his affections, grinding my hips and grabbing his hands to guide them further down. He plants feather-light kisses along my collarbone and up my jaw to my ear and whispers.

"Such a good girl," his breath tickles my neck, showing a side of him I didn't know was lurking under his gentlemanly demeanor.

Even though we have just met, I can't help but feel this profound familiarity with him. I have never been one for public displays, especially not in the way Kai just did, but with him, I not only wanted it, I needed it. And I'm loving every moment of his praises.

"More. I need more of you." I beg impatiently, tugging at his trousers and reaching deep inside to sweep my hand along his considerable length, feeling it pulse under my grip.

Kai gently removes my hand. "Eve, I want nothing more than to drive you wild with pleasure and sink deep into your perfect warmth right here on this beach, but we can't. We barely know one another, and I want to learn more about you before you scream my name out while riding my cock," he smirks, and then his lips turn into a frown as a crease forms between his brows. "And I need to see if my brother Dru might be here."

"I understand," I sigh, even if my heart aches slightly at the rejection.

Kai pushes off the rock and grabs me around the waist, easily pulling me from it and setting me on the ground. I feel, for the first time in forever, that I could truly find happiness with this man, but a thousand wayward thoughts begin to flash in my mind.

If he finds his brother here, will he want to find a way to leave this island, only to die trying? If they can't find a way to leave, what kind of future would we have? Would he begin to resent this place like I've begun to? Or worse, resent me for dragging him to shore and saving him instead of letting the sea decide his fate?

I look up at him with heavy-lidded eyes. "Come on, let's go find your brother, and if we do, then you must keep your promise of driving me wild with pleasure. And just so you know, sirens have quite the call," I add with a wink.

Kai

My god, did I actually just pleasure this woman—this siren—on a rock in the middle of a beach? Never have I done anything so reckless and so improper in my life, but damn did she taste good. I don't know what came over me, but I couldn't stop myself. I had to have her and was desperate to explore every inch of her beautiful, color-shifting skin.

I would have taken her fully, but I can't let myself forget the task at hand. This intoxicating feeling that comes over me every time I look at her needs to be pushed aside, but it feels like if I don't claim her and make her mine, I will actually die. I huff out a laugh, because it sounds so dramatic, and it is, but it's exactly how it feels.

I don't even know this woman, how can she have such an effect on me? Is it something about the siren's call? Is that what she meant by 'sirens have quite the call'? Maybe she's seducing me, making me feel this way with whatever powers she has.

It's going to be a painfully long walk to the other side of the island if I can't manage to keep my creeping urges at bay. I glance toward the horizon, where storm clouds gather in a thick band that seems to stretch as far as I can see around the island. The ocean churns beneath them, matching the intensity of the dark gray sky, and a sense of dread knots in my stomach at the scene. I want to learn more about those storms and this island.

As we continue walking along the beach just on the outside of the forest, I can't help but notice the vibrant flowers littered amongst the greenery. Blossoms I've never seen before peek through the lush plant life, boasting every color imaginable, their stems full of blossoms. I want so badly to stop and study them. Their petals are so

intricate, some plain, while others have beautiful patterns on their velvet blooms. Not only are their colors exemplary, but their scents are spellbinding, drawing me in like a moth to flame.

For a moment, I dare to think that being shipwrecked here might be a blessing in disguise, for I never would have seen the beauty this place holds, but then I think of the crew members I paid to come on this journey with me. How many of them lost their lives? And Dru? What if he met the same fate as those men, drowned beneath the stormy seas?

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

I shake away the thoughts, Dru is strong, and if I survived those storms and ended up here, he did too, I'm sure of it.

Savoring the moment, I glance over at Evelyn, this siren, who makes me feel nothing I've ever felt before. Her beauty is a thousand times more than the flowers that dot this beach. She is breathtaking and makes my heart race with anticipation, anxious to uncover everything about her.

Pulling away from her earlier when she was so eager for me was like pulling out my own tooth, but even if she helped me all evening and we shared intimate moments in my fevered haze, I can't just take her without knowing her fully. What sort of man would that make me? I clench my jaw as the sway of her round hips taunts me, and another ripple of yearning burns through me.

We come to the end of the beach with the choice of either going into the jungle or climbing up a steep rocky cliff. Evelyn pulls me into the thick copse of trees to our left, and we continue on our journey.

She looks up at me, drawing her brows together, "Are you okay? Am I going too fast? We just have to get around these cliffs. The village is on the other side. I can slow down if you need..."

I cut her off, "No, no. I'm fine. I just..." I stop and look away from her intent stare. The intensity of my rapture for this woman ignites further. I want to pick her up, to taste her again, to fuck her up against one of the trees until she's coming apart at the seams.

I can't stop the low growl that comes from me as I say, "I've never felt anything like this for a person before—so immediate. Is there something about this island? I mean, this is your home, does it affect humans in any particular way?"

She frowns and refuses to meet my eyes, turning away from me, pushing through the brush and fallen palm leaves that litter the forest floor.

"If it makes a difference, I've never felt what I'm feeling for you right now before either. Sailors come few and far between to our island," she stops, and I almost run into her as she spins back around.

I refrain from touching her again, not sure if I can hold myself back. "But you are...different, somehow. I know the circumstances aren't great for why you are here, but I—I'm glad you are."

She smiles in a way that feels overly sensual for such a simple act, and I can't take it anymore. I grab her, wrapping my arms around her waist and pulling her flush against me. My dick is rock hard pressing against her bare stomach. I want to feel her smooth scales against it, skin to skin. Heat rushes through me as I push her up against a palm tree and crush my lips against hers, searching, seeking as I kiss her hard, letting my tongue explore inside her mouth, relishing in the feel of her sweet, plump lips.

I unbutton my trousers, pushing them down as my cock springs free, the tip wet with my need. Her eyes widen as she looks down, her hand wrapping around it, and I almost lose it right there.

"Fuck! I want to be inside you," I hiss, "Feel your soft wet pussy around my needy cock." There's something so satisfying about sharing my inner thoughts with a woman when we're together. Some women share right back, spiking my arousal further, while others I tend to scare away with my forward words.

A moment of panic shoots through me as I worry I've taken it too far with Evelyn, but instead it seems to only arouse her further.

She shudders, gripping my shirt and pulling me into her, ready to devour her lips once again as she strokes my length. Her small hand glides along my cock and I'm moments away from coming.

I wonder how tight she is, if my dick will slide easily between the apex of her thighs, the thought has me cursing, ready to erupt, but then she breaks our kiss and drops to her knees in front of me licking the head of my cock.

"Mhmm," She moans against my head, and the vibrations almost send me over the edge. She sucks along my length, pulling it in and out, until it pops out of her delectable lips. "Does that feel good, sailor?"

I freeze, so close to my release that I don't dare exhale. I want nothing more than to feel her mouth around me, licking, sucking, teasing, her teeth grazing against my taught skin.

Her mouth closes around my tip and she sucks my entire length into her mouth.

"Oh, fuck!" I yell out as she drags her teeth lightly against my cock. Her lush lips circle me and she's relentless, sucking in and out, stopping in between to swirl her tongue around the head of my cock. I grip her silken blonde hair, desperate to hold onto something.

"Stop teasing me," I grind out. She stops for a moment, allowing the head of my cock to linger just barely in her open mouth. I slide free of her lips, and she grips the base in one confident move. She begins to stroke my length, torturing me further.

Her soft hands caress up and down while she teases my head between her lips. Pre-

cum is dripping out, and she laps it all with her tongue, savoring every bit of my arousal.

The pleasure resonating through me is immense, and I let out a cry so loud I'm sure the rest of the island can hear us. I slide my fingers through her hair and set my own pace, pushing my cock further into her mouth, desperate for more.

She slides my dick out of her mouth long enough to quip. "So demanding. Do you always get what you want when you ask for it, sailor?"

Giggling, she sucks me back down her throat and I can feel the vibrations of it all the way to my balls. I let my head fall back as she continues to suck and tease until I can't hold it in any longer and I come harder than I ever have before inside her mouth. She swallows every last drop of my release, and I can't help but pull her up to meet my lips, tasting the final remnants of my seed on her tongue with a groan.

"That was..." I begin, but she stops me with a shimmering purple finger pressed to my lips.

"Shh, I think someone's coming."

I grunt, reaching for my trousers and pulling them on, refastening them just before I hear the rustling of something coming toward us through the trees.

She grabs my hand and pulls me through the maze of palms, boulders, and plants, leading us away from whatever is coming toward us.

"I think we lost them, unless they followed the scent of your arousal." She smirks and my traitorous cock twitches ready for round two.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

“I—Gods, I don’t know what you are doing to me. I’ve never done anything like this before. Usually, I would have taken you on several dates before I allowed that to happen between us.” I laugh awkwardly, trying to use humor to chase away the embarrassment creeping up my spine. “I’ve never been this bold with a woman this fast.”

“You don’t have to apologize for something I wanted just as much as you. I don’t know what this connection between us is either, but I don’t want it to go away.” Her cheeks turn a light lavender, and I wonder if that is the color of her blushing. “But if we are being honest with one another, I think you might be who I’ve been searching for most of my life.”

The breath escapes my lungs, and I stare at her, unsure what to say. There is a foreign fluttering in my chest, and I try to ignore it, but then I find myself wondering what her life is like here. How has it taken her one hundred and twenty-seven years to find someone?

“Come on. I want to help you find your brother. I hope he is here for your sake. There are several sailors at camp from years of shipwrecks, maybe he’s one of them.”

She begins walking again, and I decide to use the opportunity to learn more about this place and these sirens who were supposed to be brutal killers, but if Evelyn is like the others, then I can’t see them hurting a soul, unless sex with a siren can kill. The very thought has all the blood in my body rushing south. I quickly push the thought away.

“What are the storms that surround your island?” I remember just before they hit, both the sea and sky were clear. There were no dark clouds, no white capped waves.

There wasn't even an island. One moment we were sailing with the sun beating down on our backs, the next, rain, raging winds, and waves higher than the ship crashed down on us.

"I'm not sure. They've been there my entire life. They have been a part of this place for centuries." There is a waiver of trepidation in her voice. It makes me wonder if she is hiding something from me or if she truly doesn't know the answer.

"My people do not know about this island. It's not on any map or in any history books." I try to see her reaction to that news, but she's in front of me, and there is no change in her demeanor, making me think she already knows this.

"What is your home like?" She asks suddenly, slowing down until I catch up to her.

I raise a brow at the question, "It's—well, it's less of a jungle like this and more of a city. Actually, now that I think of it, there aren't many plants at all in the major city where I live. I probably have most of them locked up in my greenhouse."

She tilts her head and we continue our slow walk, "What's a greenhouse?"

I smile at her wide eyes, amused by the keen interest she has for my homeland. "It's a glass building where you can grow plants like all of these." I motion to the lush wildlife around us, noticing a specific flower I haven't yet seen on our walk.

"What is this flower called?" I ask, bending down to a bright blue bud with several long orange stems shooting up from its center and reaching out towards it. "It's so unique."

"Don't touch that!" She yells, grabbing my hand and pulling it back. "That plant is toxic. It has venom in the orange spines that will make you feel like your entire body is on fire."

“Interesting,” I muse, and she pins me with an amused look.

“You are a strange man, aren’t you?”

I snort, “Most people where I come from would say so.”

“Tell me more about your home, please. I’ve heard so little about the other lands outside the storms.”

“Well, I wouldn’t say my home is the most fascinating. It’s actually a rather harsh place to live. The entirety of Halvendor has been at war for—well, since our elven king left almost two hundred years ago. Wars were fought, and they still are over land. My own province has a wall around the city, housed with hundreds of soldiers in case of an attack.”

“What are provinces?”

“Sections of land that have been claimed and taken over by those with the power or means to do so. Several centuries ago, our kingdom was thriving and at peace. Some have even said it was a time of great magic, full of the mythical creatures in our story books.” I shake my head and chuckle, “I didn’t believe that before, but maybe there is some truth to it, seeing as I’m standing in the presence of one of those mythical creatures right now.”

Evelyn doesn’t say anything, just studies me intently, hanging on my every word.

“Anyway,” I continue, running a hand through my tangled locks, “a few centuries ago, the elven royal family suddenly disappeared, and whatever magic or creatures, if there were any, vanished with them, leaving the land vulnerable and weak. Those who were once powerful found themselves depleted and unable to defend their homes. Many took advantage of the feeble state of Halvendor, killing populations and

stealing land for their own.” I stop, shaking my head at the world I live in.

Part of me has always gone to my plants as a way to escape the cruelty that surrounds me. Even my own father has been a part of the cruelty of war, securing the rulership of the province I am trying to get away from inheriting. I don’t want all that blood on my hands.

“No one has been able to sit the throne and hold it since the ruling family left. It’s a big part of why there is so much war and unrest in Halvendor. Everyone wants control, but no one can keep it for long.” With a heavy sigh, I continue, “Now we have set borders between areas of land, heavily guarded. My father is the head of our province and he isn’t doing well.” I clear my throat, rubbing a hand along the tightness that has begun to twist in my chest. “If I can’t find my brother, I’m next in line to take over the province, and I... don’t want to.”

“So you could be the next ruler of your people?” Her brows shoot up in surprise.

I huff out a laugh, “Not like a King or anything, just our small city. There are only about six hundred people living there, and we work mostly in shipping. I just have no interest in any of it. I don’t want to have to worry about the company or trying to make sure peace remains in the province. Maybe that makes me weak or selfish.”

I rub at my chest, the tightness there growing, because it is weak and selfish. It’s the entire reason I am even in this situation. I don’t want responsibility. I look around at where I am, at the woman leading me through the jungle, and shake my head. Just look at where my selfishness has landed me, stranded on an island, but at least it’s full of beautiful women, even if they are sirens.

“I understand,” Evelyn says, pulling me from my thoughts. “I want nothing more than to leave this cursed island and see the world. This place is all we sirens know. We’ve been here for centuries.”

“Well, if we find my brother and get off this island, you are more than welcome to come with us back to our province. Maybe we can finally put the myth of the bloodthirsty sirens to rest.” I smile softly.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

She returns the gesture, but there is something in the way it doesn't reach her eyes. I sense a lingering sadness in her gaze. I have a mind to ask her what's wrong, but before I have the chance, we are at the edge of the forest and I can hear voices beyond.

"Welcome to our home," Evelyn says as we push our way through the trees and onto another picturesque beach, however this one is covered in huts—dozens of them. There are even huts up in the palm trees lining the beach with roped walkways between them and rope ladders going up the trees. It looks like something from a story.

"Come, the Elders will want to meet you." She grabs my hand and pulls me toward the largest of the huts. It is decorated with white flowers and carvings of not only sirens but different sea creatures and what looks like possibly a few humans. I don't get to look for long before Evelyn pulls me into the large, round space where four intensely gorgeous women sit in chairs made entirely out of seashells. I momentarily think that the seats can't be comfortable for the women, but they seem perfectly content. Ethereal even.

"Another batch of survivors so soon after the last?" One of the women says, "Where did you find him? And where have you been for the last day, Evelyn?"

She is probably the oldest of the four, although she looks no more than thirty. She has thick red hair that is braided into a coil atop her head, her skin, though tanned, is smooth and unmarred with age as her scales subtly shift between silver and bronze.

I gulp as she stands up and walks around the table she is sitting behind. She is

completely nude, and I force my eyes to stay on her face. I won't show any weakness in front of these women. They exude power and grace in a way that makes me want to do whatever they tell me to. I blink, trying to shake that feeling away.

The three other so-called Elders all join the first, and I bite the insides of my cheek trying not to make a sound, all of them fully nude as well. None of them look older than myself, and my heartbeat begins to quicken at their closeness. I can feel the power radiating from each of them.

Have I actually just landed myself on an island full of naked women? This is any man's dream. I pinch myself to make sure I'm not actually dreaming. If Dru was here somewhere alive, I can see why he might have stayed. This is a utopia compared to our home. The thought of my brother sparks what the Elder woman just said, 'another batch of survivors so soon'.

Does that mean someone from my brother's ship wrecked on these shores, too, and survived? It has to be Dru. I need it to be Dru.

"Take him to the men's hut with the others and then come back here. We need to speak with you, Evelyn, before tonight's cleansing ceremony," another of the Elders says as she walks toward me. Her hair is pitch black and braided intricately down her back, leaving everything uncovered for me to see. I gulp and clear my throat, trying not to look at her erect nipples as she circles me, looking at my body in a way that has my skin crawling. It's not sensual, but more like she is sizing up an animal for slaughter.

Evelyn must sense my discomfort because she brushes the back of her hand lightly against mine. The contact instantly sends a warmth through me, one that I reach for. I don't want to leave her side while on this island.

"Yes, Florence," Evelyn says, bowing her head to each of the Elder women and then

grabbing my hand and pulling me from the large cottage.

“What was that?” I asked.

“They must inspect all new men who come ashore. It is our custom.”

“Inspect?” I raise a brow, “For what reason?”

“It’s just how things are done here.” She brushes the question off quickly and it sends a flurry of unease through me. She is definitely hiding something from me.

I allow her to pull me through the maze of huts along the beach and into the copse of trees behind them, to where a large hut is built into the trunks of several large palms high overhead. I look up at it, amazed at its carpentry. It looks so different from the huts on the beach and reminds me of some of the smaller wooden structures from home.

“This is where the men stay. One of them built this place for themselves, and he has always welcomed newcomers to stay with him there.” That explains why it looks so different.

I follow her up a ladder, which consists of pieces of wood nailed into the trunk of the largest tree, and go straight through the center of the building. I’m not sure what I expected to see as I climbed my way up into the large space, but I most definitely didn’t expect to see an orgy happening right in front of us.

Moans of delight and ecstasy echo toward us, and I can’t peel my eyes away from the group of two men and four sirens all locked together in a pretzel of limbs and lust.

“I—my god,” I whisper and Evelyn grabs my hand pulling me away from the group and into another area of the treehouse far away from the sounds of the orgy.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t realize they would be doing that this early in the day.”

“So that’s a recurring event?”

“Um...well, yes,” her cheeks turn that lavender color again, noting she is blushing.

Just then, a man comes through a door at the opposite side of the room we are in. He is tall with short hair so light it looks almost white, tanned skin, eyes that seem to glow with a strange golden brown, and ears with a subtle point at the top.

“Katarina told me there was another new sailor to join our home. Happy to welcome you,” the man says, smiling with a large toothy grin. I can’t help but notice the points at the tip of his incisors.

Something about his smile, the way he is tilting his head a little to the right, and those strange, pointed ears, ignite a long-lost memory inside my mind. “Do I know you?” I ask him.

He chuckles, extending out a hand for me to shake, “I highly doubt it. The name’s Mathius. Pleased to meet you.”

I take his hand, which practically engulfs my own with how large it is. “Kai,” I offer numbly, staring at him, trying to place the face and the name in my head. Where do I know him from?

“Come on, let me take you to where you will be staying.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

I nod, but can't shake the feeling of familiarity I get in his presence. He's from Halvondor, I'm certain of it.

I narrow my eyes at the back of his head as I follow him into my new living quarters.

9

Evelyn

I should have warned Kai before we entered the men's hut. What was I thinking? This type of occurrence is so routine, happening several times a day, that I didn't even think to prepare him. After witnessing it for so many years, it's normal, but I should have thought about how different this might be for him.

I could feel his embarrassment and hesitation at the scene, and while we navigate through the hut, I can't help but wonder if he's ever experienced being with more than one partner at a time. It's quite common here to have multiple lovers simultaneously, but the city he comes from seems so rigid. They probably wouldn't understand our way of life.

Many of the men who come from Halvondor have mentioned various rules about making love with strangers in their kingdom. A part of me can't help but wonder if there is any wisdom to their way of intimacy on the mainland.

As we weave our way down the hall, Mathius comes out of his room to greet us. He has been on the island for as long as I can remember, and while he's not exactly human, he seems to come from the same part of the world as the sailors, and they all

follow the rules he's put in place without question. He cuts a stark figure, taking up the majority of the door frame, towering several inches above Kai.

After a moment of introductions, I graze Kai's hand with my own, a soft and deliberate touch anchoring me to the reality of his presence. He's warm and solid, and for now, mine and mine alone.

The Elders have always been strict about following our rituals with newcomers, for our safety and theirs. These poor sailors have only heard horrid tales about us, and we can't have them darting back into the churning sea, terror-stricken by the mistaken belief that we are monsters determined to drag them to their watery graves.

So, as per tradition, all newcomers must meet the Elders before participating in the weekly Elder flower cleansing ritual, and then meet the rest of the residents of the island. Normally, the cleansing ritual would be tonight at dusk, but since Kai has just arrived and is still healing from his injuries, I will request moving it to tomorrow. I know that is what Florence and the other Elders want to discuss with me. The cleansing is a sacred piece of our life with the sailors here, a necessity for them to survive, or at least that's what I've always been told.

Typically, during these rituals, the men finally begin to relax, letting their guards down, and surrender to all the island has to offer, including us sirens. After each cleanse, there is a celebration, which—if I can convince them—will likely be moved to tomorrow evening. During the celebration, the entire island erupts into an orgy, indulging in their most carnal impulses. At one time, I eagerly awaited the weekly Elder flower ritual, but I've long since found no joy in it, much to Katarina's dismay.

But I suppose if Kai wanted to try... No. I shut the thought down as soon as it comes. I want him all to myself. I can give him private lessons on anything he might see during the post-cleanse celebration tomorrow evening in the privacy of his room, far from the other siren's hungry eyes.

Kai is something new and so different from the other men on the island. A kind and alluring man like Kai is sure to ignite a wanting in my siren sisters. They will see a sweet new flavor to try, and they won't be able to keep their hands off him, which is why I need to relish these moments.

I'm determined to savor every lingering glance, every heated kiss, and every whisper of affection for as long as I can. Time is short, and I must go speak with the Elders before the ceremony tomorrow, including Florence.

Looking back at Kai, I let out a heavy sigh, happy to simply enjoy the view of his perfectly sculpted ass and broad shoulders for now.

The very thought of him mingling with my sisters causes a fierce protectiveness to surge within me. No part of me wants to let Kai go through all this. What if he meets my sisters and chooses someone else's bed? I won't let that happen.

My mind wanders back to our journey to the village and the way he feasted on me like a man who's never had a meal. The way his lips felt pressed against mine still sends a tingle across my skin. I touch my lips, remembering the feel of his cock in my mouth and his seed spilling down my throat.

It makes me want to pull him into his new room and continue what we started in the forest. I've never wanted someone to take me in such a way, never wanted to explore my need so deeply with only one person.

While having multiple partners was common here, we've been told by the men that it's not where they're from. Although all of the humans I've met thus far seem happy with this change of standards, which makes me think that Kai could be convinced as well. Yet, even just the thought of him with another siren makes my stomach churn.

A wave of possessiveness surges through me. I want him to be only mine and mine

alone, and I will do whatever I can to ensure he only wants me in return.

His priority is finding his brother. He has made that clear, but perhaps while we search, we can explore a few fantasies along the way. Besides, who knows if his brother is even on this island, and it's not like the men can go anywhere, so we have plenty of time to find him if he is here.

I clench my jaw at the thought, because I still haven't told Kai that he can't leave, even if he does find his brother. The time just hasn't been right, but I will tell him when he needs to know.

For now, I follow him as Mathius provides Kai introductions to the few men who are not currently engrossed in other activities. None of them are Kai's brother, and Mathius leads us to a private room that is to be Kai's quarters.

Each of the men has their own rooms within the expansive hut, though they don't tend to spend much time in those spaces. Still it's a comfort that we try to provide them—something to give them a small semblance of peace since they are trapped here with us.

We turn down another narrow hallway and I gently push open the wooden door at its end to reveal a modestly sized room. Dominating the space is a large, inviting bed, elevated by a carved wooden frame and draped with a quilted blanket that adds warmth to the room. At the foot of the bed is a sturdy trunk, its surface weathered with age, and in the far corner stands a wash basin made from a large clam shell, already filled with fresh water. The walls are made of straw, and the wooden floors make the space seem cozier. A delicate flowering vine creeps its way inside his room from the small window above the wash basin and several woven rugs litter the floor.

I can see his eyes taking in the room with utter fascination. He mentioned that where he comes from in his—what was the word again—province. It is more of a city, full

of buildings and people, and I can only imagine what his quarters in his home there look like.

The island provides most everything that we need, and what it doesn't, we scavenge from the wrecks that the storm brings our way. While it isn't the lavish life Kai is probably used to being the son of a wealthy leader—it's home. Our home. He just doesn't know it yet.

We all work together as a community to keep the village running, so anything extra he might need can be found in the heart of our beachside huts.

Kai walks around the room, looking astonished.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

“I know it’s probably not what you’re used to, but I hope it will work for you,” I say, feeling a little self-conscious of our humble homes.

“This is perfect, and very generous. All one needs, to be honest.” He says, staring longingly at the bed. He must be exhausted—getting caught in the storm, almost bleeding to death, feasting on me, and then me returning the sentiment, and walking several miles across the island.

Shooting a glance down the hall and making sure no one is around, I blurt out. “I guess you must be pretty exhausted. You probably want to wash up and get some rest. Dinner is in a few hours, and I can come get you beforehand. There should be spare clothes in the trunk, and I’ll just leave you to it.”

Turning sharply towards the door, I feel like I should leave the room. The air grows thick, and I feel like I can’t breathe.

Kai grasps my wrist as I take a step to leave and pulls me round to face him. “Or you could stay and tell me more about what to expect from the others at dinner. Will there be another performance with our meal like the one in the front room? Dinner and a show?” He smirks, and my entire body relaxes.

I am not ready to show him off to the rest of the girls, but I know he has to come to our nightly meal. It’s tradition. If I can steal another few more moments with just the two of us, I certainly will.

I laugh, “No show. Just dinner and then the cleansing ceremony tomorrow morning.” He raises a brow, and I quickly add, “It’s fun, trust me. You will get to meet all of the

other sirens more...intimately. They're just as beautiful as Katerina and even more open about their appetites. I'm sure you could find a few to share your evening with."

Why did I just say that? What is wrong with me? I don't want him to find someone else to share his evening with. I want him to share it with me. I can't stop thinking about how much I want to push him onto this bed and take every ounce of satisfaction I can muster from him before falling asleep wrapped in his arms.

Kai releases my wrist and moves to grip my chin, forcing me to meet his eyes. "I am not interested in spending the night with anyone," he whispers. "Except you."

Suddenly, his mouth crashes against mine, making me gasp, and I sink into his body. Gripping his shirt, I grind my hips into his growing length, allowing his hands to roam down my back, my hips, and grasp the underside of my ass. He lifts me up roughly and I wrap my legs around his waist as he carries me to the bed.

"The door...anyone could walk in." I rasp, neediness pulsing through me, wanting nothing more than to finally feel this man fully and completely. Kai gently places me down on the bed, showering kisses along the side of my neck and down my collarbone.

Leaving me desperate and pleading on the sheets, he kicks the door shut and slides the trunk in front of it just to make sure it's secure.

His eyes rake up and down my frame as he prowls back towards the bed.

"Clothes off. Now." He orders gruffly and pulls his shirt over his head, revealing an exquisitely sculpted chest. His trousers hang lazily on his frame, showing off the light hair trailing down his stomach to the barely concealed length that is straining against the buttons. I want nothing more than to see this man naked.

He has surprised me in more ways than one with his gentle touches and demanding desires. He's so light-hearted in nature, but he has such a filthy mouth.

I know from experience that being a sailor is no easy job and most of the men that arrive here have bodies accustomed to a hard day's work. Even though Kai told me he's not a sailor but a scholar, I never would have known. His body is a masterpiece of hard flesh and corded muscles.

His heated gaze meets mine, and I pull the strings of my simple top, slowly unlacing the knots behind my neck, watching as his nostrils flare. He's practically quivering in anticipation. With a final yank, my top slides down my frame, leaving my breasts on full display.

Kai makes a sound deep in his throat and my nipples go hard as a wave of wanting washes through me. He continues to watch my every move as I trace my fingers down my stomach and tease at the waistband of my skirt. Tugging at the laces, I lift my hips to shimmy out of it and toss it to the floor with one soft thud.

I have never been the most sultry or sought-after siren, nothing like my sister, but I am proud of my body. I may be more petite than the others, but I have delicate curves and ample breasts for my size, and the way Kai is looking at me now—no man has ever looked at me with such desperate want in their eyes.

"Kai, are you sure?" I say, hoping with all my heart he wants this as much as I do. "Because if not..."

His hands grip my ankles and pull me to the edge of the bed, scooping me into his arms. He whispers in my ear, "I want this, Eve. In fact, I've never wanted something more." And his lips are on mine again.

I break away from his kiss for a moment and stare into his shining emerald gaze,

knowing then that he feels the same as I do.

Biting on his lower lip, I give in to the fever that has overtaken me. I slip my tongue between his lips and drag my hands down his muscular chest, searching for the buttons to undo his trousers. I can feel his cock hardening further under my touch as his pants drop to the floor. Kai lowers us both down onto the bed, his large body towering over me.

“Never have I seen something so beautiful in my life. Not even a Dahlia or one of the vibrant flowers on this island. No other woman could ever compare.”

My heart melts at the sentiment, and my need for him only rises with desperate abandon.

I want this man. I need this man.

“I never expected to need a man in such a way, and I can’t wait for you to hold up your end of the deal from our walk through the jungle.” I smirk, “Are you going to show me all the ways I’m going to be screaming your name?”

His eyes turn feral and his mouth finds mine, hungrily his hands begin to explore my curves, trailing down until he finds my clit, and rubs delicate circles around it, before slipping a finger inside my pulsing heat, teasing my center.

“So wet,” He murmurs in my ear, “Is this all for me?”

“Yes,” I pant at the feel of his finger teasingly pumping inside me while his thumb strokes my clit. A moan slips out of me, and I whine, “More, Kai. I need more.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

“Good girl, asking for what you want.” He nibbles at my ear and rakes his teeth down the side of my neck while adding another finger inside me. “So tight. Gods, Eve,” he rasps.

His fingers move in and out with expert strokes, circling my clit with his thumb. My walls start to tremble, and I can feel myself falling. The edges of my vision blur just as Kai moves down my body and roughly takes one of my breasts in his mouth.

With none of the gentleness from earlier, he’s a man desperate to deliver pleasure. He bites at my taut nipples as I see stars and scream out his name.

“That’s right, good girl, say my name for everyone to hear,” he praises while kneading each breast, “These are perfect. So plump and heavy in my hand. I could feast on them all night.”

His encouragement only ignites me further, building me up, and my release crashes through me with such ferocity that I’m certain my soul has just left my body. I take in a shaky breath, reveling in this moment.

My eyes are heavy as I look up at the man who made me feel like I was on another plane of existence, if only for a second. But I’m not satisfied yet and I can see by the cum glistening from the tip of his hard cock, neither is he. I drag his body back over mine and devour his mouth, savoring the soft feel of his lips. Pushing playfully against his shoulder, I encourage him to flip over to his back.

“I need to feel you inside of me.”

With my knees straddling either side of his hips, I reach for his cock and gently guide it to my entrance. Slowly, I lower myself onto him, feeling my walls expand inch by inch as he fills me fully. His eyes begin to glaze over, and he throws his head back until I am fully seated.

I began to roll my hips, seeking another round of pleasure for myself. The feeling of a second climax begins to build in my core, and I lean forward and kiss his soft lips, teasing him with my tongue.

Kai grabs my hips roughly and begins to pick up the pace, the sounds of our bodies crashing together are mingled with our moans of passion. Never has it felt so right.

Kai flips us over, and my back hits the mattress with a soft thump as he slams into me with abandon, seeking out his own release. He brings a hand to my clit and starts rubbing slow circles in an effort to drive me mad with want. I can feel the waves of another orgasm beginning to crest. With his other hand he grips my calf and brings my leg to his shoulder. I cry out. This angle is doing wonders, I can suddenly feel him deeper inside me.

“Kai. I’m so close. Don’t stop.”

His hand grazes down my leg, and he places soft kisses along my calf and brushes his hand down my leg, up my stomach, to his final destination. His thrusts come faster and faster, as he rolls my hardened nipple through his fingers. I can feel every stroke, a pulse in my blood, coiled tight in my core.

Heat builds in my center, and my walls begin to tremble as Kai continues to taunt and tease the most sensitive parts of me. With one final thrust, he spills his seed inside of me while my pleasure crashes through every part of me.

He collapses on top of me with a heavy sigh and nuzzles into my neck, sending

shivers down my spine. Slowly, he begins to pull out of me and his cum drips down my scales. Looking at him, I see a possessiveness in his gaze that I have often seen with the other men on the island, but never experienced firsthand.

Kai rolls out of bed and silently grabs a towel from the wash basin, wets it, and walks back to bed. With the gentleness of someone who spent time caring for delicate flowers, he reaches between my thighs and begins to clean up the mess. After placing the towel back by the wash basin, he slides back into the bed and wraps his arms around me.

“That was...something,” he mutters in my ear. “Eve, you do something indescribable to me. I...I just can’t help myself around you. You are incredible.”

“I feel the same,” I say while drawing slow circles on his arms with my fingertips as my eyelids begin to drift close and our breaths become an even tone.

10

Evelyn

Waves crash, the white caps crest higher and higher with each lull of the tide. A crack of lightning off in the distance. Sand under my feet. I look around and try to place exactly where I am.

“My dear, I've been looking for you everywhere.”

A woman with long blonde hair and teal scales walks along the shoreline, wrapping her arms around a man's waist. He turns to face her, capturing her in his arms, and his face is alight with pure love and affection for this woman.

Why does she feel so familiar? Who is she? Do I know him?

“I’ve been right here the whole time. Watching.” He smiles big and full-toothed, and it brightens the world around him. But I can’t see his face, because it’s somehow blurred from my view.

“You have to stop obsessing. It’s just a storm cloud, it will leave.” She says to him, planting a kiss on his cheek and reaching up to muss his hair.

He catches the woman's wrist as she continues to chip away at his carefully constructed exterior, and he kisses the top of her hand, the inside of her wrist, up her arm, and her lips. His arms squeeze her closer, and he whispers something in her ear that sends her into a fit of giggles.

Releasing her from his grasp, the woman turns to look at the lone storm cloud off in the distance and then up at the clear blue sky above her. She’s radiant, full of so much love for this man, and she seems so happy.

Something tugs at the back of my mind, and I can feel the edges of my consciousness stirring to life, but I can’t wake up. Not before I figure out who this woman is.

I take a hesitant step towards them, determined to get a closer look, when suddenly she turns toward me and I can see her round, heavily pregnant belly.

I know exactly who she is.

I wake with a start, forgetting where I am. The dream felt so real, like I was there, almost like a memory. The images of the dream start to fade quickly.

Feeling the cage of Kai's arms around me helps my racing heart, but the feeling of unease is still sitting on my chest. It had to have been Aurelia, my mother, but who was that man? Was he my father?

Her eyes, the curve of her nose, that shining hair. She is what I always imagined my mother to look like. My mind is playing tricks on me, conjuring up fairy tales even when I'm sleeping.

But it felt so real.

Blinking awake, I realize that we've slept most of the day away. The sun is low in the sky, it's now late afternoon, and there are more important things to deal with than some strange dream, even if it felt so real.

A rustling from Kai jars me from my thoughts as I feel his naked chest press into my back and something else that seems eager and wanting.

"Kai, we have to go. It has to be almost dinner time, and you have to meet the others."

"Dinner can wait, surely," he groans while rolling his hips into me.

“Fine,” I rumble. “Dinner can wait.”

Immediately laying me on my back, Kai kisses my lips like it’s been days, not hours. He lazily makes his way down my body, sending shivers down my spine. He makes it to the center of the thighs and starts to kiss up each thigh gingerly, intimately. His hand grazes the inside of my leg, and then he eases one finger into my center. I gasp at the sensation. He begins thrusting in and out while kissing my clit.

What a way to wake up, am I right?

He adds another finger and arches them inside me. With no warning, he nips my clit and I scream feeling my orgasm shoot through me. The feelings of pleasure crest through me, and I’m seeing spots dance behind my eyelids as he continues with his fingers. Languidly, he pulls them out and looks at me with his dark, jeweled gaze before he sticks them in his mouth and licks off my arousal.

“Your so fucking addicting,” He purrs. “Who needs dinner when I can have your sweet wet pussy instead?”

I glide my fingers through his luscious curls and tug slightly. A moan escapes him, and he kisses between the apex of my thighs one last time before coming up, his mouth meeting my waiting lips.

He wraps his arms around me, cradling me to his chest, and plants a kiss atop my head, drawing lazy circles along my back, and I sigh contentedly. I haven’t felt this at peace in a long time.

“These scales are so soft. I can’t stop touching you.” He says sleepily. “I thought they would be rough, but they’re so smooth and cool. They’re breathtaking. You are breathtaking.”

He yawns, and soon after, I hear his light snores begin, and decide now is the perfect opportunity to go and talk with the Elders.

Soundlessly, I slide out from Kai's arms and plant my feet delicately on the floor. I turn to look over my shoulder, making sure I haven't woken him. His golden curls have fallen into his face for the hundredth time, and he looks so relaxed, so serene, like he's right where he should be.

Resisting the urge to sweep the hair from his face, I gather my clothes and tie the strings of my top as I mentally prepare for tomorrow's events.

What I need first is to speak with Florence and explain where I've been the last day and a half. Then I need to talk to the other Elders about the cleansing ceremony and have them check on Kai's still healing wounds.

I make a mental note to be more gentle next time we're in bed together.

Next time.

I'm already planning a next time, planning our future, and I've only just met this man. Am I out of my mind? I touch my fingers to my lips and remember the feel of his mouth devouring mine.

Stealing one final glance at Kai's sleeping form, I open the door as quietly as possible and sneak back out into reality.

I find the Elders in their hut deep in discussions, heads huddled together and whispering in each other's ears with looks of concern etched across each of their faces. Cautiously, I clear my throat to acknowledge my presence, not wanting to seem like I'm eavesdropping on their heated conversation, even as curiosity has me wishing I hadn't revealed myself so soon.

“Evelyn, my dear, where is that new sailor? The ceremony will begin this evening. We need to see him now and make sure he’s prepared to participate in the cleansing ritual,” Florence says, making her way towards me and sweeping me in one of her bone-crushing hugs.

Although I’ve been around for one hundred and twenty-seven years, I’m still just a child in her eyes. She holds me in her arms and kisses the side of my head. I squeeze her just as tightly before letting my arms drop and nod to all of the additional Elders in the room.

“He’s sleeping in the men’s hut.” I say, “He sustained several injuries from the ship wreck, and I left him to rest and recover. I would hate to wake him now, mistresses. But I can ensure he is ready bright and early tomorrow morning if you will allow.” My voice wavers slightly as I’m unsure if the Elders will move the ceremony.

After a brief shared look between them, they nod in unison. I nearly sigh in relief, internally squealing in delight to have the rest of today and the entire evening with Kai all to myself.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

“We still have things to discuss, young lady. You’re not getting out of telling me all about what happened with that boy.” Florence jokingly scolds, “Walk with me.”

“Yes, Flo,” I say, bowing to the other three Elders, looking each one in the eye as I do. Their gazes always send a shiver through me. They are the most powerful sirens ever to exist. They were the reason Kafidga is what it is today—a paradise. If only they could use their gifts to eliminate the storms, then we could be free to come and go from our home as we please.

Florence leads the way out of the cottage, and we head out towards the water. “You must be starving, seeing as you disappeared for almost two full days and didn’t take any food with you,” she teases.

“I did take some supplies, but I definitely didn’t expect to be gone for so long.”

“Tell me, dear, what happened?”

“Well, I just couldn’t see another man lost to the storms, so I decided I could still be helpful if I gathered medicine and other supplies for any injured men that the sisters might save. I went to the cove on the other side of the island for the jindera flowers when I spotted him out in the distance. Florence, I can’t explain it. I felt this pull towards him, like I needed to save him.” I pause and check her expression. She just watches me with that loving, motherly expression she always had. She had always been there for me, no matter what. I could tell her anything and everything, and she would comfort me.

“I was able to pull him ashore, but he was bleeding from several wounds, and I had to

sing in order to heal him. We were both exhausted and ended up staying the night on the other side of the island until he was well enough to make the trip here.”

“I’m so sorry, Eve, I know how you feel about new arrivals. How did he take the news?”

I chuckle slightly at the memory of our conversation on the beach. Was that really only a few hours ago?

“Surprisingly well. Kai mentioned that he’s searching for his brother, a royal who’s ship was lost at sea one moon ago. I’m hoping it’s that boy that’s been following Katerina around, but I can’t be sure. I need to talk to her. Where is she?”

“Right here, sis!” Katerina calls from behind me. I spin to see her dripping wet from time spent in the sea, and she’s not alone—a dark-haired man trails behind her, the one who’s been following her around like a guppy. I narrow my eyes at him, studying his features. His hair is so dark it could almost be black, and his eyes are a light brown, but as the dying afternoon sun hits them, they seem almost to shift green. Could this be Kai’s lost brother?

“There you are, Kat. I need to talk to you.”

“I’m sure you do,” she winks. “So, where’s Wonder Boy?”

Florence gives me a knowing look and quirks an eyebrow. I groan internally, knowing I will have to confess my full feelings for Kai before things go too far.

“Wonder Boy has a name, and it’s Kai,” I emphasize, hoping for some spark of recognition from Katarina’s latest conquest, but he’s too busy nuzzling her neck to be paying attention. “He’s asleep in the men’s hut. It’s been a long few days for him, and I wanted to let him rest.”

Katerina smirks at me, leaning into the man's advances, and I roll my eyes. I want to catch her up on everything that has happened since she met Kai only early this morning, but now, in front of Florence, is not the time.

"Well, it's too bad everyone hasn't gotten to meet him yet. He's quite the catch, sis. I'll see you at the gathering in the morning. Always a pleasure, Florence." Kat says while turning back towards the dark-haired man. She sweeps her fingers across his chest before grabbing his hand and pulling him towards her hut.

Florence coughs beside me, shaking me from my thoughts, "So this boy. What's the real story?"

"I...I'm honestly not sure," I say, because this bond I feel with him is still a mystery to me. "When I brought him to shore, I felt this instant connection and a deep need to protect him. The hours I spent nursing him back to health, I felt a spark growing between us. I know it sounds crazy, but I've never felt this way before. He's awakened something inside me."

Florence smiles lightly at me.

"He's kind and caring. He's gentle and.." I trail off, looking Florence in the eyes, waiting for her reaction.

"And handsome," she laughs, her eyes alight with happiness.

I smile at her, feeling joy and excitement spread through me for the first time in ages. Maybe this island could feel less like a prison with Kai around. Maybe having someone to share this life with was all I needed.

"I'm so very happy for you, my dear." Her smile falters slightly, and I feel a wave of uneasiness come over me. "But make sure you are following the rules. He must

participate in the cleansing ceremony as soon as he wakes in the morning, and you must introduce him to the rest of the village. It would benefit you both to spend time with the others.”

I try to hide my frown of disappointment as I say, “Yes, Flo, I know. We will be at tomorrow’s ceremony, I swear it.”

11

Kai

I might be the luckiest man alive. I finally understand why sirens are rumored to lure men to their watery graves, because I feel like I would go to the ends of the earth for Evie. Her presence is so enchanting, it’s magnetic, pulling me to her, and even if I could resist it, I wouldn’t want to.

I’m drawn to her in a way that can’t be explained. It’s not a need or even a want, it’s as if my soul would be ripped from my body if I don’t have her.

In a single day, she has become a necessity, something I can’t live without. So, in a way, I guess the stories of sirens luring men to their deaths could be true. If any other man felt the way I was now, they would most certainly follow a siren beneath the waves with no thought for their own lives.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

We must have both been exhausted from last night's escapades. I didn't count, but I'm pretty sure I made Evie come a dozen times. We missed dinner and spent most of the night enjoying one another, which means I've had no chance to meet the other sirens and the rest of the men before this 'cleansing ceremony' that Eve keeps talking about. But even worse, I've completely pushed aside thoughts of Dru and finding him here on this island. I grunt, inwardly cursing myself for losing track of something so important.

Turning over in bed, I find Eve sound asleep beside me, looking so beautiful and serene. Her golden hair covers her face, and I reach out, brushing it behind her ear, letting my hand lightly graze across her face. She stirs from the touch and slowly opens her eyes.

"Good morning, Eve," I whisper, cupping her chin and pulling her lips to mine.

She moans, smiling as I release the kiss. "I'm not sure I've slept that well ever in my life."

I smile back, and she laughs softly, but then her eyes widen and she pushes herself off the bed, looking out the small window. "What time is it?!"

"I don't know. Morning? Afternoon? How can one be sure?"

"We have to go! The cleansing ceremony starts at dawn." She grabs the clothes that we strewn across the floor last night, throwing them at me.

The strings of her top smack into me, and I pick it up, holding it over my chest. "I'm

not sure this is mine, but if you want me to wear it, I certainly will.”

She snatches the top from my grip and fastens it over her ample breasts, “Not funny. I’m serious, we have to be there on time. I spoke with my mother and the other Elders yesterday, and they gave you a day to rest, but we can not miss the ceremony this morning.”

I push off the bed, realizing that she’s right. It was time to find Dru and get off this island, but even the thought of leaving this place makes my heart twist. I know it’s only been a day, but I don’t want to leave. I want to see where this thing between Evie and I goes. There is something profound between us, something new and exciting, but first, I need to find my brother.

“You’re right,” I say, pulling on my pants. “I need to find Dru.”

Evelyn stops and makes a strange face that I can’t quite figure out.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes,” she says, tying her skirt around her waist. “I’m fine. I just don’t want you to get your hopes up too much. I’m not entirely sure your brother is here. I don’t know anyone with that name, although a few of the sailors can’t remember their names from before coming here. Still,” she walks to me, taking my hands in hers. “If he isn’t...”

“It’s alright, Evie.” I don’t know why I’ve started calling her Evie, but it feels right. I like the way Evie sounds. It seems more like her than her full name.

“I’ve already come to terms with the fact that he might be gone forever. I mourned his loss long ago, but I do still have some hope. Enough hope to have brought me all the way here...to you.” I smile down at her with heavy lids, looking at her plump

lips, parted and ready for me. Cupping her chin and tilting her head up toward mine, I bend, going for a kiss, but she pushes me away.

“No! We don’t have time for that. If you kiss me, we will miss it all because we both know we will be on that bed in two seconds flat. No distractions. Come on.” She grabs my hand and pulls me out the door.

I notice the rest of the men's quarters are empty as we make it to the trap door and climb down the tree ladder, making our way to the beach.

“See, we are already behind. Hurry!”

I chase after Evie as she leads the way down to the beach. Looking out over the horizon, I notice the foreboding grey skies and the angry storms that encircle this whole island. Streaks of lightning can be seen far off, but there is no thunderous sound, almost as if the storms are too far away for the sounds of thunder to reach here. It just hovers far away like a bad omen, making me shiver as gooseflesh climbs up my arms and down my torso. There is something not right about those storms. Memories flash in my vision of the harsh winds whipping through the sails, tearing them to shreds and the giant waves towering over the ship.

“We are almost there! Hurry up!” Evie shouts from far ahead of me, and I only now realize I had slowed my pace, entranced by the imposing storms.

Stepping onto the beach, I find nearly one hundred possibly more sirens standing in the shallows where the sea meets sand, light waves splashing against them with the tide. And standing in front of them with their backs turned to us are fifteen perfectly poised men.

This is my chance to find out if my brother is one of them, but just as I’m about to dart forward to study each of their faces, Evie seizes my hand. She tugs me to stand

beside the men positioned at the farthest right side of the group, limiting my view so that I could only see a few of the faces just next to me.

None are my brother.

“You’re ordered in line from who arrived first to the last arrivals, which is you.” She whispers in my ear. “Don’t be scared. The ceremony is fast, and you’ll get to hear our deadly siren’s song.”

She gives me a wink before joining the other sirens, and I see her stand beside her sister Katarina. They are so similar in the way they look, but there is a softness to Evie that Katarina doesn’t have. The way Katarina holds her body is vain, as if she knows she is the most beautiful siren on the beach, but to me, that makes her so much less spectacular than Evie. As if sensing my thoughts Evie smiles at me and I smile back before looking away, because if I stare at her much longer my dick will be straining against these trousers just thinking about sinking into her. Even just the thought of her body makes my balls ache and my cock begin to swell.

I curse, drawing my attention to the men beside me. Leaning forward, I look at the man on the far end of the line. It’s Mathius, whom I met the evening before. I remember what Evelyn whispered to me a moment ago. Him being the first in the row means he was the first to arrive on the island.

I let my eyes travel to the next man in line and then the next beside him, squinting through my cracked spectacles, looking for my brother’s features. Disappointment washes over me with each inspection of the men’s faces. None of them is Dru. My brother isn’t here.

The realization hits me in the center of my chest like a ton of stones. A heaviness settles there, followed by a sting of pain. My brother is lost. He is truly gone, and I will never get the chance to see him again, hug him again. I look down at the white

sand beneath my feet, feeling the tears begin to well. I cried for my brother's loss long ago, but it never felt final, not like it does now.

This was final.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

Dru was dead, and I am now the heir to our father's province and shipping company. Another weight suddenly settles on my shoulders, the weight of responsibility. A burden I never wanted, a duty that I can't say no to.

I look up to Evie again and see concern etched across her features. She has been watching me. I can only imagine the mosaic of emotions that just crossed over my face. Sending her a weak smile, letting her know that I'm alright, her body relaxes, but then the sirens begin to sing.

I quickly look back at the line of men beside me, shifting my gaze to each of their faces a second time, when a sixteenth man runs up and squeezes in beside me. Stumbling sideways, I blink several times, looking at the man's hand, recognizing the signet ring on his finger. The ring is one I know well, an anchor with two swords marked in an 'X' over top. It's my family crest. I want to look up at the man's face, certain that I will see my brother's hazel eyes staring back at me, but I'm stuck, frozen by the most enchanting sound. All thought leaves me, and I turn my gaze back to the sirens, to Evie and her sirens' song, drawn to its beauty like a fish to a hook.

The sound is unlike anything I've ever heard—almost otherworldly.

It's like the chime of a hundred bells ringing in perfect harmony, combined with the distant echo of an immense waterfall. Their song weaves through the air like a tangible thing, shimmering and wrapping its threads around all of the men, including myself. I feel my entire body relax into the sound as I watch them hold a large vase up into the sky, continuing their song.

One of the sirens places several beautiful pink flower petals into the vase while

another adds a vial of some kind of herb. They continue their song, and I feel my mind growing hazy, my eyes growing heavy with the peacefulness the otherworldly sound imposes upon me. It's beautiful, they are beautiful.

I think back vaguely to the stories I was told as a child about the lure of the siren's song. Those stories never ended well, and the rational part of my brain yells at me to look away from them, to cover my ears from their song. Instead of doing either of those things, my body moves of its own accord. I take a step forward and then another, I can hear the other men doing the same until my feet meet the cool lick of water, and I stand only a step away from Evie, my Dahlia.

My eyes widen as I see her skin begin to glow, lavender and green light shining around her like an aura, her purple eyes glimmering in the sunlight. I am mesmerized by her, unable to look away.

Abruptly, the sirens stop their song, and I am handed a cup of pink liquid that glows just as Evelyn's skin did. Taking it, I drink without question, letting the sweet taste of the brew bloom on my tongue.

It is extraordinary, like the sweet richness of honied coconut mixed with so many vibrant fruits, creating a symphony of flavor on my tongue. I taste ripe berries, crisp apples, and other tropical fruits I don't think I've ever had before. It's warm as it travels down my throat, and I can feel it as it moves into my stomach, spreading a comforting warmth through me that makes me moan with delight. Leaving a tantalizing tingling sensation in my chest, the strange drink begins to make my head feel woozy. A thick fog seems to shroud my mind, leaving me disoriented. I blink, struggling to clear the haze and remember why I am here and what I was doing before this moment.

"What was that?" I hear myself ask, but it sounds as if my voice is far away.

“The siren’s Elixir,” Evelyn says, her voice still sounding like the song I heard her sing only moments ago.

I look past her, my eyes sweeping over the vast expanse of the sea, and I can’t help but gasp at the astonishing vibrancy of the colors before me. The ocean scratches out like a brilliant tapestry, revealing every hue of blue imaginable, from the deepest indigo to the clearest cerulean. I can even see the coralreefs dazzling beneath the shimmering waves, their intricate patterns and vivid colors creating a masterpiece that captivates my senses.

“Do you like it?” Evie says and I nod, looking back down at her. For the first time, I realize that her skin is not two colors, but many, a hundred different shades of colors, some that I have never even seen before. They meld together, shifting and growing more vibrant the more I look. And there is an aura of bright yellow and orange that surrounds her like a sun. She is glowing before me.

“You are stunning,” I breathe. “How is this possible? I can see everything so clearly now.”

“It’s the Elder flower.” She grabs my hands and pulls me through the water toward the forest we came through yesterday. “It’s incredible. You have to see it. It will make every flower you’ve seen look dull in comparison.”

My mind is a blur, keeping me from coherent thought, and I feel like I can’t trust my own lips to move and say words correctly, so I simply nod and follow her to the edge of the trees.

“How are you feeling?” She asks with a knowing giggle.

“Like I’m seeing the world fully for the first time,” I say. “And I want to know if that sweet pussy tastes even more magical than the siren’s Elixir.”

Blushing, she smacks my arm, and I pull her in my arms as she stares into my eyes. She's stunning, I can't seem to get enough, and neither can my cock. It's growing hardness is distracting me from the task at hand. I kiss her gingerly on the nose and mentally scold myself for allowing such boy natures to take control.

"You're a goddess, and I can't wait to have my way with you again. When can I do that?" I joke.

"Soon, sailor, soon, but first we have to go mingle with the others. Plus, you need to eat. It's been days since you've had a proper meal."

"Oh I don't know about that, I think I feasted plenty over the last few days," I whisper into her ear and lightly nip her lobe, my dick surges as she presses herself further into me. She tilts her head to the side, allowing me full access to her neck, where I kiss and nip down to her collarbone. I resist the urge to pull down her top and capture one of her supple nipples between my teeth.

A quiet gasp escapes her lips as I let my hands roam up her sides, squeezing her full, rounded backside.

"Kai, we have to go," she says in a breathy whisper. "You have to meet Yvette and the others."

Reluctantly, I pull away and take one final moment to admire her beauty, the faint glow still emitting off of her and the slight lavender hue to her cheeks that I've come to realize is her blushing.

I take her hand, and she leads the way back to the party. Sweaty bodies writhe around us as more of the siren's Elixir is passed between the men of the village.

"Evelyn," a voice calls from behind us, and we both turn. It's the Elder I met earlier,

the one with the red hair and the scales that shift from silver to gold. Her hair is no longer coiled atop her head, but flowing long down her back. She still wears no clothes and I find myself wondering if she ever does.

She is quite stunning, but her beauty feels off. I can't figure out why, but there is an eerie feeling that rushes through me at her closeness. Unlike the other siren's who glow with vivid colors under the spell of the Elixir, this woman has none. There is a blackness surrounding her, like an inky poison that has taken over her aura. I frown, taking Evie's hand and pulling her away from the Elder siren.

"Yvette," Evie says. "What a beautiful cleansing you performed, per usual."

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

The siren's smile doesn't reach her eyes, and I only then realize her eyes are black, just like the aura that surrounds her. I shiver at the way she seems to look through me, and I have the sudden urge to turn and run from her.

"The new man," Yvette nods toward me, and I force myself not to take a step backward. "You said he was injured. Might I take a look?"

"I'm fine," I say, and her cold eyes narrow on me.

"Are you sure?" Evie asks, a frown of concern on her features, and I nod, grabbing hold of her around the waist, suddenly feeling like I should protect her from this woman. Whatever this Elixir has done, it's made me see this particular Elder in a new light, and I didn't like what I was seeing.

"You will join us for tonight's celebration," she says pointedly at me, a demand, not a question. "We should have celebrated your arrival the first night you were here, but our dearest Evie hid you away from us."

"It wouldn't have been safe for him to move, mistress." Evie says quickly, "He was not conscious the first night. I did as any siren would have and saved his life."

"Yes, how very noble of you, Evelyn." Her eyes flicked to Evie for a split second before narrowing in on me once more. "Might you join me alone for a time, sailor?" Yvette's voice drips with her eagerness, and she walks closer to me.

The Elixir has filled my body with lust, raw and uncaged, but the instant Yvette suggests the two of us being alone together, that overflow of sheer desire turns to a

waterfall of disgust. I will not go near this woman, but I need to get this bottled-up feeling out. It itches through me with a fever that calls to the most primal parts of me.

Reaching past the lust and the haze of yearning, I remind myself that I only want one woman on this island and she's the one captured in my arms. My hand brushes down Evie's waist, and I squeeze her side teasingly as I kiss lightly at her ear and whisper, "I need you. Now."

I feel her quiver in my grip, and she leans into me further, feeling my hardening length pressing to the small of her back, before sputtering out, "I—I'm just going to show Kai something really fast, and then we will come back and join you."

Yvette narrows her eyes at us, but then waves us off and says, "Very well. I would like to inspect the newcomer more...closely, when you get back."

I force myself not to scrunch my nose up at the thought of this poisonous woman touching me, but before I have the chance, Evie pulls me into the jungle, and all thoughts of Yvette slip from my mind completely.

We climb, hiking up through the trees, along the island's coast, and I watch as the beach below grows further and further away from us. I don't care how high we are, all that I can think of is how this entire place looks like a rainbow. A kaleidoscope of color is spread out before me, and I can't pull my gaze away.

"We're here," Evie stops and plucks a flower in front of her, spinning to hand it to me.

"You're right," I say, taking the large bloom. It is the size of both my hands put together, and it looks just like the island down below, a kaleidoscope of color. "It's exceptional."

Not wanting to leave it here, I pluck the petals from the flower and put them in my pocket.

Evie smirks at me, “Saving them for later?”

“If they taste as good as that drink did, I want to eat one every day.”

She walks closer to me and wraps her arms around my waist. “Would you care for a morning swim?”

“Does this swim require both of us to be naked?” I query, feeling emboldened after our evening last night.

“You can be as naked as you want, I, on the other hand, will always have my scales and my tail to cover me.”

I raise my brows, “I want nothing more than to see that.”

“Come on, I want to take you to my spot. Not many of the sirens care to come up this high on the mountain, so they don’t all know about the caves.”

She pulls me to a spot at the crest of the hill, the highest flat area of the mountain. It’s covered in lush, blooming flowers and tall grass.

“Do you trust me?” She asks, her cheeks flushed from the hike and her eyes sparkling with excitement. She literally takes my breath away, and I can’t say a word, so again I only nod.

“Then jump with me. One, two, three...” She jumps forward, and I instinctively follow her lead. Suddenly, I realize there is a chasm below us, but it’s too late. We plunge into the void, air rushing past us as the pitch black swallows us whole.

I hold my breath at the sensation of falling, it's terrifying, yet exhilarating, and my heart picks up its pace at the thrill. Our feet hit warm water, stinging with the impact, and we are both engulfed beneath the surface. I open my eyes, bubbles clouding my vision, but as soon as they dissipate, brilliant glowing blue light emerges, clinging to the rock formations beneath the water, illuminating an artistry of colorful coral and shimmering schools of fish gliding around us.

I can see everything so clearly, as if it were daylight beneath the water in this dark cave. My eyes catch a glimpse of a purpletail, and I spin, taking in the full view of Evie, my little Dahlia. I suck in sharply, water filling my lungs at the pure majesty of her in this form. Cursing myself for trying to breathe beneath the water, I swim, trying to get to the surface, but then stop suddenly, realizing that I'm not choking, nor do I feel like I am suffocating. I breathe in again, and the wonder of it hits me.

I can breathe underwater.

Swimming to Evie, I grab her and push us both up to the surface.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

“What’s wrong?” She says, brows drawn together in concern, and she places a hand on my face.

“Nothing,” I say, covering her hand on my cheek with my own hand. “I can breathe underwater. How is that possible?”

Her brows scrunch like she’s holding in a laugh, “Did I forget to mention that?”

Frowning, I think back to everything that happened since yesterday. We hadn’t eaten anything, in fact the only thing Evie and I had done was let our lust consume us. Then I realize it’s the Elixir. That was the only bit of food or drink, the only substance I have ingested since coming to this island. It truly must be magic.

My mind wanders back to the feeling that moved through my chest as the drink spread within me. Something in it made me capable of breathing underwater.

Reaching into my pocket, I pull one of the damp petals I plucked from the Elder flower and inspect it. It is no longer an array of colors, but only pink, just like the petals I saw the sirens put into the Elixir before I drank it. Had the effects of the drink already begun to wear off?

“Extraordinary,” I muse, tucking the petal back securely in my pocket.

“I almost forgot about that part,” Evelyn says, looking away from me. “I don’t interact with the others as often as I used to, I’ve kept to myself in recent years. Sometimes I forget the perks of the ceremony.”

My face softens at that, “Why did you choose me, then?”

Our eyes lock, and I feel her tail wrap around my legs, pulling me closer to her.

“You’re different from the others. I don’t know why, but when I touched you for the first time, I felt something. It was like a spark that ignited a flame inside me. Something that has been dormant my entire life. And I didn’t want to let that flame go out. So, I’m keeping you all for myself for as long as I can,” She says that last bit in a whispered tone, drawing closer still.

“I like the sound of that,” I whisper back, our lips so close I can practically taste their sweetness already.

When her lips finally meet mine, it is like a restraint inside of me snaps free, and I explore her in every way I want to. I let my tongue trace over the soft curves of her mouth, savoring the taste. My hands roam down her waist and down to the smoothness of her tail. She lets out a moan, sending a shiver through me, and I pull her closer, wanting more of her, to feel all of her.

I break the kiss momentarily, reaching around to untie her top when she puts a finger to my lips, drawing my attention back to her eyes.

“I didn’t get a chance to ask, did you find your brother among the men? Did you see Dru?”

I frown, searching through the fog still hovering in my mind, “Who?”

12

Evelyn

“Dru, your brother.” I frown, “Kai, are you alright?” I grip his face in my hands, forcing him to make eye contact. His lids are heavy and hooded with lust, “Focus, Kai.”

“I don’t know who you’re talking about,” he leans in to kiss me, but I push him away.

Just a few moments ago he was tumbling through a tidal wave of emotions during the ceremony. I saw it in his face while he inspected all of the men on the beach. I assumed we wouldn’t be running off to this cave together if he had found his brother.

I know everyone deals with grief in different ways, but this feels different. Wrong somehow.

This island is full of mysteries, one being the Elder flower that allows mere mortals to breathe underwater. But this feels too strange, forgetting an entire person, his brother, nonetheless.

We can’t just stay here exploring each other’s bodies further. I have to figure out what’s going on.

“Kai, you have a brother. His name was Dru, remember? You sailed into the storms looking for him. Your ship wrecked, I saved you. We...had a moment. There was a boulder. And a forest. And another few moments in a bedroom. Does any of this ring a bell?” I look at him for any signs that he might be joking. A hysterical laugh caught in my throat threatens to escape.

“Oh, I remember the beach. And you. And the forest. And my room.” He says, grinning like a cat who just caught the canary. “But I don’t know anything about this brother you’re talking about.”

“Dru, your brother, the man who’s in line to take over your father's company,” I

practically shout, the noise reverberating off the glowing walls. “Yesterday. Do you remember yesterday?”

“Sure, we were on the beach.” He swims closer to me, locking his arms around my waist and pulling me into his chest. “And I remember tasting every ounce of your pleasure.”

The memory of our very public moment on the beach has heat throbbing in my core. My mouth begins to water at the thought of his wicked one and all the things he can do with it. Get an actual grip, Evelyn, this is serious.

“There will be time for more of that later,” I shake off the daydream and any thoughts of letting this man have his way with me on the cave floor. “Do you remember anything before that? The day before? Last week? Last month? Kai, where are you from? Can you at least tell me that?”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

A look of curiosity, then arrogance, and confusion crosses his face while he contemplates my barrage of questions. He looks like he can't quite decide which to answer first, hoping it's not because he doesn't have an answer to any of them.

"I am from...somewhere that's not here. Last week I was..." He frowns, and his eyes are distant, searching.

My heart catches in my throat, and I know my instincts were correct. Something is very wrong. I begin swimming to the edge, needing a moment to stand on solid ground. We need to get back to camp. Someone has to know what's wrong with Kai.

I lift myself onto the ledge, and my tail glimmers and begins to take the shape of two scaled human legs. I love my tail and the rush of using it to explore the ocean, but when I'm on land with two legs, I feel more myself—like the real me. I stare down at the shimmer of my scales while all of my thoughts sort themselves out in my brain.

My first thought of who might know what's happening to Kai is my sister, Katarina. She has to know, and she won't hold back. There have been times when I've asked the Elders about the magic of the island, our ceremonies, and the storms. They never give me a real answer, calling me a foolish girl with my head stuck in the waves. But Katarina, she will tell me what is going on, I know it.

"Kai, let's go back to camp. I think you need some rest." And I want some answers, I don't say that bit, knowing he won't care right now.

Kai lazily makes his way to shore, testing his skills at breathing underwater and spiking my irritation with his genuine disinterest. I wait by the edge, one moment

away from screaming. He seems only interested in one thing now—me. And as much as I am enjoying having his full attention, I have to know what’s going on. Has this ever happened before? Maybe it has, and I’ve just never paid enough attention.

Thinking back, years and years ago, before we began the Elder flower weekly rituals, the men seemed restless. They were always pacing the beaches and building boats. We lost so many men in their attempts to leave the island and outrun the storm. No one can outrun the storm, not even the ocean’s most powerful beings. Not even me.

I remember feeling their pain and wanting to leave just as deeply as they did.

They had homes to go back to, lives, and families who missed them. I just longed to leave this prison paradise and see the rest of the world. Still, I helped them craft ships and stocked their supplies for the long journey home, but none of them made it out alive. The storm was angry at our defiance. It swept the sailors under massive waves in the blink of an eye, dragging them to a watery grave, and the last thing they heard was our siren’s song trying to save them.

As the years passed and we started sharing more of the island with our shipwrecked sailors, they started to settle in. Fewer and fewer of them wanted to leave. They began enjoying life here, enjoying us and our traditions, especially the pleasurable ones.

My heart broke for each man who was dragged down to the bottom of the sea. For each man who admitted defeat and gave into his new life here. For each man who would look upon us with lust and love in his eyes, all the while knowing he would never be able to go home.

Take away all the trappings and dressings, and this place is nothing more than a cell.

My jail cell, and somehow with Kai, I thought it could be different, but maybe he’s just like all of the rest of them. Willing to get swept up in the magic of this place and

forget his grief and his responsibilities.

Kai finally gets to the edge of the cave and lifts himself onto the ledge. I reach for his hand, already feeling more stable and steady with his calloused palm in mine, and help him out of the water. I gasp as he embraces me, lightly kissing my lips. As much as I seem to be the only one of us who wants to find the answers right now, I know deep down, he wants to find them too.

Looking into his eyes, all I see is adoration for me. I let out a small sigh and let the kiss linger, reveling in this feeling. Allowing myself this moment of holding onto this lust, this possession, this caring that I have for him.

Kai deepens the kiss and slides his tongue into my mouth. He grips the back of my head, exposing my neck, and begins to trail kisses along my neck, nipping my ear, and worshiping me. I can feel myself melting into his touch and reaching for this insatiable feeling. His hand slides up my waist and moves to untie my top—I let him.

Feeling so out of control already, our skin presses together, and his chest is wet and cool from the water. He's hard in all the right places and I can't help but tug the buttons at his waistband, allowing his cock to spring free. I grip it at the base, and he hisses in response. Pre-cum is already beading at his head, and I swirl my thumb around it, spreading it along his length.

The scent of him fills my nose, and I moan because it smells so good, like earth and honey. His teeth nip at one of my nipples, and I rasp out as fiery pleasure thrills through me. He cups my ass, squeezing, urging me closer, until he finally lifts me onto his hips and slides me down onto his waiting length.

“Oh, Gods!” I groan out, and Kai gives a low rumble of approval.

“Always so wet for me, my precious Dahlia.”

His words do something blissful to me, as he pins me against the cave wall and pumps into me. With each glide of his dick into my wet heat my body clenches and the pleasure builds.

“Kai,” I moan out his name, and suddenly he stops. “What? Why did you stop?”

“Beg for me,” his voice is low.

“W—what?” I say breathless.

“Beg for me to fuck you.”

Who is this man? He is so gentle and kind, but the moment we’re alone, his mouth, his demands, the way he owns my pleasure.

“Beg, siren,” he growls, and I can feel the vibration all the way to my sex.

“P—please,” I stammer, desperate for more.

“Say my name.” He holds me perfectly still and I move my hips, needing to ride his cock. “Ah,” he squeezes my hips so I can’t move onto him anymore. “Not until you beg and call out my name.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

I'm swollen and dripping with his cock resting inside of me and I can't move, can't do anything to find my climax. But why am I so aroused by this?

"Please, Kai, fuck me."

He slams into me, and I almost come right there. He's crazed, hungry, and I can't get enough. Our moans and gasps rise up, echoing around us through the cavern, and I ride the pulsing, tingling, building ecstasy with each wonderful thrust. Waves of pleasure wrack through my body and I can feel Kai begin to tense, and we both find our release. It is so beautiful, the most wonderful thing I've ever experienced.

Resting my forehead against Kai's, the waves of regret for wasting more time begin to slam into me. I think I'm falling in love with him. I can't ever admit this to anyone, but I can feel it. What would happen if I did?

With achingly painful slowness, Kai pulls himself out of me and sets me down. He grins as if he's not done and wants nothing more than to stay here and fuck me all day, but enough distractions. It's time to get answers. We gather our clothes, and he can't stop stealing glances in my direction, hunger still in his eyes.

"You must stop looking at me like that. We have to get back to camp," I roll my eyes. "It's getting late, and they will start to wonder where we are. I can't have anyone find out our secret spot. Then it wouldn't be such a secret, would it?"

I try to keep my words light-hearted, but the anticipation of finding answers feels like a weight on my chest. Trying for a second time, I grab his hand and we make our way out of the caves. The first glints of the sunset start to peak through the cave entrance,

and we're met with an overwhelming view as we step outside.

The cerulean waves crest far off the shore, and the rocky coves that dot our shoreline are on full display as the tide recedes further out towards the storms. We can see the tops of several lush trees as birds flutter in and out of their canopies. Purple and pinks paint the sky while dusk fast approaches. It's an electrifying view of Kafigda, one of my favorites. Being so high up the mountain makes me feel like I'm somewhere else entirely. The whole world lay out before us, if only those darkened storm clouds would finally clear, then we could actually see it.

"This place is truly paradise, isn't it?" Kai muses at the expansive island before us.

"A gilded cage is still a cage," I mutter.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. Let's get going." I begin the hike down the mountainside, letting Kai trail slightly behind me. I must keep peeking over my shoulder to check if he's still with me. He mentioned this yesterday, but it strangely feels like years ago now that he said he studied plants. So I can't blame him when he gets distracted by all of the luscious flowers and greenery that surround us.

I've always loved this trail for its beauty. The others rarely venture this far inland, preferring their siren tales and quick access to the ocean. They feel like it's too treacherous, too untamed, but that's why I love it so much. It makes me feel like I'm somewhere else. Someone else. And as the birds fly out of the trees, I can't help the pang of envy that travels through me.

That's right, I'm jealous of birds. They can come and go as they please. What would it be like to feel that kind of freedom?

We finally make our way back to camp, and with my mind racing, I hardly pay attention as I walk face-first into a solid, towering chest, one belonging to none other than Mathius. Perfect. If anyone knows anything about this island and what's happening to Kai, it would be the man who has been here since practically the dawn of time.

"I'm so sorry, M," I sputter. "My head is somewhere else. Actually, you are just the person I was looking for. Can we talk?"

"Absolutely, my dear, I was just heading down to the beach to gather clams for tonight's celebration, you're welcome to join me."

"Wonderful, let me get Kai settled, and I'll meet you by the beach. And M, do you ever think about leaving this place?" I ask just above a whisper, a tightening in my chest that I can't explain starts to form as I wait for his answer.

"No, Eve. I don't," he looks at me wistfully, lost in some distant memory. "Why would I ever want to leave a place where I can live just like a King of Halvendorf? Who wouldn't want that?"

Smirking, he nods in the direction of Kai, who is now delicately studying the petals of a nearby flower, looking so unlike himself, yet still so Kai, and my heart squeezes.

"You better go get him before he thinks every flower on this island can be turned into a magical water-breathing Elixir."

"Thank you, Mathius. I'll meet you in just a moment."

Mathius has always been a steady presence for me. As close to a father figure as I could get, his kindness and wisdom have sustained me over the years. There's always been something about Mathius that's almost regal. Perhaps it's the power that

radiates from him that none of us knows how to explain, the elongated teeth, unique eyes, something about him that makes him more than just a human. He's so sure of himself and his purpose here. He loves this island more than I thought possible, and I know he's haunted by demons from his past. No one seeks to find joy in the simple things quite like Mathius.

I allow myself a small smile as I walk towards Kai, sliding my hand down to meet his. I spin him to face me and am greeted with a smile so bright and full of affection, I'm rendered momentarily speechless. I can't help but grip his cheeks and plant a soft kiss on his lips.

I begin to pull away, trying to keep things light. Guilt squeezes my heart at his lost memories, his true fate that he doesn't even know yet, and for his lost brother. The emotions tumble through me in an overwhelming cascade, and I suddenly feel the urge to run far away.

As we make our trek back through the trees to the men's hut, I stop. Realizing that I need to tell him the truth. He seems so serene, but what would happen if I told him that even if his brother isn't here, he can't keep looking for him, because he can't leave.

Gathering all the courage I can muster, I ask cautiously, "What would you say to staying here? With me."

"Now? But I thought you said you had to help prepare, and I need to get ready. In the jungle behind camp hardly seems like the place to stay."

"No, I mean here on the island. Permanently. I mean, it is beautiful here, and even Mathius said you really do get to live like the King of Halvendor," I hastily say. "Who doesn't want that? And of course I'm here, and you could be here."

A giggle slips out, and I realize I've started pacing.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

“I mean, living like the king from your home sounds great, right? The island has everything you could ever want. We could explore more of the mountains, go diving. I do love diving in the coral reefs here. They’re just gorgeous. You have to see them for yourself, and now you can because of the Elixir. And the plants, think about all the plants you could study here. Right?”

I stop pacing and realize I’ve been rambling for quite some time and haven’t heard a single sound from Kai. Slowly, I turn towards him, and it’s like the fog has lifted, and the true Kai is back. Looking like he’s just on the edge of a thought, I stay silent, hoping he finally shares whatever revelation is brewing in his mind.

13

Kai

The haze that clouded my mind seems to almost evaporate completely at Evie’s comment. “What did you say?”

“What if we stayed here?” she frowns, concern etched across her features.

“No, about Mathius.”

“That you can live like the King of Halvender?”

A sudden image of a painting flashes in my mind of a young man with short white hair, pointed ears, tall and slender, a gemstone-studded crown atop his head, and those eyes glowing like molten gold. “I know why I recognize Mathius.” The

words feel like a whisper on my lips, the shock of it hitting me like a tidal wave. “I know who he is.”

“What? How?”

“Do you remember how I told you about where I’m from? About how Halvondor fell many years ago after the elven royal family disappeared, and no one has been able to hold the throne since? ”

She nods hesitantly, “Yes, I remember.”

“Mathius is the King who disappeared.”

Evelyn’s eyes widen, and she swallows, “How do you know this? You said that Halvondor fell over two hundred years ago, but would that mean you weren’t even alive when it happened? Mathius has been here for...” She stops, eyes glazing over with some far-off memory before snapping out of it and grabbing my hand. “We need to find him.”

My mind races as I try to understand how it’s even possible, “What is going on here? There is something not right about this island isn’t there?”

Evelyn looks away from me so I can’t see her reaction, but she whispers, “Yes, and I mean to find out what exactly it is.”

As we head back to the men’s treehouse, my mind finally catches up to my racing thoughts, and I realize what Mathius being here alive could mean. “Evie,” I grab her hand and spin her around. “Has anyone ever tried to leave the Island?”

She goes very quiet, slowing her pace, and whispers, “This is what I was trying to tell you. No one can leave the island.”

“What? But you have been talking about wanting to leave, to see the world.” I frown.

“I—I’m sorry I should have told you, but I didn’t want you to try to go and... die, trying.” She looks down at our interlocked hands. “No one has tried to leave in decades. I used to try and help them, but every single sailor died trying, and then one day none of them wanted to leave anymore.”

I swallow against the knot forming in my airway, realizing that I might be stuck here...forever. “And what of the sirens who have tried to leave?”

“No siren can. We are cursed to remain on the Island.”

I let go of her hand and shakily sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree nearby.

“Kai, I’m—”

I hold up a hand, stopping her, “I think I need a second...alone.”

Her face falls, and I can see the glimmer of tears forming in her eyes. “I’m sorry,” she says and leaves me alone with my thoughts.

The jungle is vast and full of plants I have never even seen before. This place truly is a different world from where I live. It's locked away in what did Evelyn call it? Agilded cage. I now understand her meaning. She is trapped, and no matter how beautiful, how wonderful a place this is to live, she can’t even choose to leave. She is stuck, caged, and now so am I.

I get up and push through the dense foliage. The air is heavy and wet as sweat beads my brow, dripping down my face with each step. Vines as thick as my forearm snake their way down from the canopy above, wrapping around trees and swinging in the light breeze sweeping up from the sea.

Unique flowers litter the forest floor, boasting vibrant purples, oranges, and pinks, the colors of the different siren's scales. I bend, smelling their indulgent scent, marveling at their splendor. I could spend an eternity studying each and every one of these plants, learning their secrets, just like Evelyn said.

After some time wandering the path that lines the edge of the island, I'm at the secluded beach where I woke only a few days ago. Looking out over the ocean, I stare into the dark swirling clouds of the storms that landed me here. There is something unnatural about them, hinting at something dark at play on this island.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

The strange, ever-present storms, the fact that no one can leave, and whatever that Elixir I drank was...it all wasn't sitting right with me. I couldn't shake the feeling that it was all a part of some calculated scheme, that someone was doing all this and keeping these sirens and men trapped here.

My mind seemed to clear even more from whatever fog had spread over it, and the thought of the men had me remembering them all lined up on the beach beside me. Suddenly, an image sprang clear as day into my vision—the ring.

How could I have forgotten it? My brother...I was here to find my brother. What had that cleansing Elixir done to me? I would recognize that signet ring anywhere. Dru was alive, and he had been standing right beside me only this morning.

I turn and sprint back around the edge of the island, over fallen trees, through brush, and around rocky cliffs. There is only one thing on my mind, Dru. I have to get to him, but then my mind catches up with my racing heart, and I realize that even when I find him, neither one of us can leave this place. Our father would die without either of his heirs to take over his dynasty.

Dru was fine and safe on this island for now. He wasn't going anywhere, so what I really need to do is figure out what was going on here and how to change it. There must be a way to get off this island and through those storms.

My mind was decided, I would find a way for not only myself, but Evelyn and the other men to get off this island, even if I died trying.

Evelyn

I can't believe this is happening. Less than a week ago, I didn't have a single care in the world outside of exploring the island and the waves just off the shore, loving my sister, and keeping the Elders happy.

How did things get so complicated so quickly?

Now, I was crying over a man I hardly knew, but who fully held the key to my heart.

Letting the tears stream down my cheeks, I set a determined pace towards the beach where I told Mathius we would meet. Even if I didn't know how to get Kai off this island, I was going to get some answers about why he forgot his brother and what happened to all those men who used to care so much about leaving this place. If anyone remembered, it would be the one who outlived them all.

Keeping my pace to the beach, I crash into Katarina as she makes her way out of the Elder's hut. Suspicion roils in my gut. What was she doing there?

Pull it together, Evelyn; this is your sister.

I just need to ask her for the truth about the Elixir. She would never lie to me.

"Kat, why were you with the Elders?" I ask with more accusation than I intend.

"I was just visiting with Florence. I want to make sure everything is absolutely perfect for the celebration tonight," she says gleefully, "It's not every day we get new sailors on our shores, and it has been so long since I've seen you take an interest in our traditions. I want to make sure everything is perfect."

She stares intently at me, looking for me to share in her excitement. I want so

desperately to feel that everything is normal, but I know in my heart that there is something they're not telling me. But I've also never asked, so maybe they're not hiding anything, perhaps I've just never cared.

How could I be so stupid?

Katarina and I have always been close, even though she's my half sister, we grew up together. She knew our mother and loved her fiercely. She kept Aurelia's memory alive for me during our childhood. She taught me how to use my magic and my first siren's song. Florence raised me and will always feel like a mother to me, but Katarina was the guiding presence I always needed.

Over the years, when she grew more beautiful with each passing day and caught the eye of the men in our village, I could feel her slipping away, becoming the woman she was always destined to be.

She would make a fierce Elder if ever permitted. She was loyal and kind, confident and flirtatious. She was fair and hardworking, but always knew how to have fun. Her laugh was infectious, and being around her felt like catching a falling star—pure magic.

I loved her even as we grew apart. Where I stay in the background, keeping to myself and letting my passions veer towards daydreaming about leaving this place one day. She has always been so confident, the center of everyone's world, and never shy to tell me about all her conquests.

So why was I holding back? I should just ask her.

I draw in a breath to steel my nerves and finally ask, "Kat, did you know that when the men drink the Elder Elixir, they lose their memories? After Kai took the Elixir, he seemed to shift into someone completely new." I pace, "We went for a swim, and

when I asked about his brother—you remember, the one he was sailing out to his death for. He said, ‘Who? What brother?’ He didn’t even remember he had a brother.”

I stop my pacing and turn towards Kat, hoping she’s just as confused as I am, or thinking she might be looking at me like I’ve lost my mind. But she looks like she’s doing everything she can not to laugh.

“Kat...what is going on? What’s so funny?” I try to keep my irritation in check, but everything feels like it’s unraveling in front of me, and I’m the only one who’s not in on the joke. I’ve buried my head in the sand for so long, but the time for that has passed.

I want answers.

“Eve, of course the Elder flower changes them. What do you think we’re doing at the ceremony? How do you think we’ve been able to keep these men alive for so long? Don’t you notice that none of them die anymore? They no longer build those silly boats. They don’t age as quickly. Look at Mathius, he’s centuries old. Did you not notice any of this?” Katarina sweeps her hands out wide.

“Well...no,” I whisper, feeling incredibly foolish. “I guess, I remember years ago when I used to help the sailors build their ships and tried to help them out past the storm. But I thought they were just worn down from seeing their friend's parish, and that’s why they gave up.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

Exasperated, Kat sighs and grasps my shoulders. “Sis, the men were dying. Good men, who got caught in a horrible storm and shipwrecked on our shores, but what is worse? Sailing to your death or living your life here in paradise.”

I bite back what I really want to say—a paradise for whom? And instead, relent, “Okay, but what does that have to do with the Elixir?”

“Long ago, the Elders and others got together to work on a solution. A way to stop these men from sacrificing themselves for false hope, a dream that would never come true. They created a potion, the Elixir, that would give them some of our gifts. The ability to breathe underwater for one. So they could live and thrive here. We thought if they could do that, then maybe they would be happier with their life here and want to stay. But there were some...unforeseen side effects.”

“What kind of side effects?”

“Well, memory loss for one. People were dying, E. And I know you were only working to get them back to their lives, but we had to do something. It’s been like this for years, and I’m sorry you didn’t realize it, but you’ve had your head in those mountains and caves for so long. I really didn’t think you would care.”

She was right. I’ve been lost in my own world for so long, staying away from all this, that I had no idea what was going on right in front of me. I am a fool. “Well, I care now, Kat. I care about Kai, and I’m worried about him. I don’t want him to get so lost in this place that he forgets who he is and who his brother is. As much as I love spending time with him, the guilt would eat me alive.”

“Eve, I understand.. I really do, but it’s what’s best for all of us. Why don’t you go talk to Florence? Tell her how you feel. She can explain all of this better than I can.” She cups the side of my face, wiping away a stray tear that’s rolled down my cheek. “And Eve, I’m so glad you finally found someone, but be careful. Your heart is a precious thing. Guard it well.”

“Thank you, Katerina. I don’t know what I would do without you.” I pull her into a tight hug, feeling a weight lifting off my shoulders and my mind whirling at what to do next.

“I don’t either,” she laughs lightly. “But I have a date with a tall, dark, and handsome man and a celebration to prepare for. I will see you tonight, sis.”

She walks away, swaying her hips and humming our mother’s favorite song. I take a few deep, steadying breaths. I need to talk to Florence and figure out what all of this means. Does the memory loss that the Elixir causes last forever? I hope not.

I will go talk with Florence right after I find Mathius, who is still waiting for me at the beach, but as I walk past the Elder’s hut, I overhear my name.

“Evelyn can’t know what the Elixir is actually for.”

“Of course not, do you think I’m an idiot?”

I gasp and fly backwards, shocked by hearing Florence and Yvette speaking about me. I lean towards the door to see if I can hear more.

“It’s best if she never knows what the storm can do. And how it was made. Florence, you know her, better than any of us and she has never wanted anything more than to leave this place and now with this Kai running out sucking her into a trance, she will become more determined than ever to help him leave. She. Can. Not. Know.” Yvette

bites out, emphasizing every word.

“I swear on the Elder Creed that she will never find out what really happened to her mother or how to leave this island,” Florence says, exhaustion coating her words. “She has no idea how cruel the world can be, and if I can protect her, I swear on all my songs I will.”

My mind reels, and I stumble backward. My breath comes in short bursts, and I grapple with the gravity of what I just heard. There are too many things, too many secrets, and hidden truths. What really happened to my mother? What are they saying? There’s a way off Kafigda?

Gods, there is a way off the island. How could they keep something like that from me, from all of us?

I can’t pull in a full breath, and the edges of my vision start to darken. What is happening? I now suddenly have so many more questions than answers. I can feel my heart cleaving in two at the thought of a woman I love so fiercely keeping something like this from me. Florence has been the closest thing I have ever had to a mother, and yet, she’s been keeping the thing I desire most from me. Freedom.

Not to mention Yvette, she promised to lead and protect all of us sirens. How could she keep this from everyone? Squeezing my eyes shut, I try to steady my racing thoughts.

Just then, the door to the hut creaks open, and Florence steps out onto the sand, glancing around as if looking for someone. Her eyes land directly on me with my flushed cheeks and shaking frame.

“Evie, my dear, what is the matter? You look as if you’re going to faint, child.” She gently places her hands on my shoulders, and her touch makes me want to scream.

“I’m fine, Florence,” I say, wishing desperately to wiggle out from under her grip. “Kai and I just rushed down from the caves. We wanted to make sure we didn’t miss the ceremony.” I give her a half smile, but it doesn’t reach my eyes.

“Okay, well, the ceremony doesn’t start for a little bit, so why don’t you and Kai go relax beforehand? There’s nothing you need to worry about. Where is he?” She looks around pointedly.

“He went to freshen up,” I say nervously. After what I just heard, I can’t afford to ask her about the Elixir or tell her about my fight with Kai. “But that sounds like a perfect idea. I will go look for him and get him prepped for the ceremony. Wouldn’t want to miss it.”

“You two seem awfully smitten. It warms my heart to see you so happy, my dear. You deserve the world. And I know Aurelia would love to see you two together.”

My eyes begin to well with tears at the mention of my mother. The tidal wave of emotions I’ve been battling for the last few hours comes bubbling to the surface, clawing at the back of my throat. A sob retches free, and I fall into Florence’s embrace, as many unanswered questions as I have and secrets everyone seems to be keeping from me, I allow myself this moment. My life feels like it changed in the blink of an eye, and right now I need this small comfort.

Florence rubs circles on my back, not fully understanding where these tears are coming from, but she is as close to a mother as I’ve ever had, and sometimes, we don’t need words.

I lean out of her embrace and stare at the face of the woman who raised me. The woman who cared for me since before I could remember, who taught me to question the world and explore Kafigda, and yet I feel like there is so much she’s hiding from me.

“Thank you, Flo,” I wipe away the tears with the back of my hand. “I think I need to go find Kai and make sure everything is in order for tonight.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

She looks at me like she's about to share something, and I wait, praying to the gods that she will tell me the truth. But I know in my heart, she would never go against Yvette.

"I'm happy for you, Eve, and I'm so proud. I know she would be too."

She walks away, leaving me feeling rung out and exhausted. I need to find Kai and Mathius, so I head towards the beach where I promised Mathius we would meet, mulling over the last twenty-four hours as I make my way to the golden shores.

15

Kai

The sun sets along the horizon, tucking itself behind the storm clouds as I walk along the beach. I spot a tall figure in the shallows with a net in hand. As I draw closer, I see it's Mathius.

The realization of who he is still so fresh in my mind, I stand there simply staring for a long moment. How was it possible that this man was the spitting image of the lost King of Halvondor? It has been hundreds of years since he disappeared, and my logical mind keeps saying that it is just someone who looks like him, but the pointed ears and the golden eyes are too rare. Mathius is the long-lost King.

"Mathius," I wave, gaining his attention as I join him in the shallow pocket of the sea he is fishing in.

“Kai, it’s good to see you acclimating so well to the Island.” He smiles that big toothy grin, something he seems to do often, flashing the two sharper teeth as they glint in the light of the setting sun.

I smile back awkwardly, “Can I ask you a question?”

“Anything you want.” He bends, digging up a clam and placing it in the net.

“How long have you been on this Island?”

I watch his smile fall, and a dark shadow crosses over his face. He straightens and stares out at the stormy horizon. “I-it’s been...well, I’m not entirely sure,” he stammers, brows drawn together.

“Do you remember anything before coming to the Island?” I question him further, recalling how I had forgotten my own brother for an entire day. If Mathius had been here for two centuries, had he forgotten his entire life?

He goes very still, eyes glazing over as he searches for the memories. “I think it’s time for dinner,” he says suddenly. All of his unease seemingly melts away, and he smiles at me, as if nothing is amiss. He turns to head back to the huts, but Evelyn calls out both our names and comes toward us.

“Mathius,” She says. “Wait, don’t leave.”

Something unreadable passes over Mathius’ face as he looks at Evelyn. He is so still, frozen by some unseen thing.

“Are you alright?” I ask, reaching out and carefully touching his arm.

He shakes his head as if coming out of a daze, “Fine.”

“Please,” I try again. “It’s important. Do you remember anything from before this place?”

Mathius sighs, running a hand through his white locks, and then looks once more at Evelyn. “I don’t know.”

The look on his face of dejection mixed with confusion makes my heart ache for him. He has been here for nearly two hundred years with no clear recollection of his past. What must that feel like?

Evelyn takes Mathius’s hand and casts a sorrowful look at me before turning to him, “It’s okay. You don’t have to remember.”

He stares at Evelyn and then suddenly brings a hand up to her cheek, “You remind me of someone.”

Evelyn frowns, darting a quick glance at me. I just watch the interaction, anxious to hear what else Mathius is going to say.

“Sometimes I have flashes of people, places that I’ve never seen before.” His voice is quiet, distant as his brows draw together with the effort to remember what he has forgotten. “They are like dreams, but I am awake. So real that sometimes I reach out and try to touch them, but then it all disappears and I remember that I am here on the island.”

Evelyn nods, bringing a hand up to cover his larger one, which is still resting on her cheek. “Mathius, you need to listen to me. Do not drink the Elixir tonight.”

I walk toward them, opening my mouth to question Evelyn, but she holds up a hand and stops me.

Mathius frowns, dropping his hand from her face and taking a step back. “Why would I not drink the Elixir? It is forbidden not to.”

“You must pretend to drink it, but not actually partake.” She persists, “It’s causing you to forget.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

He shakes his head, and I can see the frustration lining his features. His shoulders tense, and he clenches his fists, making me go to Evie's side, wrapping an arm around her waist protectively.

"Those visions you see, they are real. Those are your memories."

"Impossible," he scoffs, pushing past us and heading toward the Elder's hut.

"Please, Mathius! Trust me!" She yells out to him, "They aren't dreams. Let the fog in your mind clear. Don't drink it."

He stops, turning his head slightly back toward them, and I hold my breath waiting for him to say something, but he only continues to walk further into the village.

Evelyn sighs next to me. She unwraps my hand from her waist and walks into the ocean, diving beneath the waves. Night has fully overtaken the sky, and the moon's glow whispers across the water. I join her in the calmness of the night sea.

"They've been lying to me," Evie says, and I can't tell if the glistening in her eyes is from the water or her tears. "My mother...Florence, she's been hiding everything from me."

I swim to her, wrapping her in my arms, her tail shimmering beneath the waves. "What secrets?"

"We were right. The Elixir is what made you forget your brother. It's why Mathius can't remember his past. It's why all the men have stayed here. They haven't even

attempted to leave in decades. The Elixir is training them to serve the siren's in any way they require."

I suddenly can't breathe. I know my memory loss had something to do with the strange drink, but what Evie is saying would also explain the strange fog in my mind, and that unnatural need I felt to pleasure each and every siren.

"There's more," she says, and a fresh bout of tears well in her eyes. "There is a way off the island. I don't know what or how, but I heard my mother talking about it. She doesn't want me to know that it's possible."

I kiss away the tears falling down her cheeks, catching them before they ripple in the water. "Why would she hide something like that from you?"

"I don't know!" She said, her violet eyes bright in the moonlight. "They are poisoning all of the men to keep them here."

"But why? What gain do they get from it?"

"That's something I intend to find out." Her words are vicious, demanding, and they shoot a spike of arousal through me.

"We will find out together, but right now I want nothing more than to kiss you because I don't know when I'll get another chance," I say, and pull her into my waiting lips.

She tastes of jasmine and honey. I devour her, pulling her closer, wanting to feel her against me, wanting her to let go of her pain and hurt, giving it all to me. I want to replace her broken heart with pleasure. Maybe I'd taken more of the drink than I thought, but I can't stand for Evie to be in pain, not when I can fix it.

She breaks our kiss, and I watch as she slowly takes off her top, letting the lavender fabric be swept out by the waves. Her breasts bob like plump, ripe apples and I growl, grabbing her and pulling her against me, sucking one of her delectable erect nipples into my mouth. I bite down lightly, satisfied to hear her moan in delight, before taking the rest of her heavy breast into my mouth.

She lets out a strangled laugh and pulls me back to her lips, whispering against them, “Take off your shirt.”

Obedying, I release her, admiring her body beneath the starlit sky while I practically tear the wet shirt over my head and throw it as close as I can back to shore.

Her eyes grow heavy with lust, and a playfully sad smile tugs at her lips as she beckons me forward, swimming deeper out to sea. The moon dances across the water's surface, making it look like liquid glass as she effortlessly glides through it. A cool breeze whispers around us, carrying the salty musk of the sea, sending a prickle over me.

Evie's skin shimmers in the gentle light of the night sky. She brushes her tail against my bare chest and my already hard cock throbs with need. The water is up to my neck now, and I lunge for her, but she only laughs, swimming just out of reach.

“I can't stand anymore,” I say, breathless, my feet kicking to keep me afloat.

“I don't see the problem.” She smirks and finally comes closer.

I reach out and wrap my arm around her waist, pulling her flush against me, skin to skin. Her scaled body is cool and slick against me, and I groan watching the look of need wash over her features. It is a look I have come to know well in our short time together. It holds an insatiable hunger, a promise of unimaginable pleasure.

“Are you ready to fuck a siren?” she murmurs.

I swallow hard, my cock growing harder with every saultry word from her mouth.

“I’ve already been with you multiple times,” my voice cracks, and I clear my throat.

“Not like this,” she says, licking up my neck, and I almost come right then as she rips my pants clean off my body, her tail wrapping around me like a snake before she pulls me beneath the waves.

I quickly reach into my pocket and pull free one of the Elder flower petals I plucked from the cliffs earlier. I eat the petal, saving the delicious taste, and then I begin to breathe blissfully underwater. The sensation is exhilarating.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

Evie's golden hair floats around us like a halo as she pulls me deeper still, my ears popping from the sudden change in pressure.

She kisses me again, her mouth demanding as her tongue dances with mine, urgent and insistent. I let my hands rove down her scales, and then I pull her flush against me, her breasts grazing my chest. Reveling in the feel of her bare skin against mine, I drop from our kiss, taking a beautiful pink bud into my mouth, flicking it with my tongue, and grazing my teeth against it. Tasting. Toying with it while the feeling of it dissolving radiates through me. She arches her back, bubbles rising around us as I coax her pleasure further. Suddenly, her mesmerizing tail is looping around me again, and I'm unable to move. I feel captured, yet utterly aroused.

She pushes me up against a rock covered in seaweed and her hand is around my cock. Her scales feel different under the water, almost like silk, only adding to the sensation and my building desire. I need to be inside of her. I trail a hand down to her waist to the front of her tail, searching for the spot where her wanting cunt would be. She smiles at me, saying something in the water, bubbles billowing around her so that I can't make out what it was, and grabs my hand, guiding me to my prize.

And then just there, low between two feather soft fins that kiss at my hand, playful and wanting, there is a spot between two scales. I touch her entrance, its warmth like that of the sand on a squelching day, and she grips a handful of my hair as her tail tightens around me.

Suddenly my cock is at her entrance and that beautiful, pulsing spot opens, wrapping around the head of my length and pulling me in, inch by inch. I can feel each and every ridge of her sex as her pussy swallows me, squeezing and pulling until I'm

sheathed to the hilt inside her. I didn't think the feeling could get any better than this. I'm bound by her completely, her prisoner as she has her way with me. I can feel her lithe muscles rippling against me, and I clench my jaw at the pure power I feel there, holding back, not ready for this to be over yet. And then those sweet, delicate fins framing her delicious cunt swept against my balls, flicking, tapping, teasing, and rubbing. I'm so close to coming, teetering delicately on the edge, desperate to hold out just a little bit longer.

Evie rocks her hips against me, and pure ecstasy pulses through me. I gaze up at her, and the look in her eyes, hungry, feral, and possessive, sends me over the edge. I come and ride the shockwaves of the most intense pleasure I've ever felt in my life. She finds her own release with me, and her pussy pulses around me only making me come harder. We ride our waves together until we are both spent.

Finally, she releases me, and I'm so drunk with bliss that I begin to sink. Evie laughs, and I can hear the reverberation of it around me. She takes my hand and swims us back up to the surface, where the shimmering moonlight leads us.

As soon as we break free into the fresh air I'm gasping, still riding the high, "Fuck, you are absolutely extraordinary. Th—that was beyond words."

She chuckles, and I can't stop staring at the way her skin shifts like gemstones beneath the moon.

"I like it when you take control," I say.

She kisses me for a long moment and then says, "So how was your first time with a siren?"

All I can say is, "Can we go for round two?"

Kai

I'm not sure how I'm supposed to go to the celebration in the Elder's hut after I've just had the most mind-blowing sex of my life. But here we are walking hand in hand up the beach.

Lantern light illuminates the large hut, flickering in the soft sea breeze. I don't want to go, I would rather take Evie back into those waves and fuck her under the sea until the sun rose lazily above the horizon. But there is so much to be done, so much to uncover.

I force myself to think of Dru stuck here, of Mathius with no memory of who he once was, and of Evie longing to be free of this island. It grounds me, spurring me forward to the doorway of the hut.

Evie releases my hand before we enter the party, and I ache to grab it again, to feel her smooth skin against my palm. I have grown accustomed to her touch, and I am starting to ache every time I am parted from her.

She gives me a small, knowing smile, "I'm sorry, but I have to go find Florence."

"I understand. I'll see you later, then." I say, returning the smile and watching as she disappears into the throng of bodies.

The air smells of sweat and sex mingled with the sweetness of the Elixir. I notice a drink in the hands of almost every man, but none in the hands of the sirens.

They are drugging them into sex and submission, taking away everything that makes these men unique— everything that makes them who they are. Now, these men are

nothing more than husks of their true selves. Puppets to the Elixir—to this place and these sirens.

Evelyn is so unlike these other women. She cares, she doesn't want a mindless man to fuck. She wants love and affection. She wants me to be me.

There has to be more to the story. I'm positive Evie told me everything she found out, but it's likely she hasn't been told the whole truth. If this Elder, Florence, raised her and kept so much from her, what else could she be hiding? What is happening on this Island?

I intend to find out, but first I want to find Mathius again, somewhere in the mass of tangled limbs, to see if he has taken the advice Evie gave him by not taking the Elixir tonight. After experiencing just a small bit of the effect it has, I hope he listens. I can't imagine what centuries of that brain fog might feel like.

Turning to move around the room, I almost choke as I find myself face to face with my brother.

"Dru," I breathe. He is here, a physical form in front of me. I blink, not sure I fully believe it's him. Then he cocks his head, squinting at me in a way that is so incredibly Dru that I can't help but reach out, crushing him in a hug.

He stiffens, and I release him, looking back at his face, so much like our fathers. He frowns, giving me a quizzical look, and takes a step back, "Do I know you?"

My heart lurches in my chest, and I look down at his hand where his fingers are wrapped around a cup, the sparkling pink Elixir taunting me from inside. I wrench it from his grip, throwing the contents to the floor, dropping the now empty cup as it thuds to the sand.

“What’s your problem?” Dru growls, pushing past me as he storms off toward a waiting trio of sirens.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

My heartbeat quickens as emotion builds behind my eyes.

Even though I know this is simply the Elixir talking, it still hurts. He doesn't remember me at all, my own brother. Memories swim in my vision of the last moment I saw him, waving him off as he came into my greenhouse to say goodbye. I should have hugged him then, told him I love him, and now I'm worried it's too late. What if I can't get him back?

My mind wanders to when we were children, running through the manor grounds, playing with wooden swords, climbing trees, hiding in all the shadowed alcoves of the manor house to jump out and scare the servants. Happy memories that now feel sour, spoiled from this place and what it has done to Dru.

I want to go after him and shake him until he remembers who he is and who I am.

"Kai," a voice says lightly from behind me. "Are you okay?"

It's Mathius, and I spin to find him looming over me, his height is a marvel. He's nearly a full head taller than every other man here.

"You look like you've seen a ghost," he continues, concern etched into the lines of his face.

"I feel like I have," I say, taking a deep breath and pointing to Dru's retreating form. "That's my brother. He's been missing for over a month, and here he was all along. Only problem is I came all this way to find him and he's forgotten who I am—who he is."

Mathius's face softens, "I didn't drink it tonight."

My brows raise in surprise. I didn't think he would actually listen so quickly. "Do you feel different at all? Have you remembered anything?"

"No, but I don't feel so..." Suddenly, his eyes glaze over like he's lost in a memory.

"Mathius," One of the sirens saunters up to his side, pushing me away from him. "Come, sit down with me," she says, taking his hand and leading him to an area of pillows set up in a corner of the hut.

I watch as she lays him down and starts kissing him, pressing her half-naked body against his.

"No, stop," he growls, pushing her off him. "I'm not feeling well. I think I'll go to my room and rest for the remainder of the evening."

He brushes past me on his way out, and I grip his arm, stopping him, "I'll come check on you later."

He looks down at me, those strange eyes so piercing as if he can see more than what he is looking at, a whole other part of the world. I hold back the shiver that threatens to course through me at his stare. Mathius is old. He has lived for several centuries, and I can't even imagine all the memories slamming back into his mind after not drinking the Elixir this evening. It must be excruciating, causing a tidal wave of emotion.

Mathius nods at me, shaking his large arm free of my grip, and disappears into the darkness of night that drifts through the door.

I sigh heavily. How has everything gotten so complicated? This island that first

looked like a paradise, I now see it truly. It is just like Evie said—a prison.

Shaking my head, I turn back around to the insanity that surrounds me. Moans, gasps, cries of pleasure rise up, feeling far too loud in my ears. I need to find Dru and get him out of this place. Make him remember me and our home.

I spot him, my brother, his dark curly hair and his green eyes stick out like a beacon in the mass of bodies, but it is his laugh that alerts me to his exact location. I would know that laugh anywhere, having heard it every day of my childhood and most of my adulthood. I safeguard the memories of it now. I can't let them be tainted any further by this place.

Reaching towards the slick moving bodies, I grab Dru under the armpit and haul him out. Luckily, he still has his pants on, or this would be extremely awkward. I continue pulling him through the hut, ignoring his angry protests, until we are all the way down the beach to where the gentle waves lap across our feet.

“Get off me!” he finally manages to push me, and I stumble backward.

“Dru, I'm trying to help you.”

“Help me?” he snorts. “Is your brain addled? I was just in the middle of three women, and you think you've helped me?”

He gives me another shove, and this time, I actually fall onto my back, sand spraying around me. I scrambled toward him, grabbing onto his ankle, and he sputters as I yank his leg out from under him and he smacks face first onto the beach. I almost laugh at the familiarity of this situation, remembering those times when we would fight, or try to keep the other from the final one of those delicious peanut butter cookies that cook always made us.

“What’s your problem, man?” Dru coughs out the words, spitting sand.

“You have to listen to me. I’m your brother, Kai. Don’t you remember me at all?” I know he doesn’t, but I am hoping that maybe, just maybe, his mind isn’t completely gone yet. Maybe there is still a piece of him there.

He sits up to face me, both of us covered in itchy sand. He is breathing heavily from anger or possibly annoyance. Most likely, it was both, but he was glaring at me in the same exact way he always had when he was cross with me.

“Please,” I whisper. “Remember me.”

His face softens for only a moment, and then he narrows his eyes at me. A bead of hope blooms in my chest.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

“I have no idea who you are, okay?”

The blossom in my heart shrivels and dies.

He pushes himself up with a grumble and turns from me, walking back into the Elder's hut. As soon as he disappears beyond the door alight with party cheer, I let the tears fall as the loss clings to me.

My brother is gone. And I don't think I'll ever get him back.

17

Evelyn

The thrum of a low siren's song reverberates across the beach as I make my way through the party. Weaving between the sweaty, writhing bodies of my sisters and their conquests, I can't look at them as anything else now.

They are shells of their former selves, and the urge to help each of them begins to overwhelm me. I must figure out what else Florence and Yvette are hiding and find a way to save all these men from the same imprisoned fate I was born into.

Searching, I look for Kai in the fray but can't see him anywhere. Maybe he found Mathius and was able to convince him to forgo the Elixir this evening. I can't imagine all thememories locked behind the walls of his mind, but why has he never told me about these daydreams trying to break through in all our years together?

I know he's different from the others, from the sheer size of him, not to mention his eyes, the elongated ears, and the aura that radiates from him. He never seemed fully human, always more cunning, more powerful, more observant, but he never mentioned these dreams to me. I wish he had. It might have knocked me from my ignorance and made me realize something wasn't right sooner. I shake my head at the thought, continuing through the maze of limbs.

Even though he's not my father, he has been a resounding presence in my life and someone I can always turn to when I need a shoulder to cry on. We were close, and I just wish he had trusted me enough to confide in me.

Distracted by my thoughts, I accidentally bump into a figure beside me, only to realize it's Florence. The emotions of our earlier conversation swirl deep in my gut, and the urge to scream, cry, and run away all come rushing to the surface. But I know I need to speak with her, I tamp down my frustration and smile, preparing myself for the conversation ahead. There are so many things Florence is keeping from me, and I need to find out exactly what they are.

"E, where is that man of yours? I'm dying to see him again." She smiles at me, so genuine and open, I almost feel like the conversation I heard between her and Yvette was a dream—or a nightmare.

"That's a great question, Flo. I was just looking for him," I glanced around the hut, realizing that there are far too many listening ears in the space. I don't want our conversation to be overheard. "He's got to be around here somewhere. But first, can we step outside? I want to speak with you."

"Of course, my child. What is it?" She links her arm with mine, and we head out into the quiet night.

My child. Those words, which used to mean everything to me, now feel tainted by

this island and its secrets. A resounding fracture splinters across my heart.

Trying to keep a handle on the emotions that slither their way up my throat, I continue on, “I overheard you and Yvette talking earlier today, right before I ran into you.”

Flo has never been able to keep what she is feeling from her face, and I watch as her gaze shifts quickly, looking left and right, anywhere but at my face. She presses her lips into a firm line.

“What happened to my mother?” I ask, keeping my voice even and calm. And how do I get Kai off this island? I know you have the answers, I heard you speaking with Yvette earlier, so it's no use lying to me.”

Florence looks back up at me with terror in her eyes. She grabs my arm and drags me farther away from the hut, closer to the edge of the beach. The waves crest up the sand, and the familiar sounds steady my breath as we walk down the shoreline.

“Eve, I don’t know what to say.” She says, her voice thick with emotion.

“You can start with the truth for one,” I say through clenched teeth, anger spreading through me at a rapid rate.

“It’s a long and sad story, and I can’t tell you. I would be breaking a sacred oath,” She says with a dejected look in her eye. “I swore on the Elder creed to never tell a soul.”

“Oh, the Elder creed,” I scoff. “That means more to you than the daughter you took in and raised after my mother died. More than the siren you taught the songs to, shared your entire life with. You’re my mother, Florence, how could you keep so much from me?”

She audibly flinches at my words, looking away from me again, but I don't back down. "What happened to my mother, Flo?"

Her whole body seems to sag, and she looks back up at me, unshed tears filling her eyes. "I need you to know that I kept this all from you to protect you, child. I've only ever wanted to protect you."

"From what?" I frown, "What is going on?"

"Your mother was a powerful Elder, and she loved you and your sister more than anything." Florence begins, with a shaky voice, "But she didn't die in childbirth."

My mouth falls open, and I try to say something, but no words come out.

"She was murdered."

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

“I..she...what?” I stammer, unable to form a coherent thought. “Murdered? Why would you keep something like that from me!” I shout. Florence tries to touch my arm, but I yank myself away, unable to stomach the thought of her touch at this moment.

“You remind me so much of her,” She chokes out, the tears finally falling down her cheeks.

“Tell me what happened.”

“She resisted.” Florence sniffles, wiping at the wet streaks on her face. “She was a strong woman. Long ago, when we first came to this island, we were suffering. We were a wandering people and our magic was dying. We needed people to listen to our songs, to keep our magic alive. Without them, we would have all perished. Though some came to visit on their way home each season, we could not convince them to stay.”

I furrow my brows, listening to this story I’ve never heard before, this history of my sisters that I did not know. We were always told that we were thriving, that the men would come and go willingly from our shores. That we helped them. Was everything we’ve been told a lie?

“Yvette bargained with the spirit of the island, Kafigda. She made a deal with it, sharing its power to create the storms in order to lure men to our island. The storms would capture them like fish in a net, and we would save them, keeping them here on our island to restore our siren powers.” Florence closed her eyes for a moment, taking in a deep breath. “Your mother, Aurelia, was against it and tried to stop Yvette. She

believed that Yvette was wrong, that the men would willingly stay if we told them the truth.”

I swallowed against the knot forming in my throat. I was anticipating her next words, even though I didn’t want to hear them, I needed to know.

“Unfortunately, Yvette had more of the sirens on her side, although they soon learned from their mistake. Yvette killed your mother, draining her of her songs as she siphoned all of our powers into her necklace, feeding them to the island and the storms.” She takes a step toward me, and I back away again, keeping my distance from this woman who I thought loved me.

“Eve, my biggest regret was sitting back and watching your mother be strong, standing up for what she believed in even as she took her final breath. I think about her every single day, and I see so much of her in you. I cherish that part of you, the part that is her. I tried my best to raise you in her image, to keep her memory alive, but you must listen to me, child. There is no way to leave this island. Yvette would kill us all before we even tried.”

It feels as if a hole has been punched through my chest. My fractured heart has shattered and turned the place where it once rested into grains of sand that slip through my fingers. I collapse to the ground—the edges of my vision blur, and my world rocks.

Murdered.

Murdered by Yvette.

Murdered for her kindness.

I don’t think I will ever take a full breath again. This feeling is too big. An ocean of

emotion is brewing, and the waves are gathering, crashing against the shores of my crumbling world. I want to scream for the mother I should have had. Cry for the life that was taken. And fight the woman who took all of this from me.

“I’m so sorry, dear, I really am.” Florence cautiously places her hand on my back, and I don’t have the strength right now to push away from her touch. “You must listen to me now. Everything I’ve told you must stay a secret. Even Katarina cannot find out. Yvette would kill you and me both if word of this spread through the island.”

I get up, standing with trembling legs. “I don’t understand. You’ve always told me you didn’t know how the storms developed. That they just arrived one day and began to circle the island. So you’ve forced all these men to live here in this cage, taking their lives from them, without giving them any choice? And what of the Elixir, whose idea was that? Can’t have your precious chattel trying to escape now, can we?” I spit out with more venom than I thought possible, considering the gaping hole where my heart used to be.

“It was Yvette. We needed to keep the men here, not only for our own magic to be tended, but they were dying, Eve, you saw that with your own eyes. We had to do something.” Florence pleads. “If they were destined to a life here, isn’t it better for them to live than to die on a pointless hope of leaving?”

“Do you even hear yourself, Flo? And I’m sure the need to please and serve all of us was just a happy side effect. A perfect solution to a problem you let her create. Kai couldn’t remember his own brother, Florence. After a day. What would it be like after a week? A season? A decade? I can’t imagine how long you’ve been feeding it to Mathius. Is that even his real name? He has no idea who he really is, does he?”

“Eve, there are things you just don’t understand, and so many things I can’t tell you for your own safety, but I will tell you this.” She stares off at the distant party with a

far-away look in her eyes, like she's lost in a memory, not here with me. "When we first arrived on this island, it was not the paradise you see today. It was a wasteland. The seas were drying up, all the fish being caught by the mainland, so we had to find a new home, a new way to survive. Living deep under the ocean, away from the eyes of men, was no longer an option. When this island rose out of the waters, we knew it was something special, but in order to make it the paradise it is today, we had to feed it magic. Our magic worked at first, but soon we all became so drained, aging faster, dying. Then a merchant fleet sailed past our shores and sought refuge on their long journey home. These men were not just men; they were elves, humans, goblins, and dwarves. The creatures we've only told you of in campfire stories. But when they were on the island, their magic, their being brought Kafigda to life. Trees started to grow. The Elder flower started to thrive. We discovered the secrets the island wanted to share. It wanted these men to stay, share their magic, and bring life to the island."

I stare at her, fearing that if I blink, she will fall out of her trance and stop her story.

Florence's shoulders sag as she picks up a handful of sand and lets it slowly fall through her fingers before she continues, always looking off in the distance, making sure no one overheard. "At first, we were able to convince the men to stay, with a little siren song here, a little dancing there, a little taste of the Elder flower. But when the singing and dancing stopped, the men realized they had lives and families back on the mainland. We tried to convince them to stay, but they left with the promise to return next season with more sailors, some who might even be willing to stay. Seasons passed, and the merchants continued to spend their solstice with us, but it wasn't enough. We were still aging rapidly, and the island never seemed satisfied with our temporary guests. While a few men had decided to stay, it wasn't enough."

I can't believe what I'm hearing, everything I've ever known has been a lie.

Florence took a deep shuddering breath before continuing, "As more men arrived and sirens were born, Yvette elected to create the Elder council with the sirens who were

here when the island was just a desolate pile of sand. She proposed the idea of creating the storm to trap the sailors who landed here. They could never get past the rumbling storm clouds and crashing waves once they were ensnared in its grasp.”

I feel like I can’t breathe. All this time, they had told us nothing but a tale, making us all think we were the ones who were trapped here against our will, but it was the other way around. We were trapping the men here all along.

“You were just a child, your mother and father were so happy to have been blessed with you. Your mother was against the storm from the start. Never wanting to force someone into a life they didn’t ask for, knowing your father was one of the men who had come willingly to the island and was planning to take you and your mother with him on his next voyage home to Halvendorf. They both wanted you to see the world.

“Yvette created the spell for the storm anyway and forced us to help. There’s a reason she is the head Elder. She knows our magic better than any of us.” Florence wipes away a tear as it rolls down her cheek, lost in the memory.

“And that’s what I’ve done for the last one hundred and twenty-seven years. And I will do so with my last breath. You mean everything to me.”

My body feels so raw, my limbs feel like they could sink beneath the waves and never rise to the surface again. I thought I was happy enough here, I had everything I ever needed, and I was resigned to my fate. And much as I mourned my parents’ deaths, I was happy with Florence, Mathius, and Katerina to guide me. But now, knowing my mother was murdered by the one person sworn to protect and lead us all, I start to see red.

“You said my father came here willingly and planned to leave in the next season. What happened to him? Did he get off the island in time? Did he just abandon me, his child?” I ask, hoping the answer is not another devastating lie.

“He drowned. That much is not a lie. He was one of the first groups of sailors to try to brave the storms to sail home. Heartbroken over your mother’s death, he put all his efforts into trying to find a way off the island for both of you, but he never did.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

I wrap my mind around all of the new pieces of my past I just learned. A plan begins to form, and it's never been more obvious that I have to get off this rock. We don't belong here. We were never meant to stay this long. This place is an evil leech, corrupting the minds of the Elders and slowly draining the life force of everyone here. Some things are better left to sink to the bottom of the ocean.

Standing on shaky legs, I take Florence's hand and look deep into her deep blue eyes. The eyes I've been looking up to my entire life hold a sea of pain and love in them all at the same time. As much as the anger inside me is bubbling to the surface, demanding release, it's not for Florence. She did everything she could to protect me after realizing her mistakes.

The real evil here is Yvette.

"I can't forgive you for keeping all of this from me, but I know you had my best intentions at heart. Florence, I can't stay here. Kai can't stay here. None of us can stay trapped here forever. You understand that, right?" I look at her, pleading for the truth of how to escape.

A sultry voice sounds from behind me, and the scales on my neck instantly raise. Slowly, I turn around, gripping Florence's hand in mine.

"I was just looking for you two." Yvette smiles with a feline grin. "The celebration is about to begin, and your delicious man has been searching for you all night. You better go find him before someone else does, Evelyn."

Florence looks between us and says, "Go, we'll be fine."

Not wanting to leave her alone, I pull Florence towards the party with me. “I want you to meet with him first, Mom.” I bite out, feeling like I’ve been caught in a game where I don’t even know the rules.

As we stride towards the safety of the party, I turn around and meet her gaze. Yvette is staring right back at me with a wicked grin on her face, toying with the seahorse necklace around her neck.

18

Kai

I can’t bear to go back into that place. I don’t want to see Dru caught up in the Elixir’s hold. I just want to be away from this place. Distance and time to clear my head was what I needed.

A familiar voice draws my attention, and I spot Evelyn and Florence standing just outside of the Elder's hut. Evie is so beautiful, silhouetted by the moonlight. She pulls Florence into a tight embrace and whispers something in her ear. The two women share one final moment before Florence squeezes her hand and walks back inside to join the celebration.

“Kai?” She calls out, noticing me just a few paces away, and I go to her, drawn to her warmth and energy like a moth to flame. In such a short time, she has become so important to me, the person I seek for comfort, and I want nothing more than to wrap my arms around her and never let go.

“There you are,” she says. Her eyes are wild, and she quickly looks behind her into the haze of lust before pushing me back the way I came toward the beach. “Quick, we don't have much time.”

“F—for what?” I stutter, wiping away the remnants of my tears. She stops, and I can just barely make out the look of concern that washes over her face as she looks at me.

“Are you okay? What happened?”

“It’s Dru. He’s gone,” I choke out. She grabs me and pulls me into a crushing hug. We hold each other for a long moment, and an overwhelming feeling of gratitude comes over me. Evie is the brightest thing in this dark place. She’s the only person who seems to understand me and knows exactly what I need at all moments. I need to leave this place with Dru, whether his mind is with him or not, but I can’t leave her. I won’t.

“I’m so sorry, Kai.” She finally says, releasing our embrace and looking me in the eye. “Don’t worry, we will get him back. I have a plan.”

I raise a brow, “What kind of plan?”

“We have to destroy the Elixir—all of it.”

My eyes grow wide with interest, “You know where it is? All of it?”

She smiles, nodding, but then her grin wanes, “There is something else we have to do, too.”

I don’t like the look on her face, and I know I won’t like her next words. “We have to make sure they can never make the Elixir again.”

I frown, “And how exactly do you suggest we do that?”

“Burn the field of Elder flowers. Make sure it can never grow again.”

That is the last thing I expected Eve to say. She loves those flowers. I love those flowers. They are absolutely extraordinary. My botanist mind is warring with my logical one. She is right. The Elder flower needs to be destroyed to break the cycle and bring the men back to reality.

“A long time ago,” Evie begins. “I used to help some of the men try to get off the island. We built rafts and sailed out into the storms, but then one day it all just stopped. None of them had any yearning to leave anymore.” She looks away from me, and I take her hand in mine.

“It’s not your fault, Eve. You couldn’t have known what they were doing to the men.”

“But I should have. I should have realized it. I was so wrapped up in my own head and my desire to be rid of this place that I didn’t even see what was happening in front of my eyes.”

Page 41

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

I pull her into my side, bending to place a kiss atop her beautiful golden head. “Well, now you do, and we can change it. Help these men find their way back to themselves, and maybe with all of us working together, we can find a way through the storms and off this Island.”

She looks up to me, and there is a determination on her features that sends a wave of pride through me.

“First, we destroy every drop of that Elixir and burn the flower fields.” She pushes away from my chest but grabs my hand, leading me back toward the Elder's hut and the party that is still raging beyond. “Then we will find out what the Elders have been hiding from us all these years—the way off Kafigda.”

“Wait,” I say, pulling back and halting her steps. “What’s the plan? I can’t go into this blind.”

She bites her lip, “Well, the plan was to just go inside and destroy the Elixir.”

“And how exactly are we just going to sneak by an entire hut full of sirens undetected, and how are we going to destroy it?”

She shrugs. “I hadn’t really thought that far. I figured we would just figure it out as we go.”

I drop her hand, running my fingers through my hair with a huff. “I think we should destroy the flowers first. Then come back for the Elixir.”

“Why?”

“Because if we get caught, at least they won’t be able to make more. They will be down to their final supply.”

Her lips quirk into a smile, and there is a glint of mischief in her eyes, “You know you’re really smart, right?”

I snort. “I’ve been told that a time or two. Dru used to say...” I trail off, memories of home and Dru so close at hand, yet so far away.

“It will work, Kai.” She says, “Dru will come back after we’ve destroyed it all. They all will.”

I close my eyes and clench my fists, “Alright, let’s go. Grab one of those torches.” I point to one of the large fire torches that line the Elder’s hut, at the same time grabbing another from a neighboring hut.

The climb through the forest and up to the cliffs is harder this time around, with only the torches to light our way, but as we crest the top, I gasp at what was laid out before us.

The Elder flowers glow beneath the silvery moonlight in an array of purples, greens, pinks, and blues. It is stunning. The air feels thick around me, making it hard to breathe, as if the island wants me to turn around and leave this place.

“Are you sure about this?” I hear myself ask Evie.

Her entire body looks poised, ready to flee, but she resists and nods, “We have to. Let’s start at the far end and make our way back here so we don’t get trapped by the flames.”

I swallow the sudden lump that forms in my throat. These are probably the most extraordinary plants I will ever see in my life. Nothing will ever compare. I bend to the closest flower, it glows with a deep purple hue, and pluck it from the stem, placing it cautiously in my pocket. “Just one. To take home with me.”

Evie only gives me an understanding smile. “We have to be quick. As soon as they see the fire, they will know what we’ve done and come here. We have to make sure they won’t grow back.”

“Pull them all out from the roots first. Make sure to get all of it out of the soil, and then we burn the field.”

She squeezes my hand once before trekking across the field, the flowers' light causing her skin to sparkle as she goes. This is it—the moment we won’t be able to come back from. This has to save Dru, Mathius, and everyone on this Island.

A clap of thunder rings out overhead, an ominous warning for us to stop what we’re doing.

“Hurry!” Evelyn says, “We have to destroy it all before the storm comes for us.”

I look up to the once clear night sky above us to find a group of grey clouds hovering there. “How is that possible?” I yell back to her. “The storms never come here. I thought they only stayed out in the ocean.”

“It’s the Island! Kafigda wants to stop us,” she yells back.

“Shit,” I say and grab the base of the Elder flowers in front of me pulling them from the ground.

Evelyn and I race across the field, yanking every single flower by the roots from the

rich earth, and then we set it all aflame.

We step back and watch as smoke billows from the growing flames, sparks floating up toward the dark clouds overhead. Evelyn looks up at me, eyes wet with unshed tears. We have just ruined some precious, beautiful piece of life here. But it isn't just about destroying this field. We are cutting off the source of the sirens' power, destroying what has allowed them to steal the lives of countless men.

A rustling in the trees beside us pulls us both from our haze.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

“Quick,” Evie whispers. “We have to get down to the Elixir.”

She turns and runs down the slope and through the trees, away from the rustling we heard. I follow suit, lungs burning with the effort, sweat soaking my clothes. By the time we make it back down to the beach, I am heaving from the exertion.

Sirens are screaming, pointing up at the fire on the cliffs. Thunder echoes once more, and Evelyn grabs my arm, pulling me down behind a boulder on the beach. We watch as the sirens and a few of the men fly past us with pails racing up the cliffs to try and put out the flames. By the time they make it to the top, it will be too late. There will be nothing left for them to save.

“Come on,” Evie murmurs, and I follow her as she creeps from hut to hut, making sure no one is near enough to see us.

We creep our way to the Elder's hut, hidden in shadow, peering inside. It is empty, the party interrupted by our fire.

“The Elixir is in Yvette’s quarters, up there.” She points to a small set of steps at the far end of the hut that spiral up to a large loft area.

We stalk into the hut and begin our ascent up the steps, and I can’t help but feel that something is off. This feels too easy.

“Evie,” I whisper. “I think something is wrong. This doesn’t feel right.”

“They’re distracted by the fire. They don’t even know we are also targeting the Elixir

until it's too late.”

We make it to the loft, and Evelyn opens a small cabinet at the far end of the room. Inside are rows upon rows of the glimmering pink Elixir. It glows bright just like the flowers we just destroyed.

“How are we going to destroy them?” I ask. There are far more vials than I expected. This supply would last them an entire year if we don’t get rid of the vials.

“Here,” Evie rips the blanket off the small bed in the corner of the space. “We’ll put them in here and take them out into the sea, dump them in the water.”

We pull every single vial off the shelf, throwing them into our makeshift sack, and hurry down the steps and out into the waiting night air. Evelyn holds the bag of vials tightly in her grip, not daring to let go.

We are so close. The end is in sight. I will have my brother back.

Evelyn and I just reach the shore when a voice sounds behind me.

“What do you think you are doing?”

I spin, water lapping at my ankles. Yvette, the head Elder is only a few feet away from me.

Yvette laughs, and I turn back toward her. “You both think you are so clever, don’t you. Destroying the flowers, taking my Elixirs. None of it will help you get off this island. Your efforts have been in vain.”

I glare at her, “Why are you doing this? We know there is a way off this cursed place. Why are you keeping us all here?”

“So many questions,” Yvette sneers. “You men are all the same.” She brings up a hand and flicks her wrist. A scream shoots up from directly behind me, and I spin to see Evelyn flying through the air, losing her grip on the stachel. The vials clink together, splashing into the shallow waves, and are caught in the tide, pulling the bundle out to sea. I run to her, catching her before she hits solid ground, hoping Yvette doesn’t notice the last of her Elixir floating away.

“Are you crazy!” I yell at Yvette. “You could have killed her.”

“Neither of you will ever leave this Island,” Yvette spits. “Besides, you wouldn’t want to leave your dear old dad here without you now, would you, Evelyn dear?”

Evie is breathing heavily, and I gently lower her onto the sand beside me. She instantly steps forward, “What did you say?” Her hands clench at her sides. She must have been able to get rid of all the Elixir before Yvette yanked her from the sea.

“That’s right,” Yvette’s smile is full of mirth. “Your father has been here all along. He isn’t dead.”

“Who? Who is he?” Evelyn’s voice is barely above a whisper, and I come up beside her, placing a gentle hand on her back to offer comfort.

“Who do you think?” Yvette cackles, and Evie goes rigid. “That’s right, dear, Mathius. Your father has been right by your side all along.”

19

Evelyn

The breath sweeps from my lungs as I realize what Yvette just told me. Mathius is my father. My father. The man who loved my mother so selflessly, that he gave up

his whole life, his kingdom, to be with her.

“You’re lying,” I spit with all the vigor I have left. I’m not sure how many more emotional tidal waves I can take today.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

“Of course you don’t believe me. Why would you? Except, think about it, Evelyn? The way you have always been drawn to him, even after you gave up on your masquerade of starting your own shipyard in order to help these poor men escape,” she taunts while prowling up and down the beach, always twirling the seahorse necklace between her fingers.

Like a punch to the gut, I know she’s right. Only the feeling of Kai’s fingers on my arm is keeping me from sinking into the depths of my heartache. I have a father, he’s alive, and he’s the most powerful man on this island.

My mind flashes back to the dream from yesterday. My mother, on the beach, encircled in the arms of a man who felt so familiar, now I know why. It was Mathius, the lost king and my father.

If anyone can help us figure out how to leave, it will be him.

An idea sparks and I school my features for Yvette’s next penetrating volley of insults. “So what if he’s my father, if he keeps taking your Elixir and stays your slave, he could never truly be my father. You will never convince me or Kai to give you back these vials if it means controlling these men forever.”

I risk a glance at the bundle bobbing amongst the waves drifting further out, but never sinking. The vials need to be fully destroyed if we have any hope of defeating Yvette. If he could read my mind, all of this would be easier, but I have the best chance of getting that necklace away from Yvette, and he has the best chance of destroying the vials.

All I need is a little distraction. Glancing around, I spot one of the torches we used to burn away the Elder flower, although the flames have long since been doused, the end is still considerably spiked.

A perfect weapon and one Yvette would never suspect.

Squeezing Kai's hand, I kiss him gently on the cheek, wondering if this will be our last time in each other's arms. I am not as strong or powerful as Yvette, but I know in my heart what she is doing is wrong, and that has to be enough.

"Stop making moon eyes at each other and give me back the potions." Yvette extends her delicate hand, the dark silver scales of her arm shine in the moonlight, giving her almost an ethereal glow. She's always felt larger than life to me.

Graceful. Delicate. Stunning. Confident. Powerful. All the things I wanted to be, but never quite found it in myself to be. But one thing she's always been, that I never want to be, is completely self-absorbed. She doesn't realize the satchel that she tossed out of my hand held the Elixir she so desperately needs.

"They're already gone. We destroyed them before you arrived." Kai shouts with more conviction in his voice than I've heard before. Every moment he surprises me a little more, and a pang of sadness goes through me as I realize I want an entire life of little surprises from him, and I might never get that if we can't stop Yvette. "It's over, you can't control these men any longer."

"And what are you going to do to stop me? Throw a book at me? From all the men I've seen wash up on our shores, you seem the weakest. Just a younger brother living in his older brother's shadow, waiting for his daddy's approval." She says with a menacing grin, thinking she hit him right where his greatest weakness lies.

In the short time I've known Kai, he never seemed to be seeking approval from

anyone, least of all his father. So while Yvette thinks she's hurt him, I know deep down all he cares about is his family's happiness, he's never cared about gaining his father's approval or living in his brother's shadow.

"You have no idea what you're talking about," Kai begins backing out into the surf. "I love my brother and I will do anything it takes to keep him safe and bring him home."

I slowly stalk in the opposite direction, trying to allow Kai to remain Yvette's main focus for the moment. She creeps forward following him step by step while I sneak closer to the torch. I have to believe Kai can hold his own.

A resounding crash reverberates from the men's hut as the door flies open and Mathius storms out. Sprinting towards Yvette with murder in his eyes, I take the opportunity to scramble for the torch, grasping it in my hands.

Thunder rumbles overhead, and the waves froth further and further up the shore. The tide is rising quickly, and the storm is getting closer.

I've never seen Mathius so angry, he looks like he is ready to strangle the life out of Yvette with his bare hands. I honestly don't doubt that he has the ability to do so.

"You lied to me for centuries!" he bellows. "Years of my life, Yvette. You stole the love of my life and made me forget my own daughter." He finally reaches the crashing waves, and Yvette looks between him and Kai, wondering which problem to resolve first.

"I needed you, Mathius. You were feeding the island its magic. You're more powerful than you know, and I needed that power to keep us alive. The mighty Elven King of Halvendorf. Beloved by all including that spineless bitch, Aurelia," she spits. "When I made the deal with Kafigda to bring you all here, she purred in anticipation of your power. Ripe for the taking and all ours. You loved this place, you were the

reason Aurelia believed that more men would come here and stay to live out their happily ever afters.” Yvette's face turns mocking.

“No one ever told her that fairy tales aren’t real and what a shame she died believing they were true. But you, Mathius, you were the true prize, and I knew I had to do anything to keep you here. It was unfortunate your precious wife didn’t see it that way.”

Mathius’s face is a mask of grief, pain, and rage. “All of that was worth more than Aurelia’s life? She was everything to me and you took her from me and my child just like that. And not only me, you took all of it away from Evelyn too. How can you live with yourself?”

She smiles that feline smile that causes my stomach to somersault. Like we’re playing a game and only Yvette knows the rules.

“Easy, Mathius. Power. All the power I could ever want is right at my fingertips.” Black tendrils of light begin to crackle, slithering along her hands, up and down her arms as she makes her way back to the beach.

He scoffs as a soft golden glow starts to surround him. “If power is what you wanted, I could have given you that. I willingly gave you that when I was on this island of my own free will.”

“It wasn’t enough,” she spits as the shadowed black magic whirls around her arms. “And you were never going to stay. You were going to take Aurelia and Evelyn, leave Kafigda and never come back. And I couldn’t let that happen. You forced me to do this, Mathius.”

Yvette releases a crack of power, fast as a whip, towards Mathius. He holds up his hands and blocks the attack with his golden glow.

I stare in awe of the man who is my father as he fights off every burst of magic shooting from Yvette's hands. Subtlety, he closes the distance between them until she is almost within reach of his powerful grip.

Dropping the torch, I rush out into the water and try to meet Kai as he begins to get swept further from shore.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

A piercing scream resounds across the island, and I feel it deep in my bones. Yvette is screaming a siren's song, trying to stop Mathius's attacks.

In his shock, Kai drops the makeshift sack and it begins to sink to the bottom of the sea. Kai grasps for it and the loose knot keeping the bundle closed begins to unravel. Vials bob to the surface, looking like apples waiting to be collected from a barrel.

Mathius finally reaches Yvette and grips her by the arms, squeezing her back against his chest. He places a large hand over her mouth, silencing the song while the golden glow simmers around his entire frame.

Kai is frantically working to collect the bouncing potions littering the water. Heedless of the strength of each crashing wave, I watch in horror as he gets battered by a wave and pulled under.

Panicking, I dive down and swim to him as quickly as my fins will carry me. My heart lurches in my chest as I pray to the gods that he can find a way to get his head above water.

How could I let this happen?

Kai fighting to find the surface, Mathius using all his power to keep Yvette contained and these damned vials won't sink. Finally reaching Kai, I pull him to the surface and grip the sides of his face, smashing a kiss to his lips. I breathe life into his lungs and hum a healing song. Circled in my arms, he begins to cough and clings to me like a life raft.

“Kai, look at me. Focus,” I plead, my tail thrashing against the strong force of the ocean. “I need you to swim with me, my love. We have to get back to shore. The storm is coming, and I can’t fight this.”

His eyes come back into focus. “Eve, what happened? One minute I was able to stand, the next I was being swept under the waves.”

“I know, Kafigda is angry, but I’m so glad you’re safe now. Listen, we have to go and help Mathias,” I pull him closer to me, savoring one final embrace before we face the unknown. “You need to take one of the Elixirs, you’ll never make it back to shore without it, you need to be able to breathe underwater. Then I have to destroy that necklace Yvette is wearing. That’s where all her power is coming from. You have to remember who you are and don’t fall under her spell, Kai. Whatever you do. Don’t listen to her.”

“Okay,” he says, looking at me like he would take on the world and all its creatures for me.

My shattered heart feels like it might be able to piece itself back together after all. Kai pulls the cork on the sparkling pink liquid and downs it in one swallow. The waves start to thrash, and even pumping my tail with all my strength, I know I won’t last long against this storm. Grabbing Kai’s hand, we plummet under the water and make our way to the shore.

Keeping his hand in mine somehow feels like the most important thing in the world right now. My mind races with the possibilities of what is happening on land with my father and Yvette.

My father.

I still can’t believe it, but deep down, I feel like I’ve always known we shared a

connection. Maybe when all of this is over, Mathius can tell me more about my mother.

Shaking from my thoughts, we finally make it to the beach, where I can make out the silhouettes of Florence, Mathius, and Yvette in some kind of a struggle. Florence seems to be wielding the torch that I was holding earlier, while Mathius struggles to keep his grip on Yvette.

Suddenly, Florence is thrown across the beach, the torch retched from her hand as she crumbles to the ground. I gasp out and begin sprinting towards her unconscious form. A low humming is resounding, and as I reach Florence, I turn to see Kai stalking towards Yvette with the sharpened torch in his hand.

“Florence, can you hear me?” I sing a healing song and watch the color return to her face as she shifts slightly under my hands. I push the hair back from her face and feel for her pulse gently with one hand. It flutters very lightly under my fingers, but it’s still there. All of this healing is starting to take its toll, but I lay her back on the sand and gingerly push off my knees, pushing through.

Kai is still stalking towards Yvette. He is no match for her on his own. What is he thinking?

And then I realize, the Elixir—he’s drawn to her. And the singing, she’s calling him to her aid. Mathias must be immune to her song with whatever magic he possesses, but Kai, under the influence of the potion, certainly is not.

I sprint towards him, my heart hammering in my chest. I can’t lose him. I can’t let her keep him here.

Mathius, struggling to keep Yvette contained, turns his back to Kai. Grasping at any part of her that he can keep his hands on, he tries with all his might to cover her

mouth and stop the singing. Suddenly, with more strength than I thought possible from his lithe frame, Kai hurdles the torch right at Mathius's exposed back.

"Watch out!" I scream with all the air I have left in my lungs. Diving for Kai, I tackle him to the ground just as the torch leaves his hand.

Surprised by my sudden attack, he huffs out a breath as I grab for his wrists and pin his body under mine.

"Kai, snap out of it," I pleaded. Risking his escape, I shift both his hands into one of mine and slap him across his cheek. His eyes shift back into focus, and I instantly regret such an outburst.

"Gods Evelyn, what did I do to deserve that?"

Hope surges in my chest and I gradually release my grip on his wrists and sit back. "You tried to kill Mathius, now get up and help me kill this sea bitch. I need to destroy her necklace."

Still writhing in his arms and with a nasty scratch from the torch on his side, Mathius has managed to finally cover Yvette's mouth again.

As we run up to him, I wrench the coral seahorse necklace that has encompassed this woman's neck for centuries off with one tug. The necklace that has brought so much heartache and trapped so many lives. That killed my mother and kept this storm circling the island. And smash it against the closest rock.

It crumbles in my hand and a dark green mist escapes from the rubble. A boom cascades across the island, and lightning streaks across the sky. A piercing cry sounds from behind me, and I turn to see Yvette writhing on the ground. The ethereal glow that surrounded her only moments ago has winked out and her scales rapidly begin to

dry and crack. She's aging right in front of my eyes, decades at a time. She continues to shriek as her scales turn to nothing more than sand. Starting from her feet and her hands, she slowly crumbles into the sand of Kafigda.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

Yvette is gone in the blink of an eye.

The most powerful siren any of us will know in this lifetime or the next is nothing more than the grains of sand that make up the beaches of our home.

With a final burst of lightning, the rumbling storm clouds begin to part all around us. The ocean around Kafigda is finally clear as far as the eye can see. Is it finally over?

Just then, I hear a loud cough and see Florence limping her way over to us. I can't help the tears that trail down my cheeks, and I race to grip her in a bone-crushing embrace. I was so worried she wouldn't recover from Yvette's spell. As hurt as I was for the secrets she kept, I understand now that she was only doing what she thought was right, and when the moment came, she was there to protect me and Kai.

“Thank you for trying to save me. I...I'm sorry for everything.”

She looks into my eyes, and the tears spill over as sobs rack her injured frame. We hold each other for several moments before I hear her whisper, “She would be so proud.”

20

Kai

The early tendrils of dawn reach across the horizon, turning the sky to soft shades of lavender and gold. No more storm clouds ominously looming in the distance, and no more dark waters promising death and destruction. As the sun crests, its light glow

shimmers across the gentle waves, bathing them all in warmth.

They were all free.

Not only the men who have been trapped here so long, but the sirens, too. The world is open to them for the first time in centuries.

I watch as Evie and Florence embrace, noting the other Elders and how they also hug their loved ones. They were prisoners as much as the sailors were, forced to obey Yvette or meet the wrath of her power like Evelyn's mother.

The gathered company of sirens and sailors part suddenly as Mathius makes his way toward Evie. There is a heavy sadness in his gaze, one that tells of centuries of regret and heartache.

Evie breaks free of her embrace with Florence and watches as he takes long strides toward her. He halts just a single step away from her, and they both stare at one another. Everyone stands silent, and the only sounds are that of the ocean's current and the swift breeze rustling through the trees beyond the beach.

It is Mathius who speaks first, "You are so much like your mother." He chokes out, and that is all Evie needs to hear, because she throws her arms around him, a fresh batch of tears trickling down her cheeks. Mathius's large arms encircle her, and he lays his head atop hers. The sparkle of emotion in his eyes, and a warm smile spreads across his face.

"Kai?" A quiet voice says behind me, and I turn to find Dru standing there. "I remember."

Relief washes over me, and a slow smile blooms across my face, "Welcome back, brother."

He smirks back and then arches a brow, “You know you didn’t have to grab my leg out from under me. I busted my lip from that, see?”

He pulls down his bottom lip, where a small gash is present. I wince, “Sorry about that. I was sort of at the end of my rope. I didn’t know how to get you back.”

Dru sighs, putting an arm over my shoulder. “What are you even doing here? How are we both here on this strange island?”

I huff a laugh, “It’s a long story.”

“Well, I think I have time to listen.”

Dru and I leave the group of sirens and sailors, and I tell him everything that has happened over the past month that he’s been gone. I tell him of Father not doing well, that I didn’t want to take over the province, and that I came looking for him, to bring him home knowing he wasn’t dead. I tell him that my journey led me to this island, directly to him.

“Gods,” Dru runs a hand through his dark hair. “An entire month. I remember the storm and the shipwreck, but after that, it’s all such a blur.”

“It’s okay, you’ll get it all back in time. Listen, Dru, there’s something else.” He frowns at me, waiting for me to continue, “I’m not exactly sure how to say this, because... well, quite frankly, I can’t fully believe it myself, but the lost elven King of Halvender is here.”

Dru choked, coughing, “W–what?”

“I know, I know. He’s been here this whole time, and I think we need to bring him back home. You know as well as I do that Halvender suffers without a true ruler.

There are all the pretender kings who can never hold the throne, playing dress-up, but without the true king, the entire kingdom has been suffering for far too long.”

“Halvondor needs its king,” Dru nods, agreeing.

A glimpse of pink and blue shimmers in the corner of my vision, and I turn to see Katarina sauntering towards us. Dru curses under his breath, and I smirk.

“Well, well, if I had known if you two were brothers here on the island, I would have tried to have a little extra fun.” She says.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

Dru pinches the bridge of his nose and groans, obviously exasperated. “Katarina, I think we need to talk.”

“I can think of a few better things to do than talk, royal boy.”

Dru casts me a look dripping with annoyance, and I only chuckle. It seems that Katarina’s charms no longer work on him. “I’ll let you guys talk.”

I leave them, not wanting to be involved in whatever conversation Dru was about to have. I’d seen him break up with women before, and none of them ever took it well. Dru was the tall, dark, and handsome type, the guy that girls swooned over back home. His dark hair, hazel eyes, and tanned complexion from days at sea always had the girls looking past me and straight at him. It didn’t help that he was also heir to the province, and nearly half a head taller than I am.

The sirens and sailors have dispersed across the beach, and I notice Mathius and Evelyn still together, away from the others. I need to speak with both of them, because not only does Mathius need to get off of Kfigda and back home to Halvondor, but I want Evelyn to come as well. I only hope she does, too.

Before I even make it that far, Evelyn is waving me over with a large grin on her stunning face.

“Kai! Come quick!” She yells, and I jog over to them.

“I didn’t want to interrupt your reunion,” I say.

Mathius suddenly places a large hand on my shoulder, and I can practically feel the power emanating from him in waves. “I owe you my thanks, Kai. Without you and Evelyn,” he pauses, a dark shadow passing over his face. “I can’t think of how much longer all of us would have been stuck under that siren’s spell. I am indebted to you. We all are.”

“It was mostly Evie,” I say, smiling over at her. “I was just along for the ride.”

Mathius huffs a laugh, “Even so, thank you.”

His face shifts to one far more serious, and his hand tightens slightly on my shoulder, “Tell me, Kai. How fares Halvender in my absence?”

Looking away from him, unable to meet his intense golden-eyed stare, “It’s a much better place than you remember, I’m sure,” is all I can manage. I wasn’t alive in his time, and so I don’t know how much has changed. I have no idea what it was like when he sat on the throne, other than in history books. All I know is now. And now the country is in shambles.

“Since you disappeared, no one has been able to stay on the throne. Although many have tried, all fail and most end up dead.”

His hand drops from my shoulder, and he nods, “Only an Elf can sit the throne and rule the land. Someone from my line.” He looks over to Evie with a soft smile, and I realize that Evelyn is probably his only child.

“I—I don’t know what it was like when you ruled, but the entire kingdom has been taken over by the strongest warlords of men. It’s been cut and divided into provinces for centuries. I’m afraid there isn’t much left of your ruling city. It was picked over long ago, and now it’s little more than a war zone for those fighting to claim your throne.” I look back up at him and almost back away.

His face is set in a grim line, and a surge of energy roars around him, making him look so much bigger as he says, “It’s time for us to get off this island and go home.”

21

Evelyn

Freedom.

That's what I feel at this moment, as I look out over the beauty of clear blue skies and the seemingly endless expanse of the sparkling sea. I want to swim and explore the far reaches of the world.

I am free.

The realization comes at me fast and hard, in a rush of exhilarating excitement. I can’t believe the storms are gone, and I can go anywhere and do anything I please for the first time in my life.

I look over to the men, to Kai and Mathius. It has been two glorious days since the darkened, angry skies of Kafigda were vanquished, and Mathius had led the men in constructing a vessel for all those wanting to leave the island.

With Yvette now gone, the sirens and sailors were left to do as they pleased, and many of the men wanted to stay. This not only made my siren sisters who loved their island home happy, but it also made Kafigda happy.

At the end of it all, Yvette was the foolish one. She hadn’t needed to lure Mathius and others to the island. If she had only listened to my mother all those years ago, she would have realized that the sirens and Kafigda were a place that men and other creatures wanted to visit. She hadn’t needed to trick anyone, but I suppose she had

only wanted the power for herself all along, and in the end, that was her mistake.

Now the ship was almost done, and we would be sailing our way toward Halvondor at sunset, with Mathius and Dru at the helm.

Dru had decided to leave my sister Kat to go home and take on his duties for his people. Kai seemed significantly relieved by that choice. Mathius had assured both Dru and Kai that he wouldn't be tearing away their claim on Renyir, the province their father had secured many years ago. It was theirs still, and he would figure out the rest when he got back and took his seat as king of Halvondor once again.

He won't admit it, but I can see the trepidation and anxiety in the way that Mathius has been working these past few days. He is scared. Scared of what the kingdom might be like, afraid of taking back his rightful place in a land that has lived without him for so long. There is no knowing what will happen upon his return to the mainland.

Mathius explained to me last night that without an elven ruler on the throne of Halvondor, magic ceased to exist there. And many of the beings who had lived in Halvondor were tied to magic. He was worried for them, unsure what had befallen them in his absence. From what Kai and Dru have said, there are no longer magical beings in Halvondor, only men.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 7:37 am

After hearing that Mathius had gone quiet, he hadn't talked to a soul since. He worked tirelessly on building the vessel, seeming more desperate to leave with each passing moment.

Unsurprisingly, I am the only siren who wants to leave with the men and sail to Halvendorf. My sisters are all perfectly happy to stay on Kafigda. I vowed to visit whenever possible, but I will miss them all dearly, especially Florence and Kat.

As if conjuring her from the mere thought, Kat materializes from the ocean, walking toward me with a broad smile on her lips. "I've never been so far out to sea," she squeals.

"I told you this place was a cage, but you never wanted to listen."

"I'm not too proud to admit it, E. You were right, this freedom feels so good. It feels right." Kat smirks at me. "And now I've an entire sea full of sailors to lure with my song. I mean, the possibilities are endless."

I shake my head at her because, of course, she is only thinking about bringing more men here.

"I'm glad you are happy here, Kat. I'm going to miss you."

She instantly wraps me in a crushing hug, still wet from her swim, but I don't care. I hug her back just as tightly. This might be the last time I see her for months, maybe years, and I will savor this moment for as long as I can.

“I love you, E.” She whispers.

“I love you too, Kat. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do while I’m away.”

She breaks our hug and raises a brow at me, “Oh, I will most definitely do everything you wouldn’t do while you are away.”

We both laugh, enjoying each other's company, when Florence walks over to us. Kat grabs my hand, squeezing it before giving me a wink and leaving the two of us alone.

Flo stands beside me, looking out at the setting sun as it casts streaks of orange and pink across the sky.

“The world out there is different than what we have here, Eve.” Her voice is reserved, even, but holds just the tiniest bit of emotion. “It won’t be easy learning their way of life.”

I grab her hand, lacing our fingers together, “I know, Flo.”

She finally looks at me, and I can see the unshed tears welling in her eyes. “You can come back at any time, you hear me. If you need anything, I am here for you, always.”

The sting of tears prickles behind my eyes, and I wrap my arms around her. “I’m going to miss you so much, Flo.”

She releases our embrace, holding onto my shoulders and looking me pointedly in the eye. “Your gifts will grow stronger on the mainland, child. You are half elf, half siren. It is why your gifts have always been more toward healing. The elven magic comes from the forests and the earth. Your gifts are tied directly to the nature around you. Practice and use it well.”

I smile at her, the tears now trailing down my cheeks. “Thank you, Flo. For all you’ve done for me, for loving and teaching me over the years.”

“I would do the same time and again, child.” Her eyes crinkle at the edges, and a sadness comes over me because, since the magic Yvette was using is now gone, all of the Elders have aged rapidly in the past two days, Florence included. I make it a point to come back and visit as soon as I can, but now it’s time to do something for myself. To live out my dreams.

Florence nods her head behind me, and I find Kai walking down the beach toward us. She gives me one more hug before heading back to the huts, and Kai suddenly smiles down at me with all the love and elation in the world.

“It’s done.” He says, “The boat is ready.”

I let out an unsteady breath, feeling eager to start this new adventure but nervous at the same time.

“What do you say, Evie? Are you ready to sail to Halvondor? To see the world outside of Kafigda.” Kai’s eyes twinkle with excitement.

The dawn of a new life was on the horizon, and I was ready to go out and meet it.

“I’m ready, Kai. Let’s go home.”

Epilogue

Far across the sea, there is a land that was once rich with magical life, now only inhabited by humans. A land not entirely pleased with this chapter in history, feeling abandoned, over-farmed, sucked dry of all it can provide. This land started as a home for all those seeking a place to rest and rebuild. A land of harmony and peace, where magic flowed through the ground like the roots of the oldest trees. It did not matter

where you came from, who or what you were; you could find a home here in Halvendorf.

The rulers of this land would never call themselves something as formal as King or Queen. They were stewards of the land. Their magic thrived here, and with that, so did all of their people. An ancient race, who came from far away, but were chased out of their homes by greed and power. By fear for all their power could create. So they fled, and on their journey, they found the lush shores and tall trees that covered this continent. These forests could feel the call of their magic, and the land began to bend to the will of the Losalfar Elves, who wanted nothing more than to create a magical resting place for those in need.

Over the centuries, more and more magical beings were drawn to this haven they had built, and for a time. Halvendorf was at peace until slowly industry moved in. Cities began to take over the lush forests that used to thrive, industry over powers. Without the stewards of the land, the Losalfar Elves, to care for it, Halvendorf falls deeper into shadow every day.

The humans drove the elves, goblins, dwarves, and sirens from their land so long ago that there are those too young to even know these sorts of creatures existed outside of the fairytales they were told. But an elven king has returned to this land, and it hears his call. It feels his power through the roots of every tree, across the mountains that stand tall, in every creature living and dead.

It comes back to life.

This king was lost centuries ago, tales of a siren song luring him to the rocky shores of her island home and siphoning the last dregs of his power until he was begging for a merciful death.

But not all stories are true, and the king has returned, heartbroken, but with a daughter in tow. A daughter who is a siren, tail and all, in love with a man now ripe

to take over a powerful province. With his family by his side, this king is ready to take back his throne and restore peace to Halvondor.

While the land is happy with this elven king's return, not every force is pleased with this turning of the tide. Some want power to stay right where it's been for those long centuries, in the hands of the wicked.