



# A Song of Death and Desire (The Sirens of Witches Cove)

**Author:** *Bec Eden*

**Category:** Fantasy

**Description:** Bound to sea, cursed to consume.

Such is the sirens tune.

Eat your food, make it fast,

And never let a human past.

Kairi has always longed for more—more than the cold depths of the ocean, more than the endless hunger raging inside her daily. When she spares Eagan, a man whose soul should have been hers, she breaks the oldest rule of her kind. Now, both are haunted—he by visions of a woman and a song he cant escape, and she by the desire to become what she can never be. In a world where love and death dance too closely, Kairi must face the price of defying fate while Eagan must uncover the truth before it consumes them both.

But can a love born of defiance ever truly escape the curse that binds it?

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# Page 1

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## Chapter 1

A siren's song is a curse. A curse of madness, desire, and death.

The whirring sound of a fishing boat catches my attention as it speeds through the ocean close to where I wait. Anticipation buzzes beneath my skin and I recognize the same emotion in my sisters who swim nearby. We are hungry and lethargic. Exhausted and slow. The excitement of the hunt is the only thing that spurs us on.

This boat sounds a little larger than our usual discoveries. I estimate there are maybe half a dozen people on board. This is enough to satisfy many of us for a long time, but we will have to prioritize who gets to feed first. It's rare that we find such a big collection, so we are lucky today.

Over the years, the number of boats that venture into Witches Cove have dwindled and when they do, many don't return to the docks, the humans never seen again. It has created fear and suspicion among humans, but we need to feed, and this is the only way we know how. We are lucky we have evolved over the years so that we no longer require souls as frequently as we once did. The consumption of a soul will keep us alive for about a year if we are lucky. If we still had to have souls as often as our ancestors, we would have become extinct long ago. There is just no way to take that many humans without alerting the wider world to our existence.

My sisters look to me to take point on this hunt and I look around at each of them, taking note of their appearance and need for food.

Although they aren't my sisters biologically, the bonds of sirens within a group are as

strong as those forged by blood. We have many similarities in our appearances; the blue-gray pallor of our skin, our shimmering silver scaled tails, our webbed fingers with taloned nails and our sharp pointed teeth. Despite some human characteristics, anyone could tell that we are not human. The thirst for blood is evident in the eyes of my sisters and it shows our predatory nature.

I feel the slightest hum of excitement, but I don't thrive off the hunt the way my sisters do. Mixed with the excitement is a twinge of discomfort. I enjoy the feeling of my hunger being satisfied but I can't help the way that my mind drifts to the humans we hunt and the ache of sympathy that exists when it shouldn't. Before the feeling overwhelms me, I allow myself to give into my instincts that pull me to attack and devour. My senses focus solely on my prey and everything else ceases to exist as their souls draw me in.

We are not far from the jagged cliffs and rocks jutting out of the ocean, the very formations that have taken the lives of many fishermen who rove the dangerous waters. Together we begin to swim closer, our powerful tails almost blending in with the ocean surrounding us. My long, auburn hair whirls around me and my tail cuts through the water swiftly, my lithe body allowing me to glide through with ease. The sun warms the water to a comfortable temperature and I long to be above it so that I can feel the rays on my skin.

Everything around us is quiet, the ocean devoid of other life. The creatures of the sea tend to make themselves scarce when we hunt. They sense our hunger and although there are many forms of sea life we don't consume, they all prefer to disappear in case we change our minds. They have also learnt that we don't waste our food. There really isn't much point for creatures like sharks to hang around hoping for a bite. We aren't the sharing kind.

We reach the part of the cove where the sharp rocks begin to protrude from the water. This is where we will lead the boat for maximum damage. An unfortunate accident,

humans will say. They got too close to the rocks. Goddess, it feels like it's been a long time since we have fed. We are ravenous and I know that this hunt will be messy as we all seek our fill.

In the distance, the boat drives closer to where we lie in wait, resting just below the surface. Our heightened senses allow us to keep track of the boat. From the direction the boat is heading, it looks like they are on their way back to town. They are much closer to the cliffs than they expected; the strong tides and relentless waves that are typical for Witches Cove have pushed them off their course. And right into ours.

When they are close enough, I raise my head above the surface of the water. From this distance I can see the six humans on board. I gaze at them in curiosity and dread, knowing that they are taking their final breaths. Thoughts come unbidden about these men and I wonder about what kind of people they are. What are their lives like? Will there be anyone left behind to mourn their loss? I push the thoughts away and begin to sing. A melody pours out of me.

Beautiful.

Deadly.

In moments, my sisters join me, our voices intertwining together in perfect harmony. A song of desire, peace, and relaxation. Of hunger, seduction and destruction. Designed to entrance the humans we crave. It's our curse.

And theirs.

We watch with barely concealed eagerness as the boat comes to a halt. The wind whips my hair around me in a maelstrom of chaos, strong enough to lift the wet, heavy strands. The waves are large and violent. Sometimes we can bob with them and others we have to dive down and through. This cuts off our song briefly, but we have

positioned ourselves so that there is always someone singing at any given time.

We can't allow a big enough break in our song for a human to escape. Our song is our most deadly weapon, although our long claws and sharp, pointed teeth can cause a hell of a lot of damage on their own. The siren song helps us to ensnare our prey. We are a danger to humans only when we are in the water. So, we have to lure them here first. And trap them so they can't escape. Like a fly caught in a spider's silky web. No way out.

So, we sing.

The boat begins moving again, faster this time and moving directly towards the rocks. The humans on board are eerily silent. Under our spell. Unable to make any move to turn the boat around, to avoid the dangers lurking above and below the water. Although the sight of entranced humans, frozen and mentally absent is one that is all too familiar, I can't shake the feeling of unease. The growing feelings of sympathy and guilt continue to worm their way inside of me as I watch humans move rapidly towards their end.

But we continue to sing.

My sisters look on with excitement and anticipation as the boat hits the first large rock protruding from the ocean a couple of miles from shore.

And we sing.

Our haunting melody weaves a spell around the humans, so they are no longer conscious of anything but our song. It fills their ears, their minds, and their souls. Nothing exists to them other than the melody and the ones who sing it. It builds a madness; a desire so strong that they have no choice but to throw themselves into the ocean to find the source of their obsession.

The impact of the boat hitting rock is hard and catastrophic. A large section of the bottom of the boat is punctured by the jagged rocks and as the boat continues to move despite the damage a large hole forms. It starts to take on water rapidly but although their boat is sinking, the people on board are silent. We wait as the boat continues forward, pushed by the waves, hitting rock after rock. Crashes ring through the air of the boat being torn apart but there are no screams. If anyone were watching they would be confused to see the six humans standing aboard their sinking boat, their vacant eyes staring out to sea and no action to get themselves to safety. They wait as the destruction unfolds around them.

The first body hits the water, thrown overboard by the lurching impact. The excited squeals of my sisters echo around me as they race to consume the first man, their singing momentarily paused. They swim at a pace so fast that the man's body barely begins to sink before they are on him. I follow them, swimming slowly, waiting back. They tear at the man's clothing and claw at his skin, each eager to satisfy their hunger for flesh and desire for his soul. It's a frenzy. The man, brought back to consciousness and awareness when our bewitching song ceases for a moment, begins to thrash as he finds himself submerged, lungs filling with water. Bubbles leave his mouth as he silently screams, and his eyes, wide and panicked, take in my sisters who surround him. He realizes that he is trapped, and that death is imminent.

My best friend, Raidne, begins her song anew, and the man goes limp in her arms. Her caramel brown eyes, usually filled with warmth, are fixed on him with predatory focus. The slitted pupils of her eyes and the inhuman shade of her skin alerting him to the fact that he will not be rescued. He's in a nightmare. We're the nightmare.

Raidne is not usually the first to throw herself into a hunt, preferring to wait back. The fact that she is first today indicates that she's starving. I observe the glances shared between my sisters and their disgruntled expressions when Raidne claims the first human. Jealousy. It's an impossible emotion to prevent when every member of our group is a threat to our survival. The more sirens, the less likely we are to find

enough souls to go around.

As Raidne sings, the fear fades from the man's eyes and is replaced with longing. Her song changes from one meant to instill lust and desire to one that displays a dark hunger. In seconds, he is dead, Raidne having pulled his soul from his body and consumed it herself. Her song, the one we use to transfer a soul from the body of a human to our own, comes to a close.

Without his soul, he is an empty vessel, and we converge upon him in an instant. We are not wasteful, and it is not in our best interest to leave the body to wash up on shore. It leads to too many questions. Although we only need their souls to survive, their flesh is a delicacy—one that we are more than happy to indulge in.

The water turns red as we feast, the metallic tang of iron and copper filling my nose and my mouth as it disperses through the water. Our sharp teeth, perfectly designed to rip chunks of flesh off the bone, bite and tear at the lifeless body. We are vicious, violent, and messy as we eat. We pick the man clean in moments, each of us getting only a small taste. Raidne is the only one of us fully sated. We need more souls. When there is little left of the man's body, we move through the water for our next collection. The hunt isn't over yet.

More bodies are entering the water now; the boat is finally destroyed and succumbing to the damage. One by one, their bodies fall with a splash, slowly sinking before my sisters descend. Five steady heartbeats pulse through the water, the human brains completely unaware of the threat before them. I'm thrilled by the knowledge that this is enough to feed many of our small group but I'm also aware that the ones who miss out today will need to find more soon.

I resume my song, so the men remain calm as they begin to sink to the depths of the ocean. They stare lifelessly at us as we consume their souls and devour their bodies until all that is left is blood in the water and bones that will sink into the sand on the

sea floor below.



## Page 2

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### Chapter 2

We swim back to the part of the ocean that we call home, some of us full of the energy that we had recently been lacking and with our hunger fully sated. It's rare that so many of us were able to feed at once. Usually, we fight over a couple of souls and only get a little nibble as we share the bodies between us. The mood amongst those of us who have fed is lighter than it has been in some time, my sisters playing and joking together. Their skin is brighter since the hunt, whereas before, it was dull. Their hair is shiny and healthy in contrast to the thin strands they had before. It is good to see them full of life and virality. When months go past between hunts, everyone becomes more irritable and occasionally aggressive. There have been frequent disagreements and verbal sparring over the past weeks as hunger began to take over and push us all to the edge. Those who didn't feed today continue to display that hostility.

We have lived in the oceans of Witches Cove for decades. It's the perfect place to lure humans. However, over the years, our hunts have created suspicion and fear among humans. The death of fishermen became a legend, a superstition, a story whispered around campfires. Many refer to it as the witch's curse.

We never leave our victims alive to tell anyone about the existence of our species, so they never find out that sirens are the cause of accidents and disappearances. When we begin a hunt, we don't stop until the sound of human heartbeats has ceased. Until there's nothing left but scraps of clothing and bones. But of course, when boats were destroyed and sunk far more frequently than is typical, with their passengers nowhere to be found, people started to develop theories.

Some say the boats crashed due to the tumultuous waters and that after, blood thirsty sharks consumed those on board. Stupid, really, sharks don't enjoy the taste of humans anywhere near as much as humans think they do. Just a bite here and there and often by accident. They know to leave them for us.

Other humans believe that a witch has cursed the oceans. The town initially had another name but has been called Witches Cove for many years now. The witch exists—well, so I've been told. I've never seen her myself, but the witch is a legend amongst our kind. She is the creature we tell scary stories about. She isn't responsible for the missing humans but if the stories are true, is capable of causing her own chaos and destruction.

It has always been our mission to keep the existence of the supernatural a secret from humans. We are significantly outnumbered, and we have been taught the history of what mankind does to those who are different. That is why we have our one rule as a species: never let a human escape.

Dead men tell no stories.

The next day, my sisters are relaxing and lounging on the seafloor, enjoying the feeling of full stomachs and the energy that only accompanies a freshly consumed soul. I can't seem to relax, though. It's like an itch under my skin that I can't satisfy. I move from sister to sister, engaging in mindless conversations, not fully invested in what they are discussing. The thing is, the life of a siren is boring. We hunt, we relax, we sleep, and we eat. Occasionally, but not frequently enough, we explore the ocean and some of us go to land. It's when I'm on land that I see how different life can be and I'm envious of humans and the lives they lead.

Eventually, the boredom becomes more than I can bear, and I break off from my sisters to swim restlessly with no destination in mind. I've been doing this a lot recently. I'm becoming more and more isolated and I feel discontented and

unsatisfied.

After swimming mindlessly I find myself drawn to shore. Once again, the land reaches out to me and I can't resist its call.

I pull myself onto the beach within a secluded area surrounded by rocks. The familiar tingling sensation with a hint of pain works its way down my body. My claws retract and the webbing between my fingers disappears. The spikes lining my spine sink beneath my skin, disappearing out of sight. My skin pales and takes on a milky tone instead of my natural blue-gray pallor and lastly, my tail separates into two legs. In moments, I am no longer a creature of the ocean but one of land. I'm able to blend in and immerse myself in the human world, giving no indication of the monster within.

There's a catch to this ability though, we can become human for only twenty-four hours. Twenty-four hours to live a different life before I must return to the ocean. And the price I pay every time is the need for another soul faster than usual. The more time spent on land, the quicker my body deteriorates. The ability to shift appears to be tied to the human souls we consume, the time spent in a human body running our battery until it goes flat. The hunger is worth it though, the fatigue, the pain. All worth it so that I can be amongst the humans.

At the time of our creation, we were given the ability to shift our appearance to further our species. Sirens are only born female and cannot reproduce with each other. We require human males for this. The allowance of a human body for a brief time provides us the opportunity to use our song to seduce and fuck a human to get pregnant. We then return to the ocean to continue the gestation period at home before giving birth to our young. Coming to land isn't supposed to be a regular thing and it isn't supposed to be enjoyed, a tolerated necessity. But I feel very different.

I pull on some simple clothing that we keep hidden for times such as these and begin to walk on unsteady legs up the beach and into town. The sensations I experience on

land differ to what I am used to. I relish the feeling of the sun on my skin, the noises of people and cars busying the streets. And the smell. Oh, the smell of human food. It has me drooling in seconds. I love all the food I've had the opportunity to taste on land but I am partial to anything deep fried—especially cheeseburgers. Nothing compares to the smell and taste of human food. Not even human flesh. In fact, we can't smell much at all in the ocean, and noises are muted when we aren't hunting. The vast differences in my perceptions of the world make land even more enjoyable for me.

Sometimes, like today when I venture to land, I have no purpose in mind. I know we are supposed to be mating but because I haven't reached the age of fertility this isn't of great importance and therefore sex is purely for enjoyment. Most of the time I need to break up the monotony of my life in the ocean. I love to observe humans as they go about their lives and learn about their world. There are so many experiences here that we cannot have. I'm envious of their freedom. Their choices. I'm eager to learn what it is like to be a human and every time I come to land, I try to absorb as much information as possible.

I often fantasize about what my life would be like if I were a human. I've watched and interacted with humans often enough that I feel like I can pass as one quite easily, but I can never be one of them. I crave the total autonomy they seem to have in their lives. They can do anything they want. Be anything they want. Restrictions and a primal need for survival don't bind them. They have the luxury to live the way they want. But most of all it's the way that they love that captures my interest so thoroughly. They love each other so wholly and completely and not just in the familial way that I am the most familiar with. From my time spent watching humans, it seems like the bonds that they form with each other can be more intense and passionate than anything I've ever experienced. What would it be like to be loved in that way?

Finding a place to sit in the town's center, I watch people pass and contemplate what

my life would be like if I were like these people I watch and envy. What would I do? Where would I go? When I'm on land my emotions and thoughts are conflicted. I love the ocean, and I love my sisters—most of the time—but something is missing: a purpose. I want to have something to live for that's not just about survival. I want to experience the kind of love I've only ever seen from afar.

A movement catches my attention in my peripheral vision. A man watches me with interest. His blond hair is damp and salty from the ocean and his eyes are a deep brown. I smile.

Oh, he will do nicely.

I peer at him from under my eyelashes and push my long red hair behind my ear. I bite my lip and then slowly run my fingers down my neck and over the curves of the top of my breasts. He moves forward, quickly walking towards me.

Got you.

“Um hi... er how are you? I'm Sammy... er, Sam. I'm Sam. Can I buy you lunch?” he stammers nervously.

I smile and begin to hum. So softly that no one other than Sam can hear. The only people who can be affected by my song are the ones I directly target. If anyone were to get close to us right now, they might hear me but would not be entranced in the same way.

I hum the tune of a seductress, enthralling him and pulling him under my spell. In moments, his eyes glaze over. I could ask him to do anything, and he would obey. I could ask him to walk into oncoming traffic. Or I could ask him to cut off a limb. Fortunately for Sammy boy, that's not who I am, and all I want today is a good fuck. So, I reduce the intensity of my song, just enough to keep him interested but still

allow him his free will. If he wants to leave badly enough, he can. This helps me move things along quicker. After all, I only have twenty-four hours.

“Oh, that would be so amazing. I'm starving!” I respond with a flirtatious giggle. His eyes brighten with excitement and lust.

“What's your name beautiful?”

“Kairi,” I respond, giving him my real name. It's not like he will remember it after today, anyway.

He takes my hand and leads me to a nearby diner, talking about the surf this morning the whole way, having been out there early this morning. I knew he was a surfer boy.

“Do you like the ocean?” he enquires.

“You could say that. I practically live there,” I reply with a smirk.

After finding a place to sit in the busy diner and perusing the menu I excitedly order a burger and fries. Apart from the sex, food is the best part of being human.

We wait for our meals while Sam tells me more about himself. I'm not at all interested, but I'm great at playing pretend. As long as I laugh here and there, look at him from beneath my eyelashes, and make sure to touch him at every opportunity—just a brush of arms or legs—he will remain interested.

My disinterest is a way of protecting myself and my heart. I want to experience love more than I think I have ever wanted anything. When I first started coming to land, I sought out connections trying to fill the void that was starting to grow within me. I tried to get to know the men I inevitably went home with. I engaged fully in the conversations I had with others, desperate to learn anything and everything about

them. I love talking to people and am generally very sociable. However, conversing with humans on a more personal level caused me to return to the ocean feeling despondent and alone. A connection, however fleeting, reminds me of what I don't have, what I can't have. Human men are for breeding and nothing else. Any relationship with a human is forbidden and has the potential to be a threat to our species, and that is why I now just use humans for my satisfaction.

When our food arrives, I dive in, moaning at the deliciousness of the burger that coats my mouth. I glance up at Sam, having momentarily forgotten where I am and my purpose. "Sorry," I mumble. Feeling a little embarrassed by the way I shoveled the food into my face.

"Don't be sorry," he laughs, and his cheeks redden as I notice him reach down to adjust his cock in his pants. I pretend to act coy but am pleased that he seems to be an easy catch. If the simple act of moaning can get him hard, then this is not going to require much effort. After Sam pays for our meals—because I have no money—we walk around, enjoying the sunshine.

"So, do you think you might want to come back to my place for a bit?" he asks nervously. Goddess, he's sweet. A bit boring, but sweet.

"Where do you live, gorgeous?" I ask, grabbing hold of his hand.

"Not far from here," he responds in a voice filled with excitement. He was surprised that I agreed so readily. He has no idea that I have him wrapped around my little finger.

"Let's go," I say, with a touch more demand in my tone than I've used with him so far. Now that I've had one of the best meals of all time, I'm becoming impatient. I don't want to engage in small talk anymore, but I try to regain my sweet and flirty faux personality.

Some men are so easy to get into bed, no strings attached. But some try to at least pretend to be interested in something other than sex. They want to get to know me and build some emotional connection before “making love” or whatever they tell themselves it is. It’s kind, and I do admire the attempts, but it’s not what I’m interested in. I’m grateful that today I seemed to pick someone that is all too willing to get me home.

We walk side by side and hand in hand, the silence only broken by an occasional hum of my song to keep any second thoughts he may have at bay. Our songs play on emotions. We can enhance or remove them. In this case, I’m enhancing the desire that already exists and quieting any worries about coming on too strong.

We reach an apartment building, and my impatience makes me fidgety as we take the elevator to the third floor, and he leads me through the front door.

“Bedroom,” I order, and he immediately leads me there.

Fucking finally.

I push him onto the bed, straddling his waist as I work on undressing him. He laughs as I lift his shirt to expose his torso and can’t help but run my tongue over his abs, breathing in his scent as I do so.

Delicious. I wish I could take a bite.

“Woah, easy tiger. Someone is eager,” he says, grinning wide. I ignore him, focusing on getting him out of his clothes as quickly as possible.

I undo his pants, sliding them down his toned thighs along with his boxer briefs, and quickly rid myself of my clothes. Sam lays on the bed, hands under his head, gazing at me with lust-filled eyes as his cock stands, beautifully erect. Heat develops



between my legs, and I waste no time climbing back up to resituate myself on top of him. His breathing quickens with arousal as I wrap my hands around his length, giving it a couple of firm strokes. I rub a bead of precum into the head and as more forms, slicken his shaft with it.

“Fuuuck,” he moans, lifting his hips to thrust into my hand. “I want to feel you. I need to be inside you. You're so beautiful,” he rambles.

He reaches to his side and grabs a condom from his nightstand, quickly rolling it down his cock. When it's on, I position him to my entrance. I want hard and fast. I don't even take the time to make sure that I'm ready for him. I lower onto him, letting out a sigh as he enters me. There's a sharp bite of pain as he fills me that quickly morphs into a sensation of fullness that warms my core. I take what I want in these transactions, giving very little in return. I like to be in power.

I need to be .

I rock myself back and forth upon him, slowly at first. He grips my hips and his fingers dig in. He moves me in a way that speeds up the pace, thrusting into me from below as I chase my release. I rest one hand behind me to balance on his leg. The other hand grabs my breast, rolling the nipple between my fingers. I throw my head back with a groan and continue the pace he sets for us. The only sounds are our moans and skin slapping together in a primal way. I careen toward the chasm of my climax and use the fingers playing with my nipple to reach down and circle my clit instead. A few quick movements, just the way I like it, and like a wave, my orgasm crashes over me. As I'm coming down, Sammy lets out a low, long moan, shuddering under me as he fills the condom. There's no chance of pregnancy for me right now but that isn't going to stop me being careful. Sirens reach fertile age at around twenty-five, and I'm getting close, so I'm not going to risk someone taking me bare as I am not at all ready to have a child.

As our breaths slow, I roll onto my side next to him. He looks back at me in contentment. I let him wrap his arms around me, and for a single moment, I allow myself to enjoy the feeling of being close to someone. I begin to hum, and in seconds, he falls asleep. I dress myself and let myself out of his apartment, not even bothering to give ourselves time to clean up. He won't remember much other than a vague understanding that he brought someone home to sleep with. It's better this way.

With the day drawing to a close, my body starts to feel pulled back to the ocean and I have no choice but to comply. The call of the ocean is relentless, it won't give me up. I technically still have plenty of time left but already I feel the need to return. The prickling sensations that feel like tiny needles start at my feet and begin to work their way upward. I know that if I stay on land, this pain will intensify. There have been two occasions in the past where my curiosity got the better of me and I tested what would happen if I pushed the twenty-four-hour rule. When I was close to my time being up, I felt like I was dying. The pain was excruciating. I had no choice but to return, dragging and crawling my pain-ridden body to the shore until I could experience the instant relief of the cool water. Faced with the decision of returning to the ocean or death, it's an easy choice isn't it?

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 10:30 am*

### Chapter 3

B eep, beep, beep.

The blaring of my annoying as fuck alarm wakes me and tells me it's time to get up and start the process of getting ready for work. I groan and roll over, entwining myself around the warm body beside me. I'm too comfortable and far too tired still to want to leave this comfortable bed. My girlfriend, Kelly, wiggles in my arms, letting out a soft chuckle as I tighten them around her even more as she struggles.

"Babe, turn the bloody alarm off! You need to get up."

"No," I grumble, keeping my eyes closed and trying to drown out the screaming of the alarm to no avail. Kelly jabs me in the ribs with her elbow, not too hard but also with enough force behind it to make me roll away from her.

"Come on Eagan, you can do it," she encourages like she's my personal cheerleader, hyping me up for the day ahead.

I like my job. I do. I'm a graphic designer for a PR company run by my best friend, Tom. Yes, he's my boss, which can be kind of weird sometimes, but he is very laid back and never really has to play the 'boss' card with me. I work hard for him, and he pays me well and then we kick back and watch the football with a few beers after a long day. It's a pretty good arrangement. But sometimes there's days like today where I simply don't want to drag myself into the office.

Tom's company has grown considerably over the last couple of years, and we have

many more employees now than we started with. This is great for business but does make things a bit more difficult for me as I'm not really much of a people person. The social expectations of working in an open-plan office with a bunch of other people are exhausting. I particularly hate the small talk— "how are you? How was your weekend? Wow crazy weather we're having!" I'd much rather be in an office on my own or, better yet, work from home but Tom runs his company like a team and always encourages us to get to know each other and socialize. He doesn't mind my usual stand-offish demeanor, but he still expects me to at least try to play well with others. Even though I enjoy the design work that I do, I find the rest of the expectations of my job boring and tiresome, so sometimes it takes a herculean effort to make myself go—or a jab to the ribs.

After a quick shower to try to wake myself up I drag myself to the kitchen where Kelly has a coffee already waiting for me.

Kelly is gorgeous, has tan skin, dark curly hair and curves I love to sink my teeth into. We've been together for three years now and things are...okay. I wouldn't say that we have the perfect relationship, but we are used to each other, and we coexist in a comfortable bubble for the most part. I have no real desire to look for anything else. I'd say we are happy as a couple but occasionally I wonder whether I'm letting Kelly down. Perhaps she can do better than me and can find someone more compatible with the way she wants to live her life. I try to shove those thoughts and feelings down. If she were unhappy, she would say so right?

"Thanks Kel," I say as I take the steaming mug from her, sighing as the liquid warms my throat when I take a sip.

"Have you thought any more about what we talked about the other day?" she asks. My introverted personality is a point of contention. Kelly has always been social and outgoing. She has a large group of friends with whom she goes out regularly. She spends most weekends at parties or the bar. She always has plans which is the polar

opposite of my preferred way of spending my downtime.

My ideal weekend is staying at home and watching Netflix or doing some tasks around the home. If I go out it's to the gym or out fishing on my own. Every now and then I like going out for a drink with Tom. Occasionally, Kelly will convince me to spend some time with Tom and his wife, Lacey. I don't mind this so much because I feel comfortable around Tom, and I like Lacey. I have a couple of people in my life who I can be myself with but even then, I need time to myself after socializing to decompress and recharge my social battery.

Kelly, on the other hand, I don't think she has a social battery, at least not one that ever goes flat. No matter how tired she is from her day at work, she is never too tired to spend time with her girlfriends. She thrives on social interaction. I love that she has that quality, but god, it's exhausting.

She gave up trying to persuade me to go out with her and her friends not long after we started dating. I made it clear that those kinds of environments make me uncomfortable. While she doesn't ask me to come out anymore, she still regularly brings up how I need to expand my social circle. Make more friends. She thinks I'm lonely and that I need to be around people more often. I know that this is her way of showing she cares. She doesn't want me to be alone and she feels bad leaving me at home when she goes out on weekends. But I honestly don't care, and I wish she would understand that this will always be a way that we differ.

"I really think that you need to try and form friendships with some of the people at work. I know that they go out for drinks sometimes. Why don't you go along?" We have this conversation every few months. No matter how many times I tell her I'm just not interested in a friendship that extends beyond colleagues, she refuses to accept this as an answer. "We all need friends," she tells me, but when I mention that I am perfectly content with Tom and Lacey as friends, she says they aren't enough.

“Okay, Kel, I’ll keep an ear out for when the guys are doing something together next. I’ll go along with them for a change. How about that?” Even though the thought makes me feel uncomfortable, I want to make her happy, and maybe she’s right. Maybe I do need to try and get out of my little shell a bit more. She smiles at me, placated for now.

“Thanks, babe,” she replies as she presses her lips quickly to my cheek before leaving the kitchen to start getting herself ready for work.

I walk into the office with a minute to spare, my second cup of coffee in hand. I make the round of polite greetings before situating myself at my desk. I hear my colleagues chatting about their weekends, their partners, and their kids but don’t feel any urge to join in. They’ve learned by now that it’s not worth trying to include me in the conversations. I’m not rude, and I try my best to be kind, but I think it’s probably quite obvious that I’m scanning for an exit route whenever I’m dragged into a conversation.

Not long after I’ve sat down, Tom walks in. Tom always looks well put together at the office. He’s tall and keeps his brown hair short and neat. Dark-rimmed glasses circle his brown eyes, and his button-up shirts are always well-tailored. I put some effort into my appearance as well but usually opt for more casual attire. My work is mostly behind the scenes, and I don’t often work face-to-face with clients, so there is less importance in making a good impression. Tom, on the other hand, makes his position in the company clear with the way he dresses. He gives a greeting to the room before coming over to my desk.

“Hey man, how are you?”

“Ugh, okay for a Monday, I guess,” I respond. Tom laughs, knowing my particular frustration with Monday mornings.

“Lacey has been bugging me to get you and Kelly over again. Do you think I can tell her we will make it happen?” he asks. He knows that I don’t like my social calendar to be busy, so he always gives me choices about when and how we hang out.

I nod. “Yeah, for sure. We like spending time with you both. Just let me check Kelly’s schedule, and I’ll get back to you soon,” I say sincerely.

“Great,” he responds with a smile before leaving to go to his own office, separated from ours. He gets the privacy and quiet of his own office. Perks of being the boss, I guess. Lucky bastard.

In the break room at lunch, I overhear my colleague, Don, talking to a couple of other guys. Don’s about ten years older than me and has a wife and kids. He’s a decent guy but I haven’t made much of an effort to get to know him despite the fact he has worked here for at least a year now. “The fishing here is fantastic,” he says to one of the new guys. I think his name is Steve. Steve nods eagerly in agreement.

“So, you're going out this weekend?” Steve asks.

“Sure am. My fishing buddy Brenton and I go out quite often. It's a good break from the family chaos,” he laughs.

“Any chance I could join you? I love fishing but don't have my own boat.”

“Hell yeah! The more the merrier,” Don says cheerfully.

My mind returns to my conversation with Kelly, and this seems like a good opportunity to show her that I'm trying. I want to make an effort for her. I clear my throat, and their gazes turn to me.

“I’d love to come too if you'll have me?” Both Don and Steve try to mask their

surprise at my words. I don't blame them for being caught off guard. I don't think I've ever volunteered myself for anything and certainly nothing that involves socializing.

“Wow, really, you want to come fishing with us?” Don confirms, looking uncertain, like he may have misunderstood me.

I fidget with my hands and have trouble meeting their eyes. “Yeah, is that okay? I'd love to get out fishing, and it sounds like fun.” I try to put some excitement into my words, but they still look a bit suspicious.

Don shrugs and smiles at me, telling me that I'm more than welcome. “We're going to leave from the docks in Witches Cove. We will meet you there?” he checks.

I never go fishing in Witches Cove. I'm not superstitious but the stories about disappearances have always made me uneasy. I prefer to drive to the next town over. It feels safer.

Pushing these worries aside, I agree and leave the break room, looking forward to telling Kelly that I'm going fishing with my work colleagues. I hope I can manage to at least look like I'm having a good time while I'm out with them. And hopefully, my wariness about fishing in Witches Cove waters is nothing.



## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 10:30 am*

### Chapter 4

The day begins like any other. We set out to hunt, driven by the hunger creeping up on those who were unable to feed in the last collection. A storm rages ferociously above, churning up the ocean. The rain and thunder roar. Lightning causes blinding flashes of light that make me wince from the brightness, my eyes more familiar with the darkness of the depths of the ocean.

I swim upwards until my face breaches the surface. I brush the long strands of my hair out of my eyes and enjoy the feeling of rain on my skin. It's a sensation I don't get to experience as often as I would like. Although storms occur frequently in Witches Cove, we tend to avoid coming to the surface unless it's to hunt. The rain hits my face with a pounding ferocity, but it doesn't bother me. It is cooler than the ocean I swim in and lacks the salt I am accustomed to. It feels refreshing and I allow myself a small moment in time to feel the rhythm of the rain and inhale the scent of the storm.

Following the pattern of all our hunts my sisters start to sing. They are impatient today and don't use their song to influence humans to crash their boat, which is, more often than not, our preferred method of hunting. Fewer questions are asked when a boat is found in pieces. Humans are more likely to assume it was a horrific accident.

Today my sisters decide they don't want to wait. Increasing the intensity of their voices, they compel the humans aboard the boat to jump straight into the ocean. There's no playing today, no relishing the hunt. They want to eat, and they want to eat now. Despite my hunger and the energy drain from my time on land, I'm not at all eager to hunt.

The adrenaline of the hunt spurs them on, and they rip and tear at the humans as if it's been months since they have eaten. We all enjoy the taste of humans but many of my sisters are more bloodthirsty than me. I don't begrudge them their appetite or their food preferences, but I am much less likely than they are to fall into a mindless frenzy at the mere scent of human blood. I think that is simply because I spend more time on land than they do. I've come to learn that humans are much more than just food, and it makes me anxious if I think about it too much. So, I'll partake in these hunts and have a bite or two, but mostly, I try my best not to think about the lives these humans may have had before meeting their violent end.

Something feels different today. I can't quite put my finger on it, but I am even more disengaged from the hunt than usual. There's an overwhelming feeling of wrongness, and nausea churns my stomach along with an urge to escape.

I know the moment the bodies hit the water that there won't be enough to satisfy everyone today. Only four humans. Better than one or two, but still not enough. I wait and watch as my sisters feed. Many of us were able to consume a soul during the last hunt, so there isn't too much disappointment for those who miss out. But there are still some who push a bit more aggressively to get more than others.

I'm unable to collect a soul this time, and I don't bother to involve myself in the fight for the flesh. There simply isn't enough to go around. I have the tendency to put the others before myself and prefer to ensure they are satiated first. The continuing nausea is masking the hunger and causing me to feel even less interested in the hunt. I'll be fine without having a bite today. While fish are bland in comparison to humans, they are nutritious enough to get by on, and I think they will sit better in my stomach today anyway.

I'm more disappointed in the lack of souls. Not for the first time, I feel angry that we are only able to consume souls in our siren form. It would be so much easier if we were able to do so on land, as there are many humans to choose from. Instead, we

have to wait until they venture into our waters. Many years ago, sirens attempted to lure humans from land to the ocean; however, it started to raise suspicion as the sirens could not do this discreetly. So, while it makes far more sense for us to be able to hunt on land, we are unfortunately restricted to the ocean—just another evolutionary disadvantage.

I resign myself to feeling flat and fatigued until the next hunt. I know that going to land as often as I do increases my need for souls, and I am not able to last as long before consuming another one. I know this but I don't stop. I'd rather have low energy all the time than give up my time on land. It is too important to me.

In no time at all nothing is remaining of the humans. I send out the call to return home when I notice that they have finished feeding. Some of them grumble amongst each other, disappointed in the hunt and dissatisfied with the small bites. I rub a hand over my face and sigh to myself. I hate the feeling of responsibility I have for their hunger. It's not my fault and it's not in my power to change it but I don't like feeling helpless. There isn't a way to increase the availability of souls and protect our species at the same time. I know without a doubt that if humans discover us we will be hunted, and I just can't take that risk.

My family line has always been known to take on a leadership role in our siren group. Sirens do not have a particularly long lifespan due to our restrictions and the increasingly limited access to human souls. This is becoming problematic for our species, given the late age of fertility. Fewer sirens are being born, and our group is dwindling. I am not the oldest in our group, but when my mother passed away a year ago, my sisters looked to me. We do not require much governing as we exist quite harmoniously, but it can be helpful during hunts to ensure that someone takes charge, to ensure that souls and food are distributed evenly. Often this is me, but occasionally others take over and I don't mind. Many of my sisters don't need a soul yet; their last feed is able to sustain them for months still, but I have noticed an increase in their greed lately. Some of them crave the energy from a fresh soul and get frustrated with

our hunting limitations.

As I move to join them, a dull thud pulls my attention.

A heartbeat?

We missed one.

For a moment, I believe that I am mistaken. There is no way that my sisters would have ignored a perfectly good human. My focus narrows in, and I'm shocked to realize that someone has, in fact, escaped.

I follow the noise, driven by curiosity and an unexplained pull, wondering how a human managed to slip past us unnoticed. When we are driven by hunger, we become apex predators, all our senses heighten to ensure that no prey escapes. I'm surprised that one has done it. They were all so focused on trying to get as much food as possible that a human somehow escaped their clutches. This isn't good. We can't afford to get sloppy in our hunts. Our species is already perilously close to extinction, so we need to be careful. I can't let him get away.

From a safe distance, I watch as the man swims towards the shore. Well, tries to, at least. His breath comes in gasps as he fights to suck in the air but coughs when his mouth is filled with water instead. He's dragged under the waves and thrown around again and again but manages to pull himself to the surface each time. He battles against the ocean and the sky, both seeming determined to pull him to his death as he stubbornly continues to swim to the shore.

For the first time in my life, I consider letting a man escape unharmed. It seems wrong to kill him when he is fighting so hard to stay alive. I don't usually see them fight for their survival. They are enchanted so easily and are mostly completely unaware. There's also this unexplainable feeling that urges me to let him go. To turn

a blind eye to his survival and swim back to my sisters. I have no idea where this thought comes from, and I shake my head, willing it to disappear. No one can escape. It's not safe, and it's not what we do. So, I swim after him.

The man reaches the shore and crawls onto the sand, coughing and heaving with a force that racks his whole body. He immediately loses consciousness as he succumbs to his exhaustion. Curiosity overwhelms me and I'm overcome with the irresistible desire to see the face of the man who was able to escape our song. Without stopping to think about what I'm doing; I follow him onto the shore. The moment my full body is out of the water, my tail separates, and my body changes forms as I shift from siren to human.

I sit beside the man who is lying face down in the wet sand and I roll him onto his back. I'm not sure why I do this, but it feels like the right thing to do. I'm not sure why I'm here at all, actually. My eyes roam his waterlogged body and his handsome face. His thick, dark hair clings to his forehead and he has matching dark stubble, not long, but long enough to cover the bottom of his face. I can't explain why, but I am inexplicably drawn to him. He's attractive, that's for sure, but that's not all there is to him. I've never felt this way about a human, and I don't know how to process these feelings. Or what to do about this man who lays in front of me unconscious and vulnerable.

My instincts are at war. Part of me feels the pull to his soul, wanting to consume it and feel the flood of energy and vitality flowing through my veins. The other part wants to leave him here unhurt, soul intact. It almost seems like he deserves it for being able to get away, and the thought of ending his life makes me feel uneasy and, to be honest, physically ill. My predatory instincts win out when I remind myself of my duty to protect us all.

Bending more so that I am face to face with the man, I begin to sing. Even unconscious, his mind and soul register my voice, and his face softens in peace and

contentment.

The man suddenly jerks up, causing my song to falter and me to shuffle back from him, kicking the sand with my feet in surprise. He coughs, and water pours from his mouth as he empties his lungs. The coughing seems to last forever so I start humming a soothing tune to try and help calm and ease his distress. As his coughs ease, I resume my song at full strength, but I am unable to continue when he turns his wide, blue eyes to me. They flash with so many emotions that are too fast for me to decipher, and I am pulled into their sapphire depths. I look at this man and can't bring myself to consume his soul. He is no different from the hundreds of humans before him. But something about him calls to me, and it's not the power of his soul.

Before I can question myself anymore, I move slightly so that I'm touching the water as the waves push it up the shoreline. The tingling sensation of the transformation runs through my body and my legs fuse once more into my tail, and I decide to let him live. Despite my hunger and my predatory instincts, I decide to give in to this emotional pull that I don't understand. His eyes are still on me, but I am hopeful that the trauma from his ordeal will be enough to keep his memories suppressed. I move quickly until my body is fully submerged in the ocean once more. I chance one more look at the man lying on the beach and swim away as fast as possible, trying to rationalize what I have just done.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 10:30 am*

### Chapter 5

I cough and cough as my desperate lungs try to expel the water they've taken in instead of air. My body, soaked to the bone, shakes in the cold as the rain continues to pelt my skin. Thunder claps above me, and the beach is lit up with flashes of lightning, too close for comfort. When I am finally able to take a deep breath again without it leading to more hacking coughs, I take in my surroundings, and the memories return—well, some of them anyway.

I was out fishing with Don and Steve from work and Don's friend Brenton. I can't believe I let Kelly talk me into doing this. I had no interest in going fishing with them. The only reason I'm here at all is her constant fixation on me having more friends. I finally listened to her, and this is what I get, coughing up my lungs on a beach in a storm after almost drowning.

Until now, it hadn't been the worst day, but to be honest, they were a bit dull, and it confirmed my thoughts that I would much rather keep them as acquaintances. I generally prefer to go out on my own boat. I like the tranquility of the ocean and the peace I find when fishing alone. There are no expectations to maintain conversations in which I am not really interested. With other people around, peace and quiet is hard to find so I found myself getting frustrated and hoping for the day to end.

The sky darkened as the almost black clouds rolled in, indicating another one of Witches Cove's storms was upon us. They often come out of nowhere, these storms, with the sun shining one minute and relentless rain and wind surrounding us the next. This was one of those times. There was no evidence that a storm was heading our way. As soon as we noticed, Don turned the boat around to head back to the docks,

but the storm hit us quickly and without mercy.

After this memory, though, there is nothing. A blank spot in my memory. Did I lose consciousness? What else would explain the darkness that fills my mind when I try to search for the events that occurred after Don turned the boat around? The next memory I have is finding myself swimming for my life in the deadly ocean, each wave threatening to pull me under. I don't remember how I got there but I surmise that the boat crashed, not strong enough to endure the raging storm.

These thoughts and memories flash through my mind quickly and I am overcome with a mix of emotions. I am relieved that I somehow managed to escape death, but that feeling doesn't wash away the fear and confusion of how I ended up here in the first place. Where are the others? Are they okay?

Panic threatens to pull me under until a sense of calm and complete peace crashes over me. A haunting melody wraps itself around me like a warm embrace. It's unlike anything I've ever heard.

Ethereal.

Bewitching.

Everything feels perfect as my fear and worries slip away. Despite the circumstances I feel safer than I ever have in my life. I turn my head and suck in a short breath of air when I see a goddess sitting beside me. She must have been sent from the heavens; there is no other explanation. I've never seen someone so exquisite. Her long, auburn hair falls to her waist, the rain plastering it to her naked torso. Her skin, pale as moonlight, unblemished, and so perfect I wish to run my hands over every inch. Although partially covered by her hair, the curve of her breasts are visible, and the dusty rose of her nipples entrance me.



Without warning, the hypnotizing music ceases. A whine tears itself from my throat as I mourn the loss. The image of the beautiful woman begins to flicker. Her porcelain skin turns mottled and gray. Her plump, soft lips open to reveal rows of razor-sharp teeth. Her eyes, bright, forest green, become eerily inhuman when the round, midnight pupils turn to slits. They seem to stare into my very soul.

The moment the song stops, all my emotions crash over me once more, but the most pervasive is the sheer terror I feel as I face the monster that sits before me. Before I am able to release the scream building in my chest, she moves at a speed impossible for a human, into the ocean. Where there should be legs is now a tail. A long, silver, scaled tail. Small spikes protrude from her neck and down her spine. Then she disappears. I don't understand the weight in my stomach that reminds me of grief as I watch the woman vanish beneath the waves. It's like I have lost something or someone important and I don't know if it will ever return to me.

I stare into the endless expanse of ocean for a few moments longer until, overcome by fear and exhaustion, I pass out.

I hide behind a rock, peeking from around the side. I couldn't bring myself to leave without waiting to see what happens to this man. He lays unconscious on the beach, and I can't see any hint of movement. He was breathing when I left him, is he still? Or did the salt water of the ocean fill his lungs? Did the cold chill his body temperature past the point of no return?

I picture his ice blue eyes, the stubble on his chin that I would love to feel scratching against my skin. I worry about the well-being of this man that I've never met. An unnatural sense of longing stirs within me. But not the longing I associate with the need for a soul or hunger for food. A different, unfamiliar kind that drives me to want to make sure he is alive and safe.

What is wrong with me? I have never felt anything but mild sympathy for the humans

we hunt, never felt any strong desire to let them live. What makes this man different? Why can't I swim away, leaving all thoughts of him behind?

I watch for minutes, my anxiety for his safety continuing to build. I also can't fight the guilt that bubbles away within me. I have put my family at risk. I am supposed to be responsible for them and now I've broken our most important rule. And I have no idea what this is going to mean for us, what he might do.

Another man walks onto the beach, and I let out a sigh of relief when his dog bounds up to the unconscious man. The other man starts when he realizes what his dog is sniffing, running up, and checking his breathing. The man with the dog makes a phone call and it doesn't take long before other humans surround my man. He begins to cough again as he is wrapped in blankets. He is carried on a stretcher to a van and driven away. I am reassured that he is being cared for, but I can't push away the dread and confusion about what is going to happen next. I also miss him, but how can you miss something you don't and have never had?

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 10:30 am*

### Chapter 6

I open my eyes to blindingly bright lights, causing me to wince at the assault, and quickly close them again.

“Eagan? Eagan baby. You're awake. I was so worried.” I grunt in pain as a weight lands on my chest.

“What happened?” I rasp, my throat hoarse. My eyes open again, and after taking a moment to adjust to the light, I see Kelly sprawled atop me, her mane of brown curls in my face. The sterile environment surrounding me clues me into the fact that I am in a hospital, and I am struck with a sudden sense of fear. I lower my face to Kelly's hair, breathing in her familiar jasmine scent as it wraps around me and immediately has a calming effect.

“You're in the hospital. A man walking his dog found you unconscious on the beach. What do you remember, baby?” She asks, concern evident in her eyes.

I close mine and try to remember how I ended up here. I was out with Don on his boat. We fished for a while. I felt the warm sun on my face, the smell of the ocean, and the cool breeze that lessened the bite of the sun. It was a quiet day; we didn't catch many fish, but I had managed to reel in a couple of decent-sized ones. Mostly, I sat and listened to the banter of the others while trying not to be pulled into the conversations and instead enjoying a couple of beers.

I tense as my thoughts turn to how the sky abruptly turned dark, the wind building up in intensity. We could tell a nasty storm was on its way, and we didn't want to get

caught in it. Don decided to turn back and head to the docks to try and make it there before we were hit with the ferocity of the oncoming storm.

“There was a storm...” I start. Kelly nods.

“It was a really bad storm, Eagan. They found Don's boat,” she hesitates, “It was destroyed. It looked like the storm and rocks had torn it apart.”

“Don? The other guys?” I question, afraid of the answer.

Tears fall down Kelly's face and my heart sinks when I realize her answer before she says it.

“You were the only one they found,” she whispers. Sobs wrack her body, and all I can do is hold her as I try to comprehend that I am the only survivor. I didn't know it was possible, but I feel numb and heavy at the same time. It's as if I am witnessing this happen to someone else like I'm an observer of my own life. Don, Steve, Brenton. Three great men. Yes, I know we weren't, and wouldn't have ever been best friends, but this situation is horrific. I want to pinch myself to see if I can wake from this nightmare.

As Kelly's tears dry, I try to grab hold of something tangible, something real. I ask her if I was severely injured. I feel sore all over but I'm pretty sure I can move all my extremities. I wiggle my fingers and toes to check.

“You were really lucky, Eagan. A few cuts and bruises, a bump to the head. It's really a miracle that you aren't more injured. The doctors said that your body temperature was dangerously low, and you had swallowed a lot of water, but they were able to help. They said you'll be just fine. I don't know what I would have done if I had lost you.” She shudders.

“How long have I been here?”

“They found you on the beach at about three in the afternoon. We don’t know how long you were there before the man stumbled upon you. You’ve been in and out of consciousness for a few hours since they brought you here.” The view outside the window confirms that I have been here for a while. It's dark now and the storm has passed through. All that remains is the soft sound of rain as it falls onto the windowsill outside.

“I was so scared, Eagan. They told me you would be fine, but until you woke up and spoke to me, there was a part of me that wasn’t sure you would. I’m so sorry that you were out there because of me. I know you wouldn’t have gone on the fishing trip if I hadn’t pressured you to make more friends.” She squeezes her eyes shut and immediately begins to cry again. She's a crier, my Kelly. I decide to let her get it out of her system. I can tell how afraid she was for me. I honestly have no idea how I survived the storm when the others are nowhere to be found.

“Mr. Reynolds? Mr. Reynolds, can we speak to you?” The voice stirs me after I had fallen back asleep, too tired to deal with my current reality. With a groan, I pull myself up to a sitting position in the uncomfortable hospital bed. Kelly isn't here. She went to get something to eat. When we spoke before, she looked tired and stressed. I hope we will be able to go home soon.

Instead, two deputies from the sheriff's station stand at my door, their faces solemn.

“Sorry to wake you, Mr. Reynolds, but we need to ask you a few questions about what happened.” I nod in response.

“What do you remember?” I filled them in on the same information I relayed to Kelly. The fishing trip, the storm, Don turning the boat around.

“I can't remember anything about what happened after that. Everything between turning the boat around and waking up in the hospital is gone apart from a flash of a memory of swimming for my life.” The deputies look at each other.

“Have you been told that you are assumed to be the only survivor?” I nod gravely.

“More victims of the witch's curse,” the shorter of the two mutters. The other elbows him and rolls his eyes.

“So, you don't remember what happened to your friends?” He asks.

I shake my head. “I'm sorry, I really don't. The doctors said I bumped my head really good, so that may have messed with my memories a bit.” They glance at each other again.

“Do you think there was anything wrong with the boat? Anything that may have caused it to crash? Who was driving the boat?”

I shake my head. “No, not at all. Everything was perfectly fine until the storm. Don was driving. As far as I'm aware, he is a competent fisherman—goes out all the time.”

“Okay, thank you for your time. Please let us know if you remember anything else. As you are aware, we don't normally find anyone alive after these boating accidents. The waters are treacherous. It would probably be best if you fish somewhere else after this. Stay out of Witches Cove waters.”

I agree, and when they leave, I find myself in the room alone. My body feels sore and stiff. My head pounds. I'm looking forward to going home and falling into my bed. I know I won't be able to forget what happened. Every day at work, I will be faced with Don and Steve's absence and will remember. I'll remember that they are gone,

and I survived and I'm sure memories of the accident will haunt me. I'll let myself mourn their loss tomorrow. I don't have the energy to work through my emotions right now. The numbness continues to dull everything around me, and I hope to fall back to sleep.

The noise from the door makes me open my eyes. For a moment, the most beautiful woman stands before me. Her deep, sunset hair, long and flowing down her back, her skin pale and flecked with a scattering of freckles. Her sharp green eyes look so familiar and bring about an overwhelming sense of longing.

I blink, and the red-haired woman disappears, Kelly taking her place. I can't help the feeling of disappointment that crashes into me when I see her and not the beauty I thought was there. It takes everything in me not to call out to the vision— wait! Come back! But I reluctantly pull my attention back to Kelly.

"Doctors say you're all good to go," she says with a tired smile that I return.

Slowly and with care to avoid all my bumps and bruises, I slip off the scratchy hospital gown and into the sweats and t-shirt Kelly had brought to the hospital for me. I sign the discharge paperwork, and we are on our way home. Thank fuck. I need to sleep for a week. I rest my head against the cool window, the splattering of rain on the glass a calming rhythm. I softly begin to hum, a slow tune that creeps unbidden from somewhere in my memory.

"That's an interesting song. I don't recognize it," Kelly comments. I don't respond. The melody, while unrecognizable to me, is pushing at another memory buried deep beneath the surface. The more I try to grasp it, the more it trickles away, like sand through my fingers, and my frustration grows at the gaps in my memory.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 10:30 am*

### Chapter 7

I wander slowly into the kitchen the next morning. The sound of bacon and eggs sizzling and popping in the frying pan greets me, along with the smell that has my stomach growling. Kelly turns to look at me, and I am relieved to see the worry lines and exhaustion that were so prominent on her face yesterday are not as noticeable today. After arriving home last night, I fell face-first onto my bed, fully clothed, and I don't remember moving again until this morning. Despite the hours of sleep in the hospital and last night, it's going to take a while for me to recover fully from my near-death experience.

“Good morning, beautiful,” I murmur, placing a soft kiss on the top of her head.

She giggles, “Morning? It's practically lunchtime! Though we definitely needed the sleep.”

I sit at our kitchen island and let Kelly fuss around me, dishing up a huge plate of breakfast or lunch or whatever you want to call it. I tuck in immediately, having not eaten in about twenty-four hours now.

“I've already called Tom. You have been all over the news, so he knew about what happened to Don and Steve and how they found you. I requested that you have the week off work to recover, and he was totally okay with that.”

He would be. He'd give me pretty much anything if I asked. A week off after a boat crash and nearly drowning? A no-brainer. I'm surprised that he didn't just shut the office down for a week but I know that would cause even more of a headache in the



long run. I can't help the flicker of annoyance that she contacted Tom about my time off. I know she meant well, but I wish she had spoken to me about it first. This isn't the first time Kelly has decided for me without asking. It's something we have argued about on multiple occasions. She often feels that she knows what's best in any given situation and will act accordingly. It is expected that I'll go along with it even if I disagree.

I enjoy my work. As a graphic designer, I have a lot of flexibility in how I spend my time, and it keeps my mind busy. I like fixating on details, changing things here and there to ensure that they are perfect. Now I'm going to have to spend the week at home thinking about everything that has happened.

I eat the rest of my meal in silence, contemplating how I'm going to spend my day. My week. My way of coping with hard things is to throw myself into literally any task that keeps my body and mind busy— work, exercise, random DIY tasks around the home. One time, I even went through a baking phase because nothing else was working. And obviously, fishing. But that's not going to happen again for a while. You name it, and I've done it. Anything to avoid dealing with my issues. So, the prospect of not being busy this week is making me anxious.

I leave Kelly in the kitchen and go upstairs to take a shower. I adjust the water temperature until it is scorching hot and step in. I face away from the water and let it cascade down my back. Instead of relaxing me, though, it causes me to tense up. Memories assault me. Images of crashing waves, pulling me below the surface again and again. The loud cracks of thunder and flashes of lightning light up the dark sky. The stings of pain as my body tumbles in the surf, hitting rock after rock.

In the shower I gasp for breath, my throat closing up at the memories. My heart beats hard and fast, and my breathing becomes ragged as I frantically try to suck in the air around me. My pulse thuds loudly in my ears as my body tries to fight against the onslaught of memories. The sound of the water on the tiles reminds me of the rain

slapping against the ocean. I feel like I'm back in the water again, like I'm drowning. My lungs are filling with water. I can't breathe .

With my back to the wall, I slide down to the floor. Resting my elbows on my knees, I hold my head. I thread my fingers through my hair, gripping hard and pulling on the strands, using the pain to ground me and remind me of where I am. I'm at home. I'm safe.

I try to remember the breathing exercises Kelly talks about, something she has read in a self-help book and uses when she is stressed.

Breathe in. One, two, three, four.

Breathe out. One, two, three, four.

Breathe in. One, two, three, four.

I repeat this over and over until my heart slows and my breaths become steady. The visions of the ocean and the storm fade and I am once again aware of my surroundings. I stay under the stream for a few more minutes, and while my eyes are closed, my mind is filled with the red-haired goddess I saw in the hospital. I don't think I have ever seen her before yesterday, so I don't know why her image keeps popping into my mind. And why the image elicits such a sense of calm within me. Who is she?

"Will you stop hovering," I growl at Kelly after she offers me something to eat for what feels like the tenth time in as many minutes. I'm on edge and becoming increasingly more snappy towards her and she won't leave me alone. It's like if she loses sight of me for more than a few minutes then I will fade out of existence.

She huffs at me in annoyance. "I'm just trying to make sure you have everything you

need. You need to rest and I'm just trying to help." I get it, but I don't want or need her help right now. "I still feel so guilty that you were out there that day partially because of me," she says and her mouth quivers as she tries to hold back, what I assume to be another round of tears. This isn't a new conversation. I have been spending a lot of time reassuring her that I'm okay and that I don't blame her for the accident, that it wasn't her fault. It was, but I'm not going to hold that against her. No one could have predicted this.

I woke up this morning with an unfamiliar melody replaying in my head. It's an eerie yet beautiful tune that I can honestly not remember hearing before. I'm frustrated that I still have large memory gaps, and I feel guilty that I can't offer any closure to the families of Don, Steve, and Brenton. They deserve to know what happened, but every time I try to bring forth the memories, my heart rate immediately spikes, and I gasp for breath. I feel like I'm transported back in time and it takes me a while to calm myself back down again.

All my twisted-up emotions mean that I don't have much patience with Kelly's hovering. I just want to be left alone. I force myself to sit with her and watch movies and try to concentrate on her while she tucks herself into my side on the sofa. My mind keeps drifting though, to the scarlet-haired woman and the song.

The next three days pass similarly, torturously, just as I suspected they would. I'm irritable and I can't get this fucking song out of my head! Kelly's constant presence is driving me crazy. I love her, I truly do, but I feel like our relationship has only worked as well as it has for the last three years because we spend a good amount of time apart as well as together. We both work full-time jobs in separate locations and have different groups of friends. I like being alone, the opportunity to do whatever I feel like without judgment, and the silence that comes with not being around others. Kelly talks. A lot. And the less I talk, the more she does so to fill the space. Her extroverted manner and sociability are wonderful qualities that she possesses, but not for the first time I consider that perhaps we just aren't that compatible.

I'm watching television when the news broadcasts footage from Don, Steve, and Brenton's funeral yesterday. The funeral was as terrible as you would expect. There were no bodies to bury and still no closure for the families. The town came together to organize a joint memorial service for the three men. I didn't want to go, but Kelly pushed me until I relented. Of course, I wanted to pay my respect, but I didn't feel like I could face everyone.

I am overcome with guilt and the reminder of how goddamn awful I felt standing near their families. Their grief was tearing them apart. Wives who have lost their husbands and children who have lost fathers. And then there was me, the lucky son of a bitch who, against all odds, managed to survive. They didn't seem to resent me, genuinely appearing happy for my safety. But I think I hold enough guilt and resentment for all of us.

My eyes burn as I try to hold back the tears threatening to fall. Seeing the footage has brought up all the emotions I had been suppressing the last few days. I feel another panic attack coming on. They have been occurring sporadically all week. Sometimes I can work through it well enough but sometimes nothing helps.

"Dianna really wants to catch up with us. Do you remember Dianna? She was horrified to hear about the accident and would love to see you. Oh, and she's having all those issues with her husband. Do you remember me telling you about Jason?"

Oblivious to the war raging within me, Kelly continues to go on and on. She won't stop talking, and I just. Don't. Care. I'm trying to tune out her voice while I wrestle with my growing panic. Is that selfish of me? Possibly? But despite not engaging in the conversation at all, Kelly continues. I feel my anxiety start to morph into rage, and I need her to be quiet.

"Would you just shut up already," I say, much louder than I mean to. Kelly stops mid-sentence and stares at me as tears form in her watery eyes. Oh fuck.

“Wh...what?” She stammers.

“I need you to stop talking. I can’t handle it. Just go back to work and leave me alone,” I say, unable to stop the words coming out of my mouth but simultaneously knowing the hurt they are causing.

Without a word, Kelly walks out of the room, packs a bag, and leaves the apartment. She doesn’t say anything, I don’t say anything, and the only sounds are her sobs that she is trying to muffle. She does exactly what I asked and leaves me alone. And now I feel like a total asshole. And the song, that bloody song, continues to fill my mind, drowning out everything else.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 10:30 am*

### Chapter 8

It's been a couple of weeks since the boat crash and life has more or less returned to normal. After the week from hell, when I pissed Kelly off so much that she had to stay with her mother for a couple of nights, I came back to work. I was greeted with a lot of pitying looks and pats on the shoulder, along with a "glad you're alive." Don and Steve's desks were cleared, but staff have taken to placing bouquets of flowers on top of them. There are also photos, and the desks have turned into somewhat of a memorial.

While people generally thought I was okay, they loved Don and Steve. The loss is felt around the office every day and it's not uncommon for someone to randomly start crying at some point in the day while standing at Don or Steve's desk.

Some of my colleagues tried asking me about the crash when I first returned to the office, but they promptly stopped when I gave a gruff response that I don't remember, or occasionally, no response at all. Since then, I'd been given a wide berth in the office. I was not always the most social in our team but even less so now. I have preferred to keep my head down, and my mind focused on work.

Not only are our staff more emotional than normal but productivity has significantly dropped. Obviously, we are two staff members down, and I know Tom is beginning recruitment to fill their positions, but that doesn't change the fact that now, we are behind on everything. I'm sympathetic, and don't get me wrong, the loss of Don and Steve affects me, but I also just want to do my job and get home.

It has become clear to me over these past weeks that my tolerance for people has

diminished. I have been easily irritated, short-tempered, and snappy for no discernible reason, not just to Kelly but to everyone. I even yelled at the old lady who rammed my ankles with her shopping cart while getting groceries yesterday. It fucking hurt like a bitch, but the poor woman didn't deserve my outburst. I can tell that I'm starting to shit everyone off, but I can't seem to stop. The words seem to spill from my lips before I'm even aware of it. This isn't like me. I can appear disinterested and stand-offish, but I'm generally not an asshole especially not to little old ladies.

In addition to me flying off the handle every time I'm even remotely inconvenienced, there have been a few things I've been struggling with. The first is the song that won't leave me alone. Sometimes it plays in the background, and I am able to go about my day in a relatively normal way. And there are times when it feels like an itch under my skin that I can't relieve. An itch that gradually takes more and more of my focus until it is all I can think about. The more I think about it, the worse it becomes. Where all I want to do is scratch and make the damn itch disappear, but no matter how hard I try, it keeps crawling beneath my skin. And it's not just the song. It's the emotions that come with it. Lust and peace but also confusion and fear. I know that my productivity at work has dropped significantly. I'm just waiting to be called in to meet Tom about it. There's only so much he can let me get away with. Yesterday, I only realized when everyone started leaving for the day that I had been staring at my computer screen without doing a single thing for hours.

And then there's the woman. Her hair, a deep red that flows down to her waist, eyes that penetrate my very soul. Everywhere I look, she is there, but not really. I see the brightness of her hair on the street, but when I look closer, there is no one there that resembles her appearance. I see her out of the corner of my eye but when I face her, she's gone. She's in my dreams, mostly just sitting beside me.

Sometimes, and I would never admit this aloud, I see her when Kelly and I are fucking. A couple of times I have looked down at Kelly, seeing the other woman instead of her. In the moment, it heightens the sensations and makes everything feel

better. But after, once the high of my orgasm has faded, I feel sick and ashamed of myself. I try to tell myself that I have no control. It's not like I'm purposely imagining another woman and fantasizing about them. This is completely involuntary. Although, when I fuck my fist in desperation, so turned on by the song and the image— that is intentional. Many times, over the past weeks I've wondered if the accident has made me crazy.

My shoulders tense as I feel someone approaching my desk. I look up to find Tom. He hasn't been coming out into the main office very often lately. I think he's been struggling to try to keep up staff morale when everyone is sad and overworked. I sigh internally, knowing that he's finally here to talk to me about my work.

“Hey, Eagan, can we chat in my office for a minute?”

“Okay,” I mumble, following him to his office, stomach filling with dread.

Tom sits in his large office chair behind his desk, gesturing for me to sit in the chair on the opposite side. I oblige, steeling myself for whatever this talk is going to be about.

“I wanted to check in with you about how things have been since you've come back. I know that what you went through was traumatic. Are you getting any professional help? Lacey has a friend from college who is a psychologist. If you would like, I can get her number for you. It might really help to talk to someone.”

I shudder. The last thing I want to be doing right now is thinking more about the accident. It's living in my head enough as it is.

“Thanks for your concern but I really am doing fine.” Tom furrows his brow, and I can tell he doesn't believe me.



“Okay, I'm going to be straight with you, as a friend and not as a boss. You've been an asshole since you came back. People don't want to be around you. Actually, they're avoiding you. Now I know you went through some shit and have all sorts of survivor's guilt, but you can't keep taking your emotions out on everyone else.”

I look at my hands resting in my lap in shame. I know I've been even less personable than usual and that I've been acting differently around people I would get along okay with.

“The way you behaved in the meeting on Wednesday was completely inappropriate and unprofessional. Josh did not deserve to be spoken to that way. We have all tried to be understanding, and you have been getting away with a lot, given the circumstances. But this can't continue.” I cringe at the memory of the meeting when I interrupted Josh during a presentation and told him in not-so-polite terms that his idea was shit. I'm lucky I wasn't fired on the spot.

“I understand,” I say, pushing back my chair as I stand. “I'll get my shit sorted out, don't worry about me.”

Tom gives me a small smile. “Let me know if you want Lacey's friend's number. I really think it would help.” I walk out of his office without a reply, certain I can find a way to cope with all of this on my own.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 10:30 am*

### Chapter 9

“ K airi? Hello, Kairi? Have you heard anything I have said over the past two minutes?” Raidne’s voice breaks the spell I was under; a memory having briefly taken hold. She waves a webbed hand in front of my face, trying to regain my attention.

“What is going on with you lately?” She asks. “You've barely been around. All you are doing is pining over the humans. I know you like to spend time on land, but you seem to be there far more often than is healthy. Your body isn’t coping well with the constant shifts. You're exhausted.”

She’s right. It takes all my energy lately to swim. I spend a lot of time resting on the ocean floor, too tired to do much else. But I can't seem to keep myself away from the land. Each shift I make to my human form is getting harder and harder, my energy depleting more with every passing day. I know I’m going too often, but I’m unable to resist it.

I have to see him. The man with the raven hair and sapphire blue eyes. The man I couldn't kill. I feel a pull towards him like the way the moon pulls the tide. I've never felt like this before. I haven't told Raidne or the others that I let him live that day, partly due to shame and partly because I know I won't know how to answer the inevitable questions that follow.

Why did you let him live?

Did he see you?

Did you sing to him?

What will we do if he tells anyone?

I don't know why I couldn't kill him. I was hungry. His soul was right there for the taking. I just couldn't. For the first time, I felt a deep, all-encompassing hatred for what I am and what my instincts were pushing me to do.

I think he saw a glimpse of me. Just a few moments.

I sang to him. I sang while he was unconscious, and I sang as his deep blue eyes met mine.

As to the last question, I have no idea. Will he remember? Will he realize what I am? Would he tell anyone? These are the questions that keep me awake and push me to continue going to land. I need to know what this pull is and if my family is in danger. Because if he has told anyone what happened that day, then we are all in trouble, and it is my job to fix it.

“I can handle it, Raidne. You don't need to worry about me. I'm fine,” I tell her, trying to exude more confidence than I feel and plastering a smile on my face.

“Hmm,” she says, and I know she doesn't believe me. Raidne knows me better than I know myself and she usually calls me on my bullshit. The fact that she doesn't today makes me think that she really is concerned about me. “I miss you,” she whispers and guilt churns in my gut. We've never kept secrets from each other, and it feels morally wrong to do so now. I know it hurts her to see me wasting away with no understanding of why. All I want to do is tell her everything, pour out my secret, and beg her to help—but the urge to protect her is stronger. I don't want her involved in this situation until I know more about it. I tell myself I'll let her know what's going on once I have more information myself.

I wrap her in my arms, holding her in a brief hug, and promise her that I'll be around more despite not knowing if I'm going to be able to keep that promise. She huffs and pushes me away playfully, "You better, Kai, because the others are driving me crazy, and I'm having to break up arguments all the time, and you know how much I hate having to do that." I laugh, and she seems placated, at least for now.

I wait a little while, stewing in my thoughts, until I'm mostly certain that Raidne has had enough time to find something else to occupy herself with. I then slip away, swimming in the direction of my cove, the small stretch of beach littered with large rocks that provide shelter and a place to shift in secret. I'm desperate to lay eyes on the man who is the center of all my thoughts. Hurrying to shift and dress despite my waning energy, it's not long before I'm walking into town. Pain lingers after I've taken my human form. A tingling sensation with small zaps of pain normally accompanies the shift. Nothing too excruciating, and it's over after my legs have fully formed. This time, however, that pain doesn't subside. The zaps continue as I walk on shaky legs, and I have an ache in my bones that I have never experienced. I don't know how much longer I have until I'll be forced to consume another soul. The thought makes me sick.

I've been coming into town every few days for a few weeks now and I'm yet to come across the man. Each time, I return to the ocean more disheartened and worried that I'll never find him. That I'll never see him again. The yearning and emptiness I feel in my chest sometimes becomes more than I can bear.

I know nothing about the man. Witches Cove is a relatively small town, but maybe he doesn't live here. Maybe he was visiting friends. Maybe he was here on vacation and lives across the country. I have no fucking clue! I have no information to go on and it's getting harder and harder to avoid the hopelessness threatening to pull me under.

I spend the early hours of the morning wandering aimlessly around the town, trying to remain mostly inconspicuous. Hanging around too much has caused me problems

in the past. There is a certain familiarity that comes with small towns. Everyone knows everyone. So, I stand out. Normally, I'm able to brush people off by telling them I'm just passing through or visiting someone. If anyone questions me too much, I'll use my song to make them forget. I wouldn't say I like doing this too much though. Despite it being my nature, I often feel guilty using my song too often, and I certainly don't enjoy using it to bend free will. This is why I usually select willing men for my conquests. My song is another reminder that I am not human. That no matter how hard I try, I am different and will never be one of them.

Raised voices grab my attention, and I turn to see where they are coming from. My heart stutters, and I suck in a gasp of air. It's him. Oh, my goddess, it's really him. My heart beats a frantic rhythm, my hands shake, and I feel like my stomach is going to fall out my ass. I've never been so nervous in all my life. The man walks next to a woman quite a bit shorter than him. She's brunette, with curly hair, and curvy hips. She's beautiful and I'm jealous as hell. I can't quite make out what they are saying, but they are arguing about something.

They walk into a nearby coffee shop, and I follow. I'm scared that he will see me, but fortunately, it's getting close to the lunch rush, so it's busy, which will hopefully aid me in remaining unseen. The man and woman sit at a table in the corner, and I purposely situate myself within hearing distance but behind him. I hope he doesn't turn around. I don't know what he remembers about that day.

"You can't keep missing days of work, Eagan," the woman exclaims. "You're lucky Tom is a friend. If you were anyone else, he would be firing your ass. You need this job. We need this job. I know you've got some of your dad's money tucked away for a rainy day, but I also know that you love your job. In the years I've known you, you have barely missed a day of work, but lately, you've been missing more days than you've been going. And to top it all off you haven't even been calling to let Tom know. This isn't you, baby."

“I’ve told you; I don’t mean to miss work. I just...” He trails off, his fingers pulling strands of his hair in apparent agitation. “I just need to find out what’s going on. I need to know what happened to the boat and my friends.”

“It was an accident. A vicious storm. There aren’t any answers to find,” she replies in a softer voice.

My eavesdropping is interrupted by a waitress arriving to take my order, who is none too pleased that all I ask for is water. With a huff and a glare, she saunters off, leaving me to my casual stalking. My desire to know more outweighs the discomfort of listening in on a very private and serious conversation.

The two are sitting in silence now. Even from tables away, I can feel the tension radiating from them. A waitress brings them both a coffee in a takeaway cup. I guess they aren’t planning to stay. Probably a good thing because they don’t seem to be happy with each other.

“I’m worried about you, Eagan,” the woman says, breaking the silence. “You haven’t been yourself lately. You’re distracted, angry, and you’ve been mean. You’re pulling away from me, and I don’t know how I can help you. You’ve never been cruel to me like this. I understand that the accident was traumatic, and I know you have anxiety as a result. Even if you refuse to admit it,” she admonishes, holding a hand up when he tries to interject. “But having problems with your mental health, no matter how valid, does not give you the right to treat me like crap. I’m going to wander around the shops for a little while. Alone. I’ll catch a rideshare or walk home when I’m ready and meet you there.”

She picks up her coffee and leaves. The man I now know to be Eagan is left alone, looking at the door she walked through. I can’t see his face to know how he is feeling about their conversation. Moments later, he too, rises and leaves. I scramble to my feet and follow him out. I don’t know why I am so paranoid about him seeing me. He

shouldn't remember me, as our song normally creates amnesia. But I am worried that my presence may bring back his memories and then the subsequent questions. Unfortunately, in the seconds it takes me to maneuver myself out of the coffee shop, I manage to lose him.

"Fuck," I mutter to myself.

But I saw him.

I know his name.

Eagan.

I'm filled with yearning for a man I don't know, and it makes absolutely zero sense. I have never heard of a siren becoming obsessed with a human. It's always the other way around. We draw them in, use them for whatever we need, their body, their flesh, their soul, and then discard what's left. But what I feel seems an awful lot like obsession. It rages like an inferno, burning away all rational thought. All that remains is his deep blue eyes. And now his name.

Eagan.

Eagan.

### Chapter 10

After my disastrous coffee date with Kelly, I walk around aimlessly. I feel lost. I should go home, but the idea of returning to the silence where the only thing I can hear is the song in my head makes me nauseous. When I'm amongst people, the noise of the busy streets, I can almost tune out the repetitive melody. Not completely. But almost. I'm so fucking tired. I haven't slept properly in weeks, but it's getting worse. Kelly was right. I have been snapping at her about every little thing and often being unnecessarily mean. I don't have a good explanation for why I've been like this lately. The obvious answer would be that I'm tired and possibly mentally unwell, but that doesn't feel like all that's going on with me.

The mood swings are uncontrollable—one minute, I'm finding it impossible to find a single shred of energy to care about anything and the next, I'm flying into a rage. I've never seen Kelly look at me the way she has been lately—like she is afraid of me. When I'm capable of emotions, the guilt is crushing, but then that fades away, too.

I've become obsessed with finding out what happened that day. Some of my memories are returning, and I can't help but think that the tune I hear is somehow related to what led to the disappearance of my friends. I remember the lead-up to the storm, what I told Kelly and the police officers who questioned me. But now I'm also starting to remember that we jumped overboard. Why would we do that? That's the part I can't figure out. The boat was still intact when we jumped so why would we leave a functioning boat? Once we were in the water, it's possible that the others succumbed to the harsh conditions. Perhaps the tides, the crashing waves, and the relentless pull to the bottom of the ocean bested them. It's realistic to think that the chances of them surviving in the ocean in a raging, violent storm were slim.



My memories bring some answers but so many more questions. I can rationalize how they may have died or disappeared but still don't know how we ended up in the water. I'm also not sure how I ended up on the beach but again, logically, I'm aware that I must have just been very lucky. I'm a reasonably strong swimmer. Maybe my survival instincts kicked in and I was able to swim to safety, although not completely unscathed. Through all the memories, one thing remains constant. And that's the god damned song.

I'm surprised to find myself on the beach, having walked there while completely distracted by my musings. I haven't been near the ocean since the accident, but it's been calling to me. I dream of the ocean every night, often waking up in a panicked sweat, taking minutes to calm myself back down. And now, while moving in autopilot I ended up here, faced with the very thing I'm now most afraid of.

The sound of waves crashing onto the shore fills my ears and I breathe in the salty smell of the sea. Goosebumps pebble my skin despite the warmth of the sun, and the sound of blood rushes in my ears. My chest tightens with a feeling that has become all too familiar when faced with the triggers of the storm and the boat. My heart beats a pounding rhythm, my breaths become quick and shallow. I can't get enough air into my lungs.

I lower myself to the sand and try to focus on the things that I can see around me. I observe the group of teenagers playing beach volleyball, the children building sandcastles, and the women resting under umbrellas. I try to focus on these things as well as the feel of sand in my fingers and the sun on my skin.

I attempt to keep my attention on these things, but the sound of the song in my mind reaches a crescendo. It's all I can hear. My body is paralyzed, and I can no longer feel the sensations I was using to ground me. And then the people on the beach change. Everything around me fades until all I see is her. The goddess that haunts my fucking life.

She sits beside me, singing, hypnotizing me with her enchanting melody. I long to reach out to her. To run my fingers over her soft skin, through her silky hair. To feel my hands roam her body and to hear her soft moans as I touch her. My heart slows to a steady beat, and the weight on my chest becomes lighter. I feel relaxed. Content. At peace. But then the vision shifts. Like a flickering television screen, the woman changes.

Flick . Her skin turns a blue gray.

Flick . Her pupils turn to slits.

Flick. Her nails grow to claws, and webbing forms between her fingers.

Flick. Her legs turn into a tail.

And then the two images converge until I am no longer sure what it is real. One moment I see the woman, the temptress. The next, the monster. The next, a combination of the two. The anxiety that had briefly abated roars to life once more and it takes all my restraint not to scream. I screw my eyes shut tightly to try and banish the visions. Hallucinations? Not for the first time I wonder if this is what it feels like to go crazy. Maybe Tom was right. Perhaps it could help to talk to someone about this.

Maybe everything that is going on with me is a typical symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder. That could be it, right? You hear stories about people going a bit crazy after a trauma so maybe that's what it is. I'm pretty sure you can get specific drugs for that. Yeah. That's what I need. Some trauma drugs to make it go away. I promise myself that I will schedule an appointment with my doctor tomorrow.

With this decision made, I'm able to pull myself together and refocus on reality. I stand up, brush off the sand that has collected on my clothes, and head back to my

car. The sun is beginning its descent, and I'm shocked by how much time has passed. I've been at the beach all afternoon, but it feels like only minutes. I'm going to be in so much trouble when I get home. If I'm being honest with myself, I dread coming home lately. Kelly always wants to tell me that I'm doing something wrong. I'm not talking to her enough. I'm being lazy and spending too much time watching TV. I'm too dismissive of her feelings. I swear I don't mean to be like this, but I can't bring myself to care about anything at the moment. Along with making the doctor's appointment, I vow to try and do better by Kelly. She doesn't deserve this kind of treatment.

Two weeks after the day at the beach, I haven't called my doctor. I haven't asked Tom for his therapist friend's number, and I certainly have not been treating Kelly any better. Every now and then I tell myself I need to get help. I need to be better. But then the thoughts fade almost as quickly as they appear. I'm conscious of the fact that my life's falling apart around me, but I can't bring myself to do something about it. I don't feel much of anything towards the people and things in my life. My singular focus is on the song and the woman. The woman and the song.

Every day I find myself down at the beach. I never remember getting there and I'm rarely cognizant of the time passing. I haven't even been attempting to go to work each morning. Kelly came home yesterday screaming at me because Tom called her to say he had to let me go. I recall the way I shrugged at this news in apathy causing Kelly to burst into hysterical sobs. Once again, she tried to talk to me about my mental health. She cried as she begged me to get help. To see a doctor, a therapist, anyone. I didn't respond. I couldn't. What would I even say?

She didn't come home last night.

I'm living in a perpetual state of hyper fixation and anxiety. When I'm not at the beach, I'm researching. I've come to the realization that what I'm experiencing isn't just a typical response to trauma. I've spent hours looking into PTSD symptoms,

ocean attacks and boating accidents. Nothing has explained what happened to me. Somewhere around the time that I was deep in my exploration of accidents, I came across a mention of sirens. And then that led me down the rabbit hole of mythical creatures. I'm convinced there's something supernatural or magical at play here. I've discovered that in different legends and lore, both mermaids and sirens seem to sing and lure fishermen. I'm still trying to determine the difference between the two, but I think I'm on to something. There are pictures, but none of them quite look like the vision of the creature that comes to me in my dreams —my nightmares. But this is the most logical explanation.

When I'm hyper focused on my research, I am able to forget about the existence of the real world but there are times when anxiety breaks through. It overwhelms me when I'm trying to fall asleep each night, visions of the storm, the smells of the ocean and the rain, the feeling of hopelessness as the raging sea throws me around. When these memories assault me, it becomes hard to breathe. I gasp for air like I'm drowning until the soothing music that has attached itself to my soul lulls me into an exhausted slumber once more.

Today, I'm taking my boat out. I need to find this woman. This siren. Because I'm sure that this is what she is and that she is what's causing all my problems. I'm going to search the waters around Witches Cove every day until I find her.

### Chapter 11

In the past two weeks I have spent as much time as possible on land. Looking for him. For Eagan. Raidne is even more worried about me now. And to tell you the truth, I'm worried about me. He's become an obsession. He is all that I think about. I don't know what to do about this fixation. What kind of future could there be for a human and a siren?

My sisters have noticed the changes in me. I'm not eager for hunts like I used to be. I have resigned myself to the fact that I will have to take a soul again at some point. I have no choice in that. I need souls to survive. But I won't consume their bodies anymore. It now feels repulsive. The first time I tried to partake after my encounter with Eagan, I was violently ill after one bite. I wretched and wretched, having to swim away from the frenzy into water untainted by the stench of human blood. I've told myself that now, I'll only hunt when I am in desperate need of a soul. The rest of the time, I'll stay away. For the first time in my life, I find myself truly hating what we are.

What I am.

What I do.

The guilt that started as a niggling discomfort now causes a tightness in my chest and my stomach to roll with nausea. It's impossible to ignore the hushed voices and wary glances of my sisters as they question what is wrong with me. They are avoiding me, giving me a wide berth as if what I have is contagious. Sometimes I feel hurt by the cold shoulders, but most of all, I feel relief at not having to fake feeling okay.

Today is a hunting day. While some days, boats practically run straight into us, on others, we have to seek them out. My exhaustion is continuing to worsen, and I know I'm going to have to find a soul soon, but I'm still trying to hold off a little longer.

I swim at the back of the pack, allowing Raidne to take the lead. My fatigue slows me, my movements are sluggish, and it takes a lot of effort not to fall behind completely.

Raidne locates a boat and we all swim to the surface and prepare to sing. But before our mouths open, I recognize him.

Oh, goddess, no.

It's Eagan.

Even from this distance, I know it's him. It's almost like there's a cord connecting us, and I'm hyper-aware of his presence. His midnight hair and the shape of his body are so familiar to me. I don't know him but somehow, I can sense him. He's standing on the boat alone, gazing out towards the endless expanse of ocean before him. What is he doing here? My emotions tear me in two—the relief of seeing him again but also overwhelming fear. How could he be stupid enough to venture back into the ocean?

“Stop!” I scream, startling my sisters surrounding me. They all turn to me with confusion, eyebrows raised. My breaths come in pants as I struggle to communicate through my panic. They bare their teeth at me; their displeasure at being interrupted mid-hunt is palpable. For a moment, I'm filled with panic as it looks as if they are going to ignore me and turn back to him.

“You have to stop!” I say again, pleading for them not to begin their song.

“Kai, what is it?” Raidne asks me softly, moving closer.

“You can't. We can't. Not him.” I'm speaking fast, barely coherent.

“Shh, it's okay,” she soothes. “Take a deep breath for me and try to explain what's going on.” I shake my head, the words not coming. How do I explain this? How can I protect him? Seeing my difficulty, Raidne swims to the rest of our group and I hear her having quiet but firm words with them. Hissing and shooting glares in my direction, they move in the opposite direction of Eagan. My breaths slow as I realize none of them are continuing to pursue the hunt and are allowing me the privacy I need to get my shit together. They may not understand why I asked them to stop, but they are reluctantly complying anyway.

“We can't kill him, Raidne,” I start.

“Um...why not? What is it about him that makes him so different?”

I take a deep breath, and before I allow myself another moment to talk myself out of it, the story pours out of me. I explain how I found him on a hunt. How I tried to do what we always do, feed on his soul. But I couldn't do it, and I don't know why. I describe the way his eyes, as blue as the clearest waters, held me captivated. It was like I was under his spell when he was supposed to be under mine. I tell Raidne about how keeping him alive created an obsession within me, a tightness in my chest that I couldn't banish until I found him. Then, my regular trips to land and how I so desperately searched for the man I could not forget. And when I found him and heard his name, Eagan. And his voice! How it transfixed me, stoking the flames of my obsession.

“And now he's here!” I cry. “He's back on a fucking boat in the ocean when he barely escaped death the first time. I couldn't let him die then, and I can't let him die now. There's something about him, Raidne, I don't know how to explain it, but he needs to live.” I finish my story and gaze into the sympathetic eyes of my best friend, my sister.

“Are you kidding me right now? Why didn't you tell me you were going through all of this? I could have helped you. I knew something wasn't right. You have gotten yourself into a real mess, haven't you?” she admonishes kindly. “Don't worry though, I'll make sure that the others don't harm your human. But you are going to have to figure something out. And quickly. You know our sisters won't like being denied this hunt especially without an explanation.”

She's right. Of course, she is right. I'm grateful that although she may not understand the connection I feel towards Eagan, she isn't going to do anything to hurt him because she knows how it will hurt me. Not for the first time, I find myself feeling overwhelmingly grateful for Raidne being in my life.

Raidne moves back to the group and with a few more words they swim away. A couple look back at me with annoyance at being deprived of a soul but the further they get from the boat, the lighter the weight on my chest becomes. Raidne gives me a gentle smile before turning to join them and again I am endlessly appreciative of the privacy she is allowing me.

There will be consequences for my little meltdown. I know that my sisters will be angry because they have had to leave today. They will have questions and when I don't immediately answer them, they will be pissed off. They will never understand my sympathy for humans.

I don't know how long I spend watching Eagan. It may have been minutes. It may have been hours. But I am entranced. I ensure that I observe him from behind, so he does not see me. The waves help to obscure me from view. As much as I long to be near him, I'm afraid. I'm afraid of him seeing me.

I am still not certain why he is out here. He doesn't seem to be doing anything. He has no fishing equipment, nothing that might indicate his purpose. He's just... staring. Staring out towards the endless sea. Searching.



My heart stutters with the thought that he could be looking for me. The short burst of excitement that fills me is quickly squashed by dread. If he is looking for me that means he remembers me. What would he do if he found me? Would they view us as monsters? Would he view me as a monster and reject me for what I am?

## Page 12

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### Chapter 12

What the hell am I doing out here? This is the question I have asked myself endlessly for the past five days. Each one of these days I've woken up before the sunrise— oh who am I kidding? I'm not really sleeping—and taken the boat out. I've spent all day out at sea.

Watching.

Searching.

Waiting.

Waiting for a sign that the woman exists. That this isn't some messed up trauma reaction that's going to land me in the mental hospital. I am now more certain than ever that my memories are true.

I was taken? Saved? By a siren. It's her song that fills my every waking moment. My research on sirens has been confusing to say the least. In some legends they are simply mermaids.

Beautiful

Peaceful.

But in others they are monsters. Deadly monsters. I don't know what type I'm dealing with here but what I do know is that I need her. The knowledge of her existence but

being unable to find her is a level of distress close to physical pain. It's like bugs crawling under my skin, a desperation that nothing other than her presence will satiate.

Each day I have taken my boat out and without any clear information to go on I've just drifted. I go to a new spot and stare at the endless expanse of ocean wondering if this day will be different.

Today I shouldn't have come. The dark sky promises bad weather and the turbulent waves make this trip more dangerous than the ones before. The logical part of my brain knows that I'm making incredibly stupid decisions here. But I swear that part of my brain is getting smaller every day. Right now, I'm ruled by some other part of me. Something primal, instinctual, desperate. And that part doesn't care about danger as long as I find what I'm looking for.

The wind howls and the boat lurches with every wave that hits the side. The rain begins and I'm taken back to the storm that started it all. This has to be it. I can't keep doing this. I want to claw at my own skin, rip out my heart that is constantly hurting with the longing to find what I'm searching for. I can't live like this anymore.

And with that realization, one last, truly desperate thought enters my mind. There's no going back now. I start untying my shoes and pulling off the coat I had put on to brave the weather.

This ends today.

I've lost my girlfriend, my friends, my job, and my sanity. I don't even recognize myself anymore and I sure as hell have nothing back home waiting for me. I'm not sure if she saved me or attacked me but perhaps, she is drawn to me the same way that I am to her. Maybe I need to be in the ocean for her to sense me. I look once more at the violent waves and my resolve strengthens. She will come for me. She will

come for me, or I'll die. Either way, I'll be free.

I tug at the strands of my hair in distress as this crazy man risks his goddess damned life coming back out into the ocean in the middle of a fucking storm. Are all humans this dumb? Or is this one particularly special? Does he really not care about his life at all?

His boat is thrown around wildly by the raging waters, waves crashing over the sides, drenching the deck and sometimes, Eagan himself. I've seen him out here every day for the past five days. He does the same thing every time, which is a whole lot of nothing. He just waits. For something.

I swim closer to the boat, getting more concerned by the minute as the storm builds in intensity. Over the sound of the roaring wind, I hear Eagan screaming. He's standing on the edge of the boat and my stomach rolls like the turbulent seas. Something is very wrong.

I propel myself forward until I reach the back of the boat. He can't see me but the words that he is bellowing out to the storm reach my ears.

“I don't know who, what or where you are but I can't do this anymore. All I hear is your song and all I see is your fucking face. I've lost everything. You've ruined my life. I hate you but I want you so desperately at the same time. I hope you're pleased to have been my destruction.”

I stare in shock as I comprehend his words. Is this... is this my fault? I've never given much thought to what would happen to someone who had heard our song but not succumbed to death. As far as I know, it's never happened. Is this what happens when a human hears our song and lives to tell the tale? Does our song do something to their minds? Something that never allows them to truly escape us, bringing them back to the ocean again and again.

I feel sick, my recent meal threatening to make a reappearance. Is it possible that in trying to save this man's life, I destroyed it instead? Fuck! I have been responsible for many deaths, but I do not want to be the cause of this one. I don't know why this man is different from the rest, but I will not be the destruction he believes me to be.

I watch in horror as he pulls himself up so that he is standing on the edge, his hair whipping in the storm and the rain pelting his skin.

“If you don't find me, at least I'll be free from this curse,” he calls before launching himself into the treacherous waters.

A scream leaves my lips before I dive down, pushing myself to swim as fast as possible towards him. The storm above has caused the ocean to become dark and murky, but I am still able to find him. He isn't swimming. He isn't doing anything. He is sinking rapidly, the waves pulling him further, further down. The realization hits me, and it feels like all the air has left my lungs.

He's trying to kill himself. My song truly has driven him to madness. To the point where death seems like the only way out. I can't let this happen. I won't.

In seconds I'm at his side. His eyes widen, filled with both terror and longing. Bubbles leave his mouth, and I panic recognizing that he has just expelled any remaining air in his lungs. I wrap my arms around him. He flails at the contact but quickly goes limp. He's lost consciousness and I'm running out of time.

It's not long before I am able to pull him to the surface. But the gasping breaths I expect from Eagan don't come. I give him a shake, but he remains lifeless, his skin pale and his lips taking on a bluish hue.

“No, no, no,” I cry, acting on pure instinct as I pull Eagan along with me to the shore that seems an impossible distance away. At my full strength, dragging a human

through the water wouldn't be much of a problem but it's been too long since I've consumed a soul. Despite my belly being full of the bland fish I ate earlier; it isn't enough to increase my energy when I haven't had a soul. I'm weak and every beat of my tail drains me more. He's dead weight at this point and the ocean has a mind of its own as it thrashes around us, determined to pull him from my grip.

Time slows and all I can concentrate on is the beach as it gets closer. My muscles strain with the effort of pulling him along and resisting the strong pull of the tides.

Eventually we make it. I'm sobbing as I pull myself onto the sand, dragging Eagan behind me. I barely notice my tail transforming into legs as all my focus is on him. Everything about this moment is reminiscent of the first moment I saw him. The rain falling in heavy sheets around us, the screaming wind, and the crashing of waves.

All those weeks ago I sat beside him in this very spot and contemplated taking his life. I made a choice to let him live but here he is in the same position and this time I'm not just standing by. This time I'm desperate to save him.

I lay him down on the sand on his back and start hammering his chest, trying to push the water out of his lungs. I think I'm crying but the tears just blend in with the rain. Everything around me fades into the background as I compress his chest over and over again. All the noise disappears until the only thing I can hear is the steady thump thump of my hands on his chest and my pulse that seems to beat in time, filling my ears with its rhythm.

I don't know how long I have been sitting here, crying for a man I don't know and hoping that against all odds I can revive him. I don't even know what will happen if he wakes up or how I will solve this problem. All I know is that he has to wake up.

Just like our last meeting he begins to violently cough, gasping for breath and expelling floods of water. He heaves and heaves and I wonder how a person can

survive after taking on so much water.

This time, instead of running away or putting him under the spell of my song, I stay. I wait as he fills his lungs with air once more. As the color returns to his face and his lips become the beautiful pink they were before. I hesitantly stroke his back with soft movements, trying to soothe his distress. When he has fully regained consciousness and the ability to breathe, he finally becomes cognizant of my presence. He stills and then slowly turns to face me. He looks at me with a mixture of wonder and fear.

“You,” he breathes, voice raspy. “You came for me. I knew you would.” I nod, not quite able to find words. He reaches out a hand towards my face as if to caress my cheek. I move forward slightly to meet him, and his hand drops to my throat and tightens. I squirm, attempting to move, but he brings his other hand to join the first at my neck and squeezes. I let out a cry and kick out my legs and claw at his hands. I'm so confused. It hurts and I can't breathe. I stare into his beautiful sapphire eyes and right now all I see is fury.

“You monster. You have ruined my life,” he growls as I thrash beneath him. I can feel the way his body violently shakes and I'm unsure if it is from the cold, adrenaline or anger or some combination of the three. I think he's going to kill me.

As quickly as it began, his grip on my throat loosens and I instantly scuttle backwards away from him with a whimper as I gasp for breath. A scream tears from his throat as he falls to his knees and all I can feel is his anguish as he bellows into the storm.

He turns to me but I'm afraid of what I will see in his eyes. He makes no effort to move towards me this time, but I'm prepared now, ready to act if he comes for me again. I didn't expect this kind of violence. Maybe that was naive of me but now I don't know how to move forward.

“I'm sorry. I...I didn't mean to. I just... Do you know what you have done to me?”

You have made me crazy. All I see is your face and all I hear is your song. I've lost everything that means something to me in this life. I feel like I'm at war with myself. There's one part that needs to see you, touch you, feel you. But the other part wants to see the life leave your eyes in payment for my life that you have destroyed.”

I hear his words and immediately feel like I'm going to vomit. The thought hits me moments before I do just that.



### Chapter 13

My eyes don't leave the woman as she bends over and empties her stomach onto the sand. What an absolute fucking nightmare this is. I almost killed myself, the woman who has been haunting me found me, and then I almost killed her. I curse the world again for putting me in such a god-awful position.

The rain is starting to fall lighter now, more of a misty drizzle. My clothes are plastered to my skin and covered in sand. My throat hurts from drowning. I am so bloody conflicted at the moment. I can't reconcile this woman in front of me as the siren from the legends although I have the memory of her transformation. She's responsible for all my madness but right now she looks like a confused and frightened girl.

I don't know what to do and I am so tired. I feel like if I close my eyes I won't open them again. My body feels heavy, my movements slow. I feel stuck. I can't bring myself to leave her now that I've found her but what else can I do?

The woman stops retching and I'm finally able to take all of her in. She's just as beautiful as what I have been picturing these past weeks. Even more so if I am being honest. Her skin is a smooth, creamy white, dotted with freckles over her nose and cheekbones and her eyes, a bright shade of green that reminds me of the forest. The combination of her emerald eyes and auburn hair is striking and I'm instantly flooded with warmth and desire. And she's naked. Fuuuck. The sight of her body makes my cock hard instantly, the bastard completely disinterested in the fact that this woman is the cause of all our problems.

I shake my head, silently urging the blood to travel back north so my brain can actually function. “What's your name?” I splutter, desperate to put a name to the goddess-slash-monster in front of me. “Do you even have a name? Do you talk? Oh fuck, or are you just kind of like a fish?” I'm rambling now.

“Of course, I fucking speak and have a name!” She responds indignantly. “And how dare you call me a fish. Do I look like a fish to you?” She gestures down her body, and I can't help but stare at her breasts and take a quick glance at the mound between her legs as she does so. I mean, I'm only human.

I mentally slap myself, using every ounce of mental strength I have to focus on our conversation and not her body. Okay she speaks, and not only have I managed to almost kill her but now I have offended her as well. Things are going wonderfully.

“Okay, okay I'm sorry all right. I have no idea what's going on. I don't know anything about you other than I'm pretty sure you're a siren, a creature that until recently I didn't think existed. And I'm reasonably sure that it's your song that has been driving me so crazy. But I don't know how much of what I read is actually true. You don't really look like the pictures. Can you please help me? Can you make the song go away?” My words come out in a pitiful whine, and I would be embarrassed if I weren't so fucking tired.

Her eyes soften as I speak and try not to fuck things up any more than I already have.

“Kairi,” she says softly. “My name is Kairi.”

Kairi. Kairi. Kairi.

And just like that I feel like I've found the answer to a question I didn't even know that I was asking. I'm flooded with a sense of peace that is so at war with our current predicament.

“Kairi,” I whisper back. “Can you please tell me what's going on. My memories... they are all messed up and I don't know what's real or not.”

A grimace of what looks like pain and guilt crosses her face. Fleeting, but present, nonetheless.

“Um so yes, I’m a siren. I have a different form when I'm in the ocean to what you see now. This is my human form for when I come to land.” I nod, memories of her blue-gray skin and slitted eyes surfacing.

She speaks hesitantly again. “I don’t know how to fix this problem I’ve caused by letting you go. Humans don’t usually survive after coming across us. I’ve never heard of something like this happening.” I try not to focus on the whole “people don’t usually survive” thing and what that means and instead growl in frustration at her admission of not being able to fix this.

“What do you mean you can’t fix this? You have to! You did this to me.” Her eyelids flutter closed, and she takes in a deep breath.

“I don’t know! I didn’t know this was possible. I had no idea what letting you go would mean!” She cries, her hands covering her face. “I’ve made such a colossal mess of everything,” she says more quietly.

I make a move towards her, an urge to comfort her in her distress coming to the surface. She takes a step backwards, the distrust still evident in her eyes. I’ve frightened her. My rational brain has decided to resurface and I’m able to control the anger and frustration I feel towards her. It’s still there. I’m still furious with my predicament. But I’m not completely unsympathetic to the fact that she is also clearly distressed.

She turns contemplative for a moment and I’m silent as I wait for her to speak.

“There is one thing that might work but I’m not certain. It’s mostly legend and I don’t know how much of it is actually true...”

“I’ll try anything,” I interrupt. She nods and a look of determination crosses her face.

“Okay I’m going to need your help.” I watch as she ducks behind a nearby rock and pulls out some loose clothing. “For when we come to shore,” she explains when she sees my confusion. I can’t help but mourn the fact that she is covering her body, but it is probably much better for my focus.

“So, we are going to find the witch.”

“The what now?”

“The witch.”

“The one this town is named after? The one that made the curse that plagues the town? That’s just a myth,” I scoff.

She raises an eyebrow in response. “Like I am?” Well, she’s got a point there.

“Like I said, I am not sure how much truth there is to the legend, but I am pretty sure she exists. And it’s not her that is responsible for the curse. It’s actually us who cause the disappearances. Humans just don’t know about us and find it easier to blame a witch’s curse.”

I try to process this absolute head fuck of a situation I’ve found myself in. “Okay so I’m being driven mad by a siren’s song and I’m currently standing on a beach with said siren, but she looks like a human right now because she’s on land. And now we are off to find a mythical witch who is somehow going to fix this whole bloody situation. Do I have that right?” Words tumble from my mouth in a rush, bordering

on hysteria.

“Yep, sounds exactly right to me,” she says, her voice a little brighter now, no longer seeming as afraid of me as she was before. “My sisters and I have heard the legends of the witch. It's something that has been passed down to us as a cautionary tale. This is, quite literally, the only thing I can think of that even has the slightest chance of helping you. The witch is isolated and lives in one of the cliffside caves. I'm not even sure she is able to leave it. We are going to have to do some climbing. Do you feel up for that, Eagan?” she asks.

I don't remember telling her my name but honestly that's the last thing I need to worry about right now. Fortunately, the storm appears to have passed, the rain ceasing and the wind has lost most of its ferocity. However, it seems like quite a bit of time has passed and we are getting close to dusk. The sky, already dark from the storm clouds, takes on hues of pinks and oranges as the sun peeks out from the clouds and begins its descent. I begin to shiver from the cold and the adrenaline leaving my body, my legs struggle to hold me up. I don't know how I'm going to move at all, let alone climb a cliff but I sure as hell am going to give it my best shot. The fact that this witch may even exist should shock me more than it does, probably because it's far from the most life changing discovery I've made in the past week. Right now, in my likely delirious state, I'm just rolling with it.

“I guess we better get going then.”

### Chapter 14

What is it about Eagan that makes me so crazy? Since the moment I found him, I have been making one stupid decision after another, with obviously disastrous consequences. And now here I am trying to undo my mistakes by potentially making another one. I don't know if finding the witch is a good idea.

What I told Eagan was correct. We all have been told stories about the witch, but I left out the specifics about the warnings we also received. Although the witch will occasionally make bargains with those who seek her out, they are often edged with darkness. She appears to offer whatever your heart desires. But there's a catch. Often those who make the bargain, wish they never had. Often the price that is asked of you is more than you are willing to pay.

I didn't know what else to tell him. He looked desperate. Distraught. I hate knowing that I am the one responsible for his pain. I know that my experiences with humans are not always in the humans' best interest. Okay, well I do kill many of them. So yeah, I guess I'm not that great for humans. But I don't cause them pain. Soul consumption isn't felt by them at all, and our song allows them peace and happiness while we feed. And then the men I seduce on land enjoy themselves just fine. Even though I don't usually allow them to remember much of the encounter. My point is that this is the first time I've seen first-hand the destruction I have caused simply from being what I am. And it's a fucking awful feeling. Now I feel like it is my responsibility to fix it and the only option I can think of that has any potential of working, while also keeping Eagan alive, is the witch. I only hope that this will not be added to my list of regrets.

I explain to Eagan where I believe the witch's cave to be located. I think even getting to the cave may be a little dangerous and I'm nervous as I am already so tired from dragging Eagan out of the ocean. But we need to do this now before Eagan tries to throw himself back into the bloody ocean. Oh fuck. I hope he doesn't try to jump off the cliff.

"How are you feeling?" I ask tentatively, attempting to gauge his current mental state.

"I'm exhausted and sore but being around you makes me feel less crazy," he laughs dryly. "I mean this whole situation is crazy as fuck but at least the song has quietened and now I know you're real, I don't feel quite as much like I'm losing my mind."

Okay so hopefully his insane actions earlier are not about to repeat themselves now. After walking up, away from the beach and towards the edge of the cliff, I point to where I believe the cave to be. Eagan pales at the height and the imminent death that awaits us if we are to fall, the sharp rocks that will break our fall by breaking us. There is a small section of the cliff face that somewhat resembles a pathway further down, but we have to get there first. And the rocks are bound to be slippery due to the earlier storm. From our vantage point, we can't see the cave, so we are acting on a hunch that it is truly there and that doesn't instill a lot of confidence.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" I ask one last time. He gives me a firm nod in response and moves towards the edge. I try to take some deep breaths to steady my nerves. Up until this very moment I did not know that I was afraid of heights. Although falling to the ocean below would have no impact on me whatsoever, it's the collection of sharp, jagged and deadly rocks that promises a gruesome death if I were to fall. I may be a siren but my bones break and my skin tears in just the same way as a humans would.

I try to not let Eagan see just how scared I am. I don't know if we will even survive the witch if we are able to find her. Or what she may ask us to give up in return for

Eagan's life back. Raidne would kill me if she knew I was doing this. Especially as I'm doing it for a human. I can confidently say that none of my sisters would feel the same way I do. Why am I so different?

Eagan wastes no time in lowering himself over the edge. A gasp escapes me as he disappears from view but as I rush towards him, I realize he has lowered himself onto a small rocky ledge about six feet below. I close my eyes and say a quick prayer to whatever gods or goddesses that exist in this world that this is not one of the dumbest mistakes of my life and then follow him down.

I am grateful that the storm has passed but the rocks remain slick. The exertion of my descent down the cliff is also causing sweat to run down my face, mixing with the collection of sand and salt water already caking my skin. I focus on the movements of my body and try to forget that I'm scaling a rock wall above raging waters, with muscles already tired and sore. I move one of my feet to a small ledge, my hands finding purchase on the protruding rocks. My other foot then finds a small hole just big enough to allow me to move down a little more. We don't speak. The only sounds are my quick breaths, the pounding of my heart and the occasional screech of a bird. One foot after the other I follow Eagan. I don't dare take my eyes off of the cliff for fear of losing my footing. I can only trust that he will be okay.

I search for another foothold, finding it difficult to locate one this time. I curse and lower myself further, straining my arm muscles as I do so. I finally find the tiniest gap in the rocks and wedge my toes inside. As I loosen my hand to move down once more, the section my foot is placed on begins to crumble and I start to slip. I scream and claw at the rocks trying to hold onto anything I can find to stop me from falling to the rocks below me. I scramble but manage to regain my footing as a large hand is pressed to the small of my back, steadying me.

"Easy," Eagan says softly. "Are you alright?"



It takes me a moment to compose myself and avoid the hysteria fighting its way to the surface. Through short, shallow breaths, eventually I'm able to nod and respond. "I'm okay. Let's just keep moving." My limbs are shaking now and I'm unsure if it is due to my near-death experience or my overall weakness but I'm eager to get us both to safety as quickly as possible and never do anything like this again.

Shortly we make it to the small ledge that acts as somewhat of a pathway. While far from safe, this offers a little more comfort than the small crevices we were using for support before. Eagan stops in front of me with a sharp intake of breath. I steady myself and turn to look. We've reached a small opening in the rock. It would be mostly invisible from above if you didn't know to look for it. And even now it doesn't really look like much. But I'm quite sure this is what we are looking for. I muster up a smile, faking confidence I absolutely do not feel and step in front of Eagan to enter the cave. I feel him at my back as he follows me, and I take comfort in his presence despite our messed-up circumstances.

## Page 15

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 10:30 am*

### Chapter 15

Inside the cave is dark. A musty smell permeates the air, and a sense of dread floods me. Goosebumps pebble my skin, and I can't help the shiver that runs through me, partly from the cool air and partly from apprehension and fear. Eagan's footsteps sound softly behind me, and I resist the urge to reach back and touch him for comfort. He may not have tried to hurt me again, but I am not going to take any chances. He is clearly quite unstable at present.

The setting sun, bathing everything in its golden light, disappears from view the deeper we move into the cave. The only sounds, our footsteps and breaths and an occasional rock that one of us catches with a foot that tumbles along the ground. The cave continues on and on and it occurs to me that there must be magic at play here because there is no way that a cave this deep could exist in this location.

I startle when the squawk of a bird and the sound of flapping wings breaks the eerie silence. I stumble backwards into Eagan and for the second time he has to steady me. The warmth of his touch on my skin creates a whole new sensation inside me, causing me to shudder and my skin to heat. The sound of wings intensifies and although I am unable to see further than a couple of feet in front of me, I sense the presence of a large bird as it flies close by.

The cave veers slightly to the left and I am unnerved to realize that the bird has remained with us. Almost like it's accompanying us on our journey. Or leading us to our demise.

Eagan clears his throat behind me. "This witch. What are we expecting here? Is she

going to just cast some mumbo jumbo spells and I'll be sane again? Do we, like, pay her or something?"

"Or something," I mutter in response. It doesn't seem worth explaining the warnings I have been given growing up. I'm not entirely sure what to expect, but I highly doubt it's going to be as straightforward as paying her with money. I don't want to voice my suspicions in case it scares him off. It's taking a lot of willpower to mask my own fear and act like this isn't the scariest fucking thing I've ever done. I wouldn't be surprised if my terror were leaking out of my pores. Fortunately, Eagan doesn't seem to grasp the seriousness of our situation. Now that we have arrived, we have to follow this through to the end. Whatever that may be.

A light ahead indicates that we are coming closer to our destination. Candles line the walls, and a quick glance tells me that these are not normal candles. No wax melts atop and the light never flickers. If I had to guess, I would think that these candles are fueled with magic and will not be snuffed by something as inconvenient as a slight breeze. The newfound light allows us to see the travel companion we have acquired. A gasp leaves my lips when I observe a larger than typical raven perched on a rock ahead, rather than the sea bird I had assumed it to be.

"What the hell is a raven doing in here?" Eagan asks. "They aren't really common in Witches Cove and certainly don't usually hang around in ocean caves."

"I think we have met the witch's familiar. She knows we are here and is watching us. The raven is an extension of her. A spy." Eagan's throat bobs as he gulps in discomfort. As we continue, I start to notice more and more objects that fill the narrow passageway. Strange objects like old statues, jewelry, clothing, books are thrown haphazardly along the walls with no apparent order or purpose. Whoever this witch is, she appears to be a collector. Or hoarder.

"Well, well, well. Now what do we have here? A pretty little siren with a pretty little

voice. And what has that pretty little voice done now hmm?” A voice purrs from behind us, causing us to whirl around in shock causing an embarrassing squeak to escape me.

“Oh, he is handsome. I can understand why you didn't want to kill him, pretty siren. But you didn't know what your little voice would do to him, did you? No, I bet you didn't. Handsome boy's mind has fractured, pretty siren. And it's all your fault. Your song did this to him. You should have put the handsome boy out of his misery and let him die when he wanted to.”

A soft brush against my shoulder causes an involuntary shudder. It feels like someone is running a single finger down my arm. I can sense her presence, hear her voice but I can't see her. My chest tightens and I push my palms against my thighs to try to cease their tremors and I fight the urge to reach out to Eagan for comfort.

“So, what is pretty siren and handsome boy doing in my cave, hmm? My friends have been watching you and they tell quite the tale. Are you trying to save him, pretty siren?”

Everything about her voice triggers my fight or flight response. Every part of my being recognizes her as a threat and wants to get out of here as quickly as possible. Danger, danger, my brain screams at me, and it takes everything I have to resist the urge to run and instead raise my chin and exude a false sense of confidence.

Another flap of wings captures my attention and suddenly there are two midnight black ravens watching us. It feels like they are staring into my soul. And like one wrong move will trigger an attack.

“I've come to make a bargain,” I announce, and I am quite proud of the steadiness of my voice, not betraying a hint of the fear writhing inside me. The laugh that echoes throughout the cave chills me to my core. I start to perspire, and my legs feel like

jelly. This was a bad idea. We should not have come. Eagan stands unnervingly still beside me. Only his short, trembling breaths remind me of his presence and his fear now that he is faced with the myth.

“Oh, pretty siren is here to make a bargain with Vala. How wonderful! I do so love to make bargains, and it has been a very long time since I've had one of your kind come to see me. Your kind though, handsome boy, I've seen regularly throughout the years. Humans always want and want. They hear of Vala and think that I am some magic wish granting creature but oh no, that's not me. You don't get something without giving me something in return, pretty siren. So, what are you willing to pay as the price for handsome boy's mind?”

“I do not have much to give, Vala is it? But I am willing to pay a fair price to remove the effects of my siren song from Eagan's mind so that he is no longer haunted by his memories. What do you ask of me?” My voice is slow, calm, formal. This is a transaction and one I want to come away from on top.

She cackles again. “Oooh, pretty siren. You don't think you have much to offer huh? Did you know that because he has heard your song he is going to die? There's no avoiding it. It might take hours, days, or weeks but eventually he will die by his own hand, yours or one of your hungry sisters. How important is he to you? Enough to give your own life for?”

A sharp intake of breath from beside me has me looking over at Eagan. His face has paled but he doesn't shrink away. He's braver than I gave him credit for. Many humans and sirens alike would have cowered in fear when faced with the essence of evil that surrounds us.

“You know it would be so easy for you to drag him down into the ocean and pluck out his soul in that magical way you do. I can tell that you haven't consumed a soul in a while. I can sense your pathetic weakness. All that power, wasting away. You don't

appreciate the gift you have. You must be getting hungry, pretty siren. Why don't you ease that discomfort? He's just a human. Yes, I agree he is handsome but there's so many more out there just like him. Why go to all the trouble? You can put him out of his misery and then go back to your pretty little life in the sea. Doesn't that sound so much easier?"

A mixture of revulsion and fear crosses Eagan's face. "You eat souls? Fuck, what is this nightmare? I'm starting to wish you'd just left me to drown. It sounds like a better way to go than having my soul literally ripped out of my body."

I ignore him for the moment although I'm sure those words will leave a wound when I'm eventually able to process them. "Don't worry about why I want him to live. It's not your problem. What I want to know is are you willing to make a bargain?"

She laughs her cruel laugh again and I worry that she is going to ask for something I am not prepared to give. I have purposely not spent much time considering what she may ask from me because I am honestly not sure what I would give up for him. I'm certainly not going to start throwing suggestions out there.

"Hmm, what to ask for from a pretty siren? Should I take your life? What about the life of your sister? The one with dark hair and olive skin. Raidne. Does his life mean more to you than hers?"

I hesitate. "Shit, I want to live but I don't want anyone else to die. Kairi are you sure we should be doing this?" Eagan mutters to me with concern. Just a second ago you said you would prefer to have drowned. A tiny hint of annoyance creeps to the surface at his rapidly switching emotions. My stomach is rolling in turmoil at the impossible choice.

"I've got it! How about the very thing that makes you, you? Your song is the cause of your dilemma, so perhaps we remove it all together hmm?"

I take a moment to process her words, an uneasy feeling tightening my chest. “You can do that? Take away my song?” I question, wondering just how powerful this Vala actually is. Not for the first time I consider that this may have been my biggest mistake so far, but it seems like a much better trade than mine or Raidne’s life. I don't for a second believe that Vala is going to allow us to leave here unscathed. It's either bargain with her or prepare to fight and I have no idea what she is capable of.

“Pretty siren, you have no idea what I can do,” she purrs, echoing my thoughts.

“How will I survive if I can't use my song to consume souls?”

She laughs once more, “My pretty siren, I won't just be taking your song. I'll be claiming everything. You like to spend time on land so much, how about we make that permanent? I'll be taking your song and your siren essence. You'll be the human you always dreamed of being.”

Eagan gasps beside me but my brain is quickly moving through the words she has spoken. I will be human. That's something I have always dreamed about but never considered a possibility. If I am human, maybe I can get to know Eagan more. Maybe I can build a connection with someone other than my sisters. A flicker of something that feels a lot like hope springs to life in a dark corner of my soul. But worry prevents it from growing any larger than the small glimmer that is there. This actually sounds like a decent bargain. Eagan regains his sanity, and I become human. I will still be able to see Raidne and the others when they choose to come to land. It won't be the same but maybe, just maybe, I can have more of a life than hunting for human souls and being the cause of death and destruction.

“Please, Kairi,” Eagan pleads but I have already made up my mind. “It’s a bargain,” I say clearly and confidently.

“Wonderful, wonderful, pretty siren. Now remember, a bargain is final. All you need

to do now is sing one final time for me. Let me hear that beautiful melody and then you and handsome boy can be on your way.”

I glance at Eagan and take in the look of uncertainty plastered on his face. I avert my eyes to the floor, open my mouth and sing for the last time. I pour everything I have into the song, my loneliness, my pain, my confusion, my fear, my curiosity for the man beside me and the tiny bud of hope that maybe there is a future for me on land. I sing and sing until my voice starts to become softer, less melodious. My hands grasp my throat as my voice becomes raspy, the magic of the song disappearing. And suddenly all we are left with is silence.

I look at Eagan and blanch at the revulsion that plasters his face. The magic of my song has finally left him completely and he is regaining his memories and full awareness. “I was right. You are a monster,” Eagan growls and turns, running back to the opening of the cave. Leaving me alone.



### Chapter 16

My feet pound the dirt and rocks that cover the cave floor as I get the hell out of there. At the entrance of the cave, I pause for a fraction of a moment, sparing a glance behind me. A twinge of guilt enters my mind before I'm flooded with memories as they flash one by one, pressure increasing in my head with the onslaught. When did my world get this fucked up? I was just a normal guy with a normal life. Boring even. I got up each morning, went to work and then came home to Kelly. Occasionally I would see Tom or my sister Sienna. So, tell me how a simple day out fishing led me to standing in a cave with a siren making a bargain with a witch on my behalf? It's a shit show, an absolute colossal head fuck. And honestly, now that whatever magic was rotting my mind has been removed, I'm ready to be done with all of this, forget it ever happened and try to repair all the damage I have done to my life in the past couple of months.

Now that my memories have returned, I'm even more eager to get away from this cave and the monster, well monsters, within. Because that's what they are, both the witch and the siren, Kairi, are evil incarnate. I wasn't sure about Kairi before but now I am certain. I was fooled by her innocent and vulnerable appearance.

I remember now. I remember the storm that day and the way their song enchanted us, forcing us to jump off the boat into the raging sea below without any conscious thought of the danger. I remember watching in horror as they tore into the flesh of my friends, staining the water red. They are murderers. Vicious, monstrous, murderers. A part of me recognizes that she has been trying to help me and that perhaps I should be grateful but I shove that part right down. I refuse to get myself killed by getting all tangled up with an enchantress. I now have a clear picture of what Kairi looks like in

her siren form, and I realize that her beautiful, goddess-like human appearance is just another way to lure in her prey. After all, the deadliest creatures are always the most beautiful.

I'm shaking with anger. If I weren't so exhausted, I would punch something. I need to feel the pain of split knuckles and bruised skin. I need to hurt. I need to feel something other than this relentless storm of emotions that keep changing by the minute. I am not usually an emotional person, falling on the side of apathy, so I am completely unaccustomed to feeling this much. It's like I am going to explode.

Many of my arguments with Kelly were her telling me that I “don't seem to give a shit.” It never mattered how often I told her that I did care, she always felt unappreciated. Even going right back to my childhood, my father made it clear that emotions were not acceptable. Ever the stoic picture of masculinity, my father ensured that he had a son that portrayed the same image. I was not allowed to cry. Even loud outbursts of anger were frowned upon.

“Boys don't cry, son,” he would tell me. “We must always appear strong and not allow anyone to see our weaknesses.” My sister, Sienna, was never given the same lessons because, of course, women are allowed to show their weakness. It is not expected that they will be strong. Look, I have evolved enough to know that my father's lessons were bullshit. I do believe that anyone should be allowed to experience and show their emotions, but his lessons are so heavily ingrained in my psyche that I can't seem to break away from his words.

As the adrenaline begins to leave my system, I am reminded of just how exhausted I am. I slowly sink down to sit on a large rock outside the cave, not ready to start my ascent back up the cliff face just yet. I rest my head in my hands and once again try to focus on slowing down my breathing. I try to sort out my mess of thoughts and plan my next steps.

“Oh, fuckety fuck!” The noise of Kairi stumbling out of the cave, clearly having tripped, startles me out of my deep contemplation. I look up but she doesn't meet my eyes, instead looking quizzically down at her upper arm which has a deep red trail of blood. A pang of concern quickly seizes my chest, but I push that feeling way, way down. She doesn't deserve my concern.

“This is strange. I don't usually bleed red,” she murmurs, to herself. Just another reminder of the abomination she is. I shuffle slightly and my movement captures her attention, and I see her eyes fill with hope.

“Oh shit! You're still here. I thought you had gone and left me. Well, you did leave me in there. Kind of a dick move don't you think? But I definitely didn't expect you to still be here.”

“I'm leaving. I just needed to catch my breath before the climb. I don't want to see you again. I remember everything that happened now. You murdered my friends. In cold blood, you made us jump off the boat and then you and the others ate them.” I shudder, feeling nauseated at the thought.

At least she has the good sense to look remorseful. Her face flushes and for a split second I can't help but notice how pretty the pink tinge on her cheeks is.

“I'm sorry,” she replies softly. “It's how we survive. We have no other choice.”

I scoff, “really? So, you just go around killing and eating people and their souls—what the fuck is up with that by the way? And you want me to believe it's because you have no choice?”

She lifts her eyes to meet mine and there is some defiance staring back at me. She's a fascinating creature. Sometimes she appears meek and fragile, but other times I witness a stronger side, some ferocity. Her conflicting actions towards me are a

replica of my own hot and cold emotions. God this is so messed up.

“Do you get angry at the spider for consuming the fly? Or the cat for killing the bird? We do what we have to do to survive. We didn't ask to be born like this, having to consume the souls of humans just to survive. We are born to be apex predators of the sea and that's how we live. I'm sorry for how my actions affected you but I've done everything in my power to make things right ever since.” Her chest heaves with the effort it takes to get out that speech. I can't lie and say I'm not intrigued but I have made a decision and I'm going to stick to it. I'm done with magic and mythical creatures.

“Do you... do you have any money?” I ask, suddenly realizing the possible repercussions of her becoming fully human and then subsequently it occurs to me that that was stupid question.

“Wha— oh no. I don't have anything. I've never needed anything on land before.”

I sigh and run my hands over my face. “We are going to climb back up this bloody cliff, I'm going to give you some money, so you don't die of starvation and then I never want to see you again, okay? You'll have to figure things out on your own. I don't owe you anything.”

“Okay,” she whispers in reply.

We climb back up from the cave not uttering a single word to each other, the ascent easier than the descent. I know this is the right decision for me but why does abandoning her feel so wrong?

### Chapter 17

T rue to his word, after climbing back to the top of the cliff, Eagan led me back to his apartment. Honestly, I don't even remember much after our conversation out the front of the cave, when he called me a murderer. A monster. The hurricane of emotions I'm feeling is overwhelming. I feel guilty simply for existing. What I said to him was true, this is how I was born, how I survive. I had no idea what letting him live would do to his mind. Despite what he thinks of me, I am not cruel.

While guilt is the prominent emotion, the other trying to get loose is anger. White, hot anger. How dare he treat me like that? I just made a bargain, giving up everything that I am, for him. For him! If I were truly the evil, he believes me to be I would have left him to drown. Or better yet, I could have consumed his soul and then eaten his flesh so that I could feel better again. He's lucky I've been this nice!

While I wrestled with these conflicting emotions, we silently scaled the cliff face until we reached the top once more. It didn't take too long for him to lead us to his car that he left earlier at the docks. I followed him in an almost dissociative state, my body functioning on autopilot. I knew I couldn't leave him until I received the money he offered.

We arrive at his apartment and he asks me to wait outside. The clothing I had put on earlier is in a very sorry state. I wince at the small holes and tears from where the loose linen had snagged on the rocks while climbing. My shirt is also dotted with the red blood that I was shocked to see dripping from a small cut on my arm after leaving the cave. It's a clear reminder of my new biology. I truly am a human now. I'm still yet to process what this will actually mean for my future. I'm desperately trying to

hold my fear of the unknown at bay.

I can handle this. I'll get the money from Eagan, find somewhere to rest and then I'll regroup tomorrow. This has been a long as fuck day and I can't think clearly. My muscles are fatigued and I'm feeling the type of weariness that is soul deep. I could probably sleep for a week.

I'm pulled out of my contemplation by the return of Eagan. Just looking at him I can tell that he is also ready to sleep like the dead. Dark shadows mark the spaces below his eyes, his skin has paled and his hair, an absolute mess. But goddess he is still beautiful. I can't help the desire I feel, the pull. It hasn't lessened since bargaining with the witch. I thought it might have. I don't know whether I was hoping for that tether I feel to still exist or for it to be severed.

“Look, here is all the money I have on me right now. It's three hundred. Enough to get you some food, maybe a few nights at the motel. Now we are even. You helped me and I helped you. I need to work on fixing all my fuck ups now. Um... I'd say it was nice to meet you but to tell you the truth... I kind of wish I never had. Good luck with... being human.”

I guess that's it. Although despair and hurt attempts to break through the tough exterior I'm trying to portray, I straighten my back, lift my head, and stare him right in the eyes. “Thanks for this. I'll get out of your way. And for the love of the goddess please stay out of the ocean. I will not be held responsible for what happens to you if you go out there again and come across my sisters.”

The shudder that racks his body is unmistakable as well as the flash of fear that crosses his eyes. He gives me a small nod and I begin walking. Where to? Who knows. But as I walk, I feel his stare at my back and I know that, without a doubt, he watches me walk until I'm out of sight.

Fortunately, Eagan doesn't live too far from the main area of town. Time passed quickly during our adventure in the cave, and it is now well into the evening. The night sky is clear, showing no evidence of the earlier storm. A soft breeze tickles my skin, but the air is warm. Comfortable. As I walk towards town, I take a moment to look up at the night sky. It is the same sky that I observe from the ocean, but right now it feels different. Maybe because I am different.

I am disappointed with Eagan's rejection. I feel hurt and abandoned. Perhaps it was stupid for me to think that he would want to get to know me. I can understand where he is coming from though. Just as it is my nature to be a predator, it is his to be prey. I can't blame him for his fear as it is his natural reaction to danger. And I am dangerous. Or at least I was.

Despite this, there is a part of me that's excited to live a human life. During the days I have spent on land, I have spent a considerable amount of time simply observing. Watching people go about their days, witnessing their interactions, both positive and negative. I've been taking it all in. Learning. I'm quite certain that I can blend in with humans. There are many things I still don't know but I am eager to learn. I want to embrace this opportunity I've been given but I'm not quite sure where to start.

As I reach the outskirts of the town center, I start to make a list of items I will need to purchase with the money I have been given. I'm nervous as I know it isn't enough to survive off for long. I also can no longer use my song to coerce people into buying things for me and for the first time it hits me how truly alone I am. I always envied humans for their freedom and choices, but I think that I also viewed them as being weak. How could I not? They are really no match for sirens and rarely put up even the slightest bit of fight. Our song renders them immobile and completely compliant. It's not their fault.

Not only do I feel alone with no one to lean on for support, but I also feel incredibly vulnerable. Without my siren abilities, I am as weak as I always viewed humans to

be. I have no way of defending myself against people who may try and hurt me. These thoughts increase my discomfort.

Food and clothing are the items first on the agenda. As much as I want to find as much delicious food as I possibly can and stuff my face until I'm so full that I could explode, I know that is a reckless decision. I need to be smart. I am also aware that my dirty, torn up clothes are going to draw attention to me everywhere I go. And not the good kind of attention. The first part of blending in is to look the same as everyone else.

I find a small boutique clothing store and sigh in relief when I find that it is still open and there are no customers currently in the store. A bell dings when I walk in, and I quickly start scanning the items of clothing on the racks to find something suitable.

"Hi there, would you like some help finding something today?" A chirpy voice sings out. I turn around and am greeted by a young-looking woman with short, vibrant pink hair and bits of metal gleaming in her ears, nose, lip, and eyebrow. I don't know if I have ever seen anyone that looks quite like her, but I immediately get good vibes. The woman's eyebrows shoot up into her hairline as she takes in my disheveled appearance, her gaze scanning me from head to toe.

"Oh my gosh, what happened to you? Is everything okay? You look like you have been through some shit. Is that blood?" She points to what is indeed blood on my sleeve. I knew I was going to draw questions with my appearance. Damn! I should have taken the time it took me to walk here deciding on my cover story. Something tells me that saying I'm a siren who made a bargain with a witch and became human is probably not going to help my cause. I've been human for no time at all, and I don't want to get locked up already because people think I'm crazy.

"Um, yeah. I... uh... got caught in the storm earlier and tripped over trying to get to cover and scratched myself up a bit." I manage to stammer out. There, that actually



sounded plausible right?

“Oh, honey that sounds awful. Are you in need of some new clothes? Let’s see what I can find you.”

“I don’t have much money,” I quickly blurt out. I need to make sure that I spend the smallest amount possible.

“Not a problem at all honey,” she replies with a knowing look on her face.

In no time at all, the woman, whose name is Kelsey I discover, has helped me find a few sale items that will do the trick. Some leggings, a basic T-shirt and a sweater. Nothing fancy but comfortable and practical and most importantly, cheap. After scanning my items, Kelsey encourages me to change into them right away and thankfully offers to dispose of my ruined ones. With a wave and a cheerful goodbye, she lets me know that if I need anything else, I can stop by the boutique any time. Her kindness fills me with warmth and it’s good to know that if I run into trouble, there’s at least one person in this town that might be willing to help me.

After counting my money for what is probably the twentieth time, I decide that spending it on a motel room is not wise. That will take up almost all of my funds and I have no idea how I’m going to access more money when this runs out. I need to make this last as long as possible. I resign myself to the likelihood that I’m going to be braving the elements and sleeping outside. I rack my brain trying to think of somewhere that I can sleep. In the end, the only option that I feel somewhat comfortable with is the rocky cove where I usually come to land. It’s not busy like the main beach and I’m sure I can keep hidden and somewhat sheltered in the small cave-like structures. For now, that will work but I know it is not a permanent solution.

Now that I am dressed inconspicuously, I feel more at ease walking around town. I

buy myself some food at a supermarket. There are many things I haven't tried but I assume that because it is in packets and not refrigerated, it should be okay to eat. I then begin the journey to my cove. I'm grateful that it is almost summer, and apart from the storms that are frequent in Witches Cove, the weather should be manageable. I don't know what I would have done if this had all happened in the middle of winter. As a siren my body was made to endure the freezing temperatures of the deep ocean but I'm not sure what this human body can survive, and I don't want to find out.

When I arrive, I spend some time locating the perfect place to sleep. Just as I suspected there is a small space surrounded by rocks that will offer me some protection. The sand is soft, and I know that I am exhausted enough to be able to fall asleep anywhere. I make myself comfortable by curling up on my side and in moments, drift off to sleep.

### Chapter 18

I pry my eyes open and immediately wince at the sun that pours through my window. Every part of my body aches. I feel like I have been hit by a truck. And then reversed back over for good measure. For a moment, I think that I had the craziest dream. A siren, a witch, two midnight black ravens with creepy eyes. But as I begin to wake up fully and become more aware of my surroundings, the onslaught of memories bombard me. I'm forced to admit that it wasn't a dream and that not only do sirens and witches exist, but one has actually now come to land and is going to be living amongst us.

My stomach growls. What time is it? When did I eat last? I feel like I have been in daze, functioning on autopilot for days, weeks even. This is the first morning in a long time that I have woken up fully cognizant of the world around me. My stomach pools with dread when I remember the events of the past weeks which I now know were the result of the siren's song. I want to curl back up into the fetal position and force myself back to sleep so I don't have to face the damage I've caused to my life and those around me. How could I have let things get so fucked up?

Despite having far more clarity now, I'm still not entirely certain how much of my actions can be attributed to Kairi and what parts I might be to blame for. My stomach rolls when I think about the things that I have lost. Kelly, my job, I'm sure I've blown things with my friends too, especially Tom. I groan when I realize just how long it has been since I've spoken to my sister, Sienna. We used to talk all the time, and she was so concerned about me after the boat crash. She wanted to come and visit but I asked her not to, assuring her that I was fine. I can't even remember the last time we spoke. It's a wonder she hasn't come knocking on my door, cursing me out for

ignoring her.

The thing is, I regret my behavior immensely, but I don't regret things ending with Kelly. They absolutely should not have ended the way they did. Did they even actually end? Now that I think about it, I don't think we even had a conversation about breaking up. I was so disinterested and distracted that she left, and I didn't follow. At some point she came and packed up her things and I don't think I even noticed or cared.

I bury my head in my pillow and fight back the tears that burn behind my eyes. I know that I was not fully responsible for how I behaved but I feel like a huge asshole. Kelly and I had been together for a long time, I had even started to have thoughts about asking her to marry me. I had begun to have doubts about our relationship, feeling like we just weren't the right fit for each other but I tried to push those concerns away, telling myself that I was lucky to have someone like her. And I was lucky. I genuinely cared for her, loved her even, but there was a spark missing. No matter how hard I tried I couldn't deny it.

It pains me to know that I have hurt her so badly. I don't even know how to start repairing things. I don't want to get back together but she deserves some kind of answer, some closure.

I force myself to roll out of bed to at least get some food and search for my phone. In my state of madness, I was barely looking at my phone, not wanting to talk to anyone. I'm grateful for that now though as it means I didn't have it with me on the boat yesterday. Otherwise, it would probably be at the bottom of the ocean right now. Eventually I find it wedged between the sofa cushions and plug it into the charger. I feel like I need to call Sienna. Not only is she my sister but she is also my best friend and is probably worried sick about me.

While my phone is charging, I shuffle into the kitchen, the time on the microwave

showing me that it's one o'clock in the afternoon. Fuck! I slept for about seventeen hours. I brew myself some coffee and quickly realize that I have very little food in the house. Seems that I was neglecting myself just as much as I was neglecting everyone else. I manage to find an open box of cereal in the back of the cupboard. There's no milk so I eat it dry straight out of the box. I'm too hungry to care.

By the time I have finished eating, my phone has enough charge to turn on. As soon as I do so, it is flooded with messages. Most of them are from Sienna, becoming increasingly distressed when I did not respond. I take a deep breath and decide to make this phone call now. She needs to know I am okay and honestly; I need the comfort of her voice right now. I select her number and the phone rings.

Once.

Twice.

"Eagan? Is that you? What the hell is going on? I've been so worried. Kelly messaged me to tell me that you broke up with her. I'm going to come to Witches Cove. Something is obviously going on. Does it have something to do with the fishing accident? Are you hurt?" Sienna speaks so quickly that she barely takes a breath. She certainly leaves no time for me to interject. I've learned over the years that it is better to simply wait for Sienna to tire before even attempting to get a word in.

"Enna it's okay. I'm okay. Take a breath." I hear her obeying my command.

"You need to tell me what is going on right now." I don't really know what to tell her. It can't be the truth because she will think that I am crazy, but I don't want to outright lie to her either. I don't lie to my sister.

"You know about the boat accident Enna and how tough it was for me?" I talked to Sienna regularly in the days after the crash and I had to use a lot of my persuasion

skills to make sure she didn't get in her car and drive straight down to Witches Cove.

Sienna lives in a city about two hours away from Witches Cove and works as a professor at the college there. She specializes in the sciences. You would never guess that she is a scientist by her appearance alone. Sienna is a bright ray of sunshine, always bubbly and kind. To know Sienna is to love her. Just being around her is enough to brighten anyone's day. I think she loves the shock that crosses people's faces when they discover her profession and try to match it up with her blond Barbie appearance. I think people assume that she is dumb. I know a lot of men she deals with on a regular basis do but that is so far from the truth.

Sienna wanted to come straight here to support me as soon as she found out about the accident, but I wouldn't let her. I didn't want to cause problems for her at work if she had to take time off. Not to mention my stubborn ass was convinced that I was perfectly fine.

"I wasn't able to tell you before but my mental health kind of went to shit after everything that happened. I was experiencing a lot of flashbacks, anxiety, and panic attacks. I wasn't able to focus on my work and I wasn't able to give Kelly the support and care she needed from me. I'm so ashamed about how I treated her. She probably told you that I was a complete dickhead, am I right?"

Sienna laughs and sniffs and I can tell she is tearing up, "yeah something like that. Are you going to try and get her back?"

I sigh. "No. As much as I don't like how things ended, I think it was necessary. I have too much going on right now and although we tried, I don't think we were as compatible as I once thought. So..." I continue, "I was struggling a lot mentally and getting out of bed was hard most days. But I didn't realize until just recently, well yesterday actually, how bad I had actually become. I'm ready to do better now, Enna. I'm going to get myself back on track."

“Are you sure you’re okay? Without Kelly are you alone?”

“Nah don’t worry little sis, I’ve got people who will help me,” I lie.

“Good. It’s only two weeks until summer vacation and I’m coming to stay whether you like it or not. Don’t worry, I won’t crash in your space, I’ll get a hotel room. I know how you get. In the meantime, I want to speak to you every night. Every night, Eagan, do you hear me? You will not go radio silent on me again.”

“Deal,” I respond with a smile. It will be so good to see her again. She comes to visit when she can but it is never often enough. I miss her terribly. “I have to go, Enna. I love you.”

“Love you too, E,” she replies before ending the call.

That’s one problem fixed. A hell of a lot more to go before I’ve repaired the damage I’ve done to my life.

## Page 19

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 10:30 am*

### Chapter 19

Feeling more settled after my conversation with my sister I decide it's time to take a shower. Last night I passed out exactly as I was, which was filthy and disgusting, and I have a strong desire to erase all the evidence that yesterday happened. If I can purge all the dirt and sand from my body, then maybe I can rid myself of the memories. One can only hope!

I step into the hot stream and sigh as the water soothes my sore muscles. I watch as the sand that was caked onto my body mixes with the water and runs down the drain, the tension leaving my body in the same way. I close my eyes and tilt my head up to face the shower head. For the first time since the accident, being underwater is not causing me to panic. Now that all my memories have been released by Vala I am no longer tormented by the flashes of memory and fear that were haunting me before. It is such a relief to be free of the anxiety that I almost weep and I truly start to think that I may be able to get through this.

I remain in the shower for longer than usual until I feel like both my body and soul are finally clean. I have a new, more positive outlook on life. As I finish pulling on my plain black t-shirt there is a pounding on the door. I obviously don't move quickly enough because after only a few seconds, the knocking begins again.

"I'm coming," I call out, hurrying to the front door. I'm unnerved to see two deputies from the Sheriff's department and my anxiety spikes as I wonder why they are here.

"Mr. Reynolds?" The first one asks. I remember seeing him around town, but I don't know his name despite looking approximately the same age. My heart rate



immediately increases as I wonder why they are here.

“Yep, that’s me. How can I help you deputies?”

“In the early hours of the morning a boat was found abandoned a few miles offshore. The coast guard was called and once they checked the registration it was found to be in your name. Now, maritime matters are not usually under our jurisdiction but given recent events and your history with the recent boat crash, we were concerned about your safety and decided to conduct a welfare check. It looks like everything is okay though so can you explain why your boat was out there?”

Oh shit, shit! The thought of someone finding my abandoned boat didn't even cross my mind. To be fair, I was a bit preoccupied, but that means I haven't had the time to come up with a good cover story. Think, Eagan, think. My face heats with my racing pulse and I decide to feign ignorance and innocence.

“Shit, really?” I say with fake concern as I run my fingers through my freshly washed hair. “I honestly don’t know anything about it. I wonder if perhaps someone stole it? Is it okay though, the boat? Was it damaged?” The deputies share a look, and I can tell that my attempt to appear concerned was not as convincing as I had hoped but they definitely wouldn’t be able to guess the real reason for my behavior.

“It appears to be in perfect condition still, it’s just strange that we found no one aboard. Are you sure you don’t know anything?”

“I’m sorry deputies, I really don’t have anything to tell you. I’ve been struggling a little bit since the accident a couple of months ago and have mostly just been keeping to myself. Last night I was here, alone, trying to catch up on sleep. I also didn’t go out yesterday. As I said, I’ve been isolated.” The words leave me in a flood, and I wish I could scoop them back up again. That’s probably more information than was needed in this situation.

The deputies sigh, seemingly disappointed that I was not going to give up any more information. I wonder if my voice was steady enough, if my body was still and calm, and didn't betray my nerves.

“Okay, well thank you for your time, Mr. Reynolds. The boat has already been returned to the marina. Someone will be in contact soon for you to sign some paperwork to have it returned to your possession. Please let us know if you have any further information. As I'm sure you are aware, there are a lot of suspicious incidents that occur on the waters of Witches Cove. The more information we can get, the better.”

I nod. “Thank you, deputies. I'll be sure to let you know. Have a good day.” With my dismissal, they turn and leave. I shut the door and breathe out a sigh of relief. I didn't do anything wrong, but I also can't explain what happened. They won't believe me even if I try.

As much as I want to stay at home and continue to rest, I am ready to get back out into the world again. I have to. I have to try and remember what things were like before everything went to shit. To start with, I need food that is not dry cereal and after that—operation get my job back.

As I get dressed I notice that there is a lot more room in the waistband of my jeans than I'm used to and it's another reminder that I need to get back to looking after myself. Before all this I was a pretty healthy guy. I worked out and ate well enough to ensure that I had a nice amount of muscle definition without being too bulky. It worked for me but clearly, siren-afflicted Eagan did not care about going to the gym. I groan at the thought of the muscle pain that's going to come with going back.

At the store, I'm not being very observant of my surroundings and bump into Lacey, Tom's wife, almost cleaning her up with the shopping cart. This happens way too often. I should not be allowed to handle shopping carts.

“Eagan!” she exclaims, after I quickly apologize. “It’s been such a long time. Are you doing okay? Everything that happened at work was terrible. I know how much it hurt Tom to let you go.” Her surprise turns to concern, and it makes me nauseous. I feel undeserving of her sympathy.

I attempt to suppress my growing discomfort and soften my features to appear more approachable. “Thanks Lacey, it’s good to see you. I was suffering from some mental health issues after the accident, and it caused me to become a bit careless and destructive with my choices. I’ve been working on it and getting some help, and I am starting to feel a lot better. Please let Tom know how sorry I am for everything that happened and assure him that I am getting better. I recognize that I should have reached out for help a lot sooner than I did and now I am trying to make amends.”

Her eyes fill with tears, and I am immediately even more uncomfortable. I am not good at comforting crying women. She throws her arms around me. “I am so glad that you are starting to do better. I’ll talk to Tom, okay? We will try and get you around for some drinks. I know he has been missing you.” I nod and she waves goodbye as she continues with her shopping. I stand there for a moment and let out the breath I had been holding. There. That wasn’t too bad.

I paste a smile on my face and buy everything I need for home. When I’m ready to check out, a flash of red catches my eye. I turn just as a figure with long auburn hair turns the corner ahead. My stomach plummets and without a second thought I’m moving quickly down the aisle after her. I need to see if it is her. I catch up and reach out a hand to the woman's shoulder. She turns and glares at me. Not Kairi. It’s not Kairi. There’s a confusing pang of disappointment before I stammer an apology and rush away. In moments, my mood has soured because I’ve realized that even though things are better now that I'm not under her spell, I haven’t escaped her pull completely.

### Chapter 20

I wake up to the sounds of the sea birds and the soothing crash of the ocean. It takes me a little while to open my eyes as I remember all the events from yesterday. I uncurl from the position I had slept in and take the time to stretch out each of my limbs, the aches and pains in my muscles and joints as unfamiliar to me as sleeping on land for the first time.

Although sirens are able to come on land for twenty-four hours at a time, many of us don't last that long. I usually just come for some human food, a hook up, or just to observe people going about their day. Once I've achieved these things I usually return to the ocean. I've never seen a point to staying overnight on land and I've certainly never felt the urge to sleep next to someone I had fucked. No, I'm not the snuggling type. I use the men to sate my needs and that is it. Snuggling builds connections and I have never been afforded that luxury.

But today is the start of a new life. Things are different now. I still don't know where Eagan fits into my current predicament, but I am determined to figure out how to be human and maybe start making some friends. My sisters have been decent company and although Raidne is my true best friend, the others are supportive enough despite not understanding my desire for humans. Raidne and I were always a bit standoffish. Now that I think about it, I kept everyone apart from Raidne at arm's length.

The concept of a whole future on land is daunting. I know how to act like a human, but I don't know the first thing about actually being one. There's a rising panic when I try to think too far ahead about how I'm going to survive in this new world. I have to work at staying in the present moment and taking one step at a time. I will figure

things out eventually. I'm sure of it.

I move from the alcove I had slept in and dust of the sand that had attached itself to my body. Sand had never really bothered me before but goddess I had no idea it could get into so many places! The clothes I purchased last night have made me look a lot better than I did before but I know I need to bathe or find some way of washing myself. The ordeal of yesterday has left me dirty and gross and I think I'm beginning to smell. I consider washing off in the sea but decide that finding a freshwater source is better. I also need some food.

My stomach growls in hunger and I'm reminded that even hunger feels different in this body. The sun is high in the sky, and I realize that I had slept for quite a long time. The food I bought from the store last night satisfied me enough to fall asleep, but I want to buy myself something more substantial. Maybe something like that burger, Sammy, bought me a while ago. I salivate at the thought.

I run through the things I want to try and organize for myself today. I want to find a way to get clean, fill myself up with some tasty food and maybe buy a few other necessary items. I wonder if the woman, Kelsey from the boutique last night might be able to help me with some of these things. I'm reluctant to ask for too much help as I don't want to arouse suspicion, but she might be able to help enough to get me on my feet.

I start making the journey from my secluded section of the beach to town. On the way, I pass the main beach of Witches Cove. I can tell it is the main beach as there are already families there, playing together, swimming and fishing. A woman with two young boys walks up from the beach in front of me. The boys are complaining to who I assume is their mother. Disappointment laces their voices as they lament about having to go home. I can't help but watch in curiosity. I've always been interested in the children of humans. The offspring of sirens are quite different and become independent much quicker than humans.

“I know you don’t want to leave but we have to get going,” their mom tells them. “Come on, let’s wash that sand off so it doesn’t get all through the car.” I watch as the boys rinse off in the beach shower, their heads under the stream of water as they whine about the temperature of it. It occurs to me while watching them that I could use this to get clean. I can’t shower naked though.

I learned very quickly on land that humans have much different views on nudity. It is not acceptable to be naked in public spaces. Honestly, it seems like a silly rule given that humans all have bodies that look the same. But I am trying to remain inconspicuous. I know enough about being human to pass as one if you don’t look too carefully. But not enough to completely avoid suspicion if someone tries to talk to me. They will likely ask too many questions. Questions I simply don’t have answers for. I just need some time to figure it all out.

I make my way slowly to the boutique from last night, hoping that Kelsey will be there. She was kind and didn’t ask too many questions, which is exactly the type of person I would like to be around. When I reach the shop window, my mouth tips up in a smile when I see the flash of bright pink hair. I wait until a couple of women leave the store before deciding to enter.

“Oh, hi honey. You’re back,” she exclaims when she looks up from her register and notices me. “Do you need more clothing?”

I nod and tell her the cover story I had been preparing, “I do, and you were so kind to me last night that I knew you would be able to help me. See, I had to come to Witches Cove unexpectedly and without any time to prepare. I was only able to come with the clothes I had on me at the time.” Truth, but only enough of it to be plausible. Hopefully, Kelsey will fill in the gaps with her own interpretation of the situation. I see her eyes flood with sympathy.

“You poor thing. Let me see what I can help you with. What do you need?”

I listed the items I had been considering on my walk up here; a bathing suit for the shower to be more modest, a towel, another set of clothing or two. I see a few satchel style bags and add one of those to the list because I won't be able to keep carrying everything with me otherwise. I'm lucky that this small store happens to have a range of different items including those that I need.

Kelsey is more than helpful. She finds everything that I ask for and makes some suggestions of other things that would be beneficial as well. Like underwear. I know what it is, but I've never really had a need for it. It's probably a good idea that I start wearing it now. She also suggested I buy some shoes that protect my feet a little better than the flip flops I'm currently wearing. The total cost is far less than I expected and I'm so grateful I could cry. She gives me a hug as I leave telling me that she hopes I am able to get settled here.

Next on the agenda is to go to the general store. While there, I buy a hairbrush, a blanket, bottles of water and some more of the foods that I had bought last night, all of which fit into my new satchel. Thanks to my new purchases I am able to enjoy a shower by the beach. I wear my new bathing suit so that I simply look like any other beach goer washing off the sand and salt water. I luxuriate under the cool spray of fresh water running my fingers through my long, knotted hair. My body has always been made for salt water, which is what felt natural on my skin. But this is a completely different feeling. Right now, I can't stop the tingling sensation that flows over my skin. I feel energized and excited by all the new sensations and experiences that I am being exposed to. After years of feeling fatigued and lethargic from hunger, this new energy is a relief.

I'm disappointed that Eagan rejected me and left me alone, but I can't say that I miss being a siren. After observing humans for years, I'm finally getting to experience all the wonders and joy that they do. I wonder if Vala knows the gift she has given me in this bargain. It seems too good to be true.

Feeling fresher and cleaner than I have in a long time, my wet hair now free of sand and knots, air drying, I sit on a nearby bench and just exist. I relish in the warmth of the sun on my skin and close my eyes, allowing myself to soak in the feelings and sounds around me. There is peace in the ocean, but right now, I think I am more content right here.



### Chapter 21

It has been a week since my life was turned up-side-down. For the second time. I'm starting to get back to some semblance of normality. My mind feels clear. Strong. I still think about Kairi far more than I would like but not in the obsessive way that I did before. Well maybe not quite as obsessive.

It is more of a curiosity. Where is she? What is she doing? Is the money I gave her enough? Of course it wasn't enough. I try not to dwell on these thoughts because they bring up the guilt I'm trying to suppress. I don't know how a siren, a creature, until now, I never knew existed, would be surviving on land. The money I gave her is not going to last her long but she's going to have to figure something out eventually.

What if she's in danger? Where is she staying? A couple of times over the last week I have considered seeking her out to ensure that she is okay. I owe her that much for saving my life right? It feels stupid to feel guilty when she was the one who started all of this. But I am grateful for her help in fixing it. I always talk myself out of finding her and remind myself that the intention is to move on with my life. So yes, I think about her still, but I am able to do other things as well and take care of myself. It isn't like before. I am no longer under her wicked spell.

I am feeling like myself again. I've resumed my regular, pre-siren attack routine that includes eating well, going to the gym and having a full night's sleep. I'm even proud to say that I called Kelly. Not to try and win her back, but she deserved an apology. She rejected my first couple of calls but eventually answered. She did not sound at all happy to hear from me. But I said my piece. I explained how surviving an accident that killed my friends messed with my head. I told her about the panic attacks and

blamed them entirely for how I acted. I did apologize though. I apologized for how I treated her, how I didn't ask for help or admit that something was wrong until it was too late. I let her know that she didn't deserve the way I treated her. She accepted my explanation and my apology but said that she isn't interested in seeing me again. Talking to Kelly helped to ease some of my guilt and I hope that it will help her find closure as well. I might no longer be in love with her, but I do still love and want the best for her in life.

I leave my apartment late in the afternoon to go into town and in my haste, I run into a small man coming up the stairs. I wasn't looking at where I was going at all and bumped into him with a fair bit of force, knocking him off balance. "Oh shit, man. I'm so sorry about that. I wasn't looking where I was going. Are you okay?"

The man looks up at me, his dark framed glasses a little askew. He is fidgeting with his hands, and he looks nervous. I wonder if it is me that is having this effect on him. He straightens his glasses and runs his hands through his disheveled blond hair. He doesn't meet my eyes.

"Are you Eagan Reynolds?" He asks.

"I am," I respond, "and you are?"

"Err... um...My name is Rylan Thorn. I'm a journalist for the Cove Chronicle. I... um... Wanted to ask you some questions because I'm currently working on a story about the mysterious boat accidents and disappearances. You're the only person recently who has actually survived something like this."

I immediately go cold. A shiver runs through me and dread pools in my stomach. Another person asking questions. There are too many people wanting to know things that I can't speak about. It's leading to too many lies and half-truths. I don't feel like I'm clever enough to keep up with all the stories I am telling. I'm afraid I'll slip up

somehow and that I'll create even more suspicion. Rylan speaks quickly. Nervously. I get the impression that this young guy is relatively new to the job. He doesn't want to mess up and is probably hoping to get a big story to boost his career.

“Look I'm sorry, Mr. Thorn but I really don't have any interest in talking more about this. I'd like to just be left alone.”

I try to be polite and don't give him the opportunity to reply as I dart around him, but he places himself in front of me once more. “Mr. Reynolds, it's really important that you talk to me. I believe something suspicious is happening in Witches Cove,” he says, his voice steadier and more demanding this time.

My apprehension turns to frustration as he persists. “I said I'm not interested,” I growl. I push past him again and continue down the steps and to my car parked in the garage. As I drive away, I notice that he hasn't moved from where I left him on the steps. But he is looking at me. Rylan looks like a shy, nervous guy but he also seems determined. I don't need any added complications in my life. I'm going to have to keep an eye on him though. I don't want him to start digging. I don't think he could even imagine the shit he could uncover if he digs too deep.

In town, I run a few errands. Tom and Lacey have invited me over for lunch tomorrow. I'm really hoping that this will be a way to rebuild our friendship. I'm not naive enough to expect him to just give me my job back but I have missed having him as a friend. Even Lacey is someone I enjoy spending time with. Although, she was always closer to Kelly. I hope that Lacey doesn't hold a grudge about what happened with Kelly. She seemed to genuinely care about my wellbeing when we bumped into each other the other day. I didn't sense any animosity, but I will try to explain my actions better at lunch tomorrow, so she doesn't think I'm a complete asshole.

I like this time of day. Where the sky is alight with a spectrum of colors. It's

beautiful. The purple, pinks, oranges, and reds that fill the sky and bathe the earth in its glow. I take a few minutes to stop and appreciate the moment. Two months ago, I almost died. And then a week ago I almost died again, albeit, at my own hand. I've never believed in fate or the powers of the universe, but I can't help but wonder if there is a reason for my survival. Like perhaps it wasn't my time to leave this earth. I am grateful for the sacrifice that Kairi made for me and am determined not to waste my second, well third, chance at life. I want to spend more time with important people in my life. Don't get me wrong, I'm not going to suddenly turn into an extrovert, but I also don't want to be alone all the time.

The array of colors dancing above fade as the sun sets and turns the sky to the deep blue of night. I've achieved what I set out to do when I came into town today. I purchased some food and a nice bottle of wine to bring to Tom and Lacey's as well as some extra groceries. I also decided to treat myself to some new clothing for the gym, now that I am going again. The rolling of my stomach and the gurgling sound alerts me that it's time to consider dinner.

You know what? I could go for one of the delicious double cheeseburgers from Jessie's Diner. My mouth salivates at the thought and my stomach makes a noise that I'm sure could be heard by people across the street. I decide to grab myself a burger and fries to go. I don't really feel like eating out alone, so I'll bring it home to the comfort of my own apartment.

It's Saturday night and Jessie's is full to the brim with customers. The diner is always busy no matter the time or day but weekends are particularly rowdy. I feel overwhelmed when I open the door and am hit with the force of the sound within. I almost turn around and walk out. I have never been a huge fan of crowded environments, but I am especially prickly and over-stimulated by the sheer volume of people and noise here tonight. I guess I might still be a little sensitive after everything that has happened. I inhale through my nose and exhale slowly through my mouth. I focus on my food and order promptly, emphasizing that my order is to go.

While I wait, my eyes wander around the diner. Although I didn't grow up here, I've lived in Witches Cove long enough to recognize most faces. There are many I know by name and are friendly with in some capacity and others I merely recognize as being local.

I'm immediately drawn to the flash of deep auburn hair that catches my eye from a small booth to my right. I think I forget to breathe for a moment when I realize that it is Kairi. For once I'm not hallucinating. She's actually here.

Once I remember to breathe again and my heart resumes its steady beat I notice that she is not alone. My hands clench into fists involuntarily and I can feel a tick in my jaw. A man stands close to Kairi, leaning into her space as she sits in the booth. She looks like she has the exact same burger I ordered in front of her, but she hasn't touched it. This guy is in her way. I move a little to my right to try and get a closer look at her face. For some reason, I have to know what she is feeling. Is she interested in this guy? A strange feeling unfurls in my stomach that reminds me a lot of jealousy. But that's absurd.

She hasn't noticed me, so I take the opportunity to edge a little closer. I recognize the look on her face as discomfort. She isn't looking at the guy who is talking incessantly. Every time he reaches out a hand to touch a part of her body—far too frequently in my opinion—she flinches away. She doesn't look afraid, but she is certainly not at ease. My jaw ticks again as I clench my teeth together. I'm not sure why this is riling me up.

“Come on sweetheart, I bet I can show you a good time. Let me take you out. I promise I'll be the perfect gentleman,” Kairi cringes and leans away a little more before looking him straight in the eyes, a glimmer of defiance evident in her gaze.

“Thanks, but no thanks. I'm happy to just eat this burger here on my own. Nice to meet you, Logan, was it? But I'd like to eat my food before it goes cold, and you

should be getting back to your friends.” He’s irritated by her rejection but has no choice but to leave her booth when she turns her attention to her food and begins to eat. I’m still wary of the guy. I don’t think I recognize him, which means he’s either visiting or he’s new to town. I really don’t like the way he keeps his eyes on Kairi. It’s activating my protective instincts for some unknown reason, and it takes a fair bit of mental strength to look away from him and the beautiful seductress.

The waitress calls out my order and I pick up my meal, surprised to find that I’ve lost my appetite and instead I’m filled with a sense of unease. I can’t bring myself to go home. Something is grounding me here and my stubborn ass needs to know that Kairi is safe. I sit myself down on a nearby bench and start to eat, not really focusing on the food as I’m distracted by a myriad of other thoughts. I’m not sure how much time passes as my eyes flit to the diner door every time it opens.

Eventually, I’m rewarded for my patience when Kairi exits the diner. She’s alone and I exhale a relieved sigh. She doesn’t notice me and walks in the direction of the beach. As I pack up my trash and the food I couldn’t stomach, the door opens again. I’m immediately on edge and turn to see the man from before. He’s also alone and a sinking dread fills me as he heads in the same direction as Kairi. Something feels wrong. I think I’m a decent judge of character and this guy is giving me shady as fuck vibes. I can’t just leave when my gut is telling me that something is wrong, that Kairi might be in danger. I don’t allow myself time for a second thought before following them both.

### Chapter 22

A shiver runs through my body that has nothing to do with the cool breeze. Goosebumps pebble my skin, and I feel a sense of unease. I was uncomfortable in the diner, and I'm pissed off that my favorite meal was ruined by the guy that could not take a hint. I'm no stranger to attention but usually I welcome it whole-heartedly, desperate to make the most of my short time on land and feel close to someone. My priorities have changed. My time here is no longer limited, and sex is not the only thing on my mind. I want to live, truly live and experience what it's like to be human.

Truthfully, sex has been far from my mind over the recent days. I've had no interest in the men in town and I haven't given them a second glance. Without my siren song drawing them closer, lowering their inhibitions and increasing their confidence, if anyone has shown interest, I haven't noticed. Until tonight.

I don't know what it was about him that gave me the creeps, but I was on edge immediately when he walked up to the booth I was sitting in. He's objectively handsome, but plain and there was something about his eyes that made me feel vulnerable. Like prey. My automatic response was to shy away from him and try to display my disinterest by not engaging in conversation. I'm not usually docile but I'm still getting used to my new place in the world. He clearly did not pick up on the cues. Or just didn't care. He kept pushing, trying to get me to go out with him despite the fact I was clearly sitting down to enjoy a meal on my own. In the end I had to be firm.

My discomfort and frustration with the situation continued to rise as he kept trying to touch me. A soft touch to my shoulder, my arm. At one point he leaned down so close to me that I could smell the beer on his breath. I had had more than enough when he

placed a hand on my thigh and told him with complete conviction that I was not interested and was not going to go out with him. The flash I saw in his eyes at the moment concerned me, it was cruel, predatory. Like recognizes like. I've spent my whole life as a predator and in that moment, I recognized that this man saw me as prey. Fortunately for me, being in a crowded diner meant that he had no choice but to return to his friends to avoid causing a scene, but I didn't relax.

I'm so used to playing a part when I come to land, I very rarely act in a way that is completely authentic. I try to suppress my worry and the tinge of fear and fake a confidence that will hopefully convey that I am not weak or vulnerable. I focus on eating my burger, frustrated that it had gone cold and lost some of its taste due to my focus being elsewhere. I wasn't going to allow myself to lower my guard, so I remained vigilant.

When I was finished, I left the diner, ready to return the little alcove on the beach that I had made my own. I walk towards the beach and after about a minute or two, I hear the soft footfalls of someone behind me. I tense and all my senses are on high alert. I pick up my pace and hear the person behind me do the same. I'm being followed and I suspect it is the man from the diner. It isn't late at night but most of the people in town are gravitating to the main area of eateries and bars. Which means fewer people near the beach where I am heading.

"Oh sweetheart, why are you trying so hard to leave? We are alone now; you don't have to pretend you don't want me." My instincts were right about this one. He is a problem. But I don't know how dangerous he is. I ignore him but that makes him more irritated.

"Stop being a whore and leading me on. You can't look at me with those 'fuck me eyes' and then play hard to get. I'm getting tired of the games." This. Fucking. Guy. I was sitting in a diner trying to eat an orgasmic burger and he has the audacity to suggest I was giving him 'fuck me eyes'? If anything, I was giving those eyes to the



burger. The burger can satisfy me a hell of a lot better than I'm sure this guy would.

I weigh up my options.

I can run, but I don't have anywhere safe to run to.

I can yell for help. But I'm still hesitant to draw too much attention to myself.

Or I can fight. I want to fight but I'm suddenly all too aware of how fragile my new body is. As a siren I had my teeth, claws, and spikes. All capable of causing considerable damage to those who intended to bring me harm. I also had my song, which on land was my main defense. Now, I don't know what I have to defend myself with. I'm more vulnerable than I have ever felt before and for the first moment since meeting Vala, I wish I had my siren form back. He wouldn't be so cocky with his heart outside his chest.

I'm afraid and unsure but I'm going to fight. I'm not going to let this man take what is not his. While I used to use my song to manipulate men, I never took from them the way this man wants to take from me. My fear turns to fury when I think about how this is something that he has likely done before. How many other women has he preyed upon?

I turn to look at him. "There you go sweetheart. I knew you couldn't resist me for long. Are you done with playing hard to get?"

"Go fuck yourself," I spit. Was it my best line? Probably not, but I am beyond pissed off now. The streetlights cast just enough of a glow for me to see his face. It's contorted in fury.

"Why would I fuck myself when I can fuck you, you little bitch?" He growls as he starts towards me. I raise my hands in front of me and widen my stance for balance.

I'm prepared to punch, slap, gouge, do whatever I can to ensure that he goes down and does not take me with him.

He grips my wrist tightly. His nails dig into my soft flesh, causing me to gasp at the bite of pain. I don't get the chance to fight back because a shadow is launching himself at him from the side. Head down, he barrels into the predator pushing him to the floor. I gasp when the shadowed figure looks at me and the glint of sapphire eyes awakens butterflies in my stomach.

"Eagan," I whisper. He looks at me only briefly before raising his fist and smashing it into Logan's face. There's a sickening crunch followed by a howl of pain and a low groan as Eagan unleashes. The smell of copper, a scent I am all too familiar with, fills the air.

"Don't you ever lay a hand on her again," he snarls.

Eagan hits him once, twice, before rolling off of Logan and leaving him whimpering on the ground. Eagan's body is heaving as he sucks in air, his eyes a little wild and the droplets of blood stand out on his pale T-shirt. I notice the adrenaline leaving my body as I start to shake. It takes me a moment for my brain to recognize that I'm safe and relax my stance. I'm not sure what would have happened if Eagan hadn't been here.

"Are you okay Kairi?" he asks.

"What are you doing here?" I reply.

He runs a hand through his tousled hair. I can't help but be reminded about just how attractive I find this man. And I have to admit, the bloodied knuckles are a turn on. "I was at the diner and saw him bothering you. I had hoped that he would leave you alone after you turned him down, but I suspected that he wouldn't let it go. I stuck

around to make sure that he didn't follow. And when he did, and I saw what he was about to do..." he trails off.

"You decided to activate full protector mode," I finished for him. He shrugs his shoulders and looks sheepish.

"Well, um, yeah. I guess. I couldn't let him hurt you. I wouldn't let him hurt anyone. Guys like him are sick. Honestly, he deserves much more than what I gave him."

"Is he okay?" I question, although I'm not convinced that I give a shit.

He nods. "Yeah, probably just a broken nose. He will have a pretty banged up face to go with his killer hangover tomorrow. He's lucky it's not a lot worse."

Silence fills the space between us. It's not awkward per se, but it is clear neither of us know where to go from here. I distract myself from the fear and thoughts of what Logan was going to do to me by running my eyes over Eagan's body instead. The times that I have seen him, he was in the throes of madness from my song, his appearance was unkempt and disheveled, and the tinge of crazy was visible in his eyes. Nothing could have prepared me for how he looks under different circumstances.

He's trimmed his facial hair down to a short stubble that I long to run my hand over. His hair, while still a little long, is styled. Well, I assume that it was, but the scuffle has slightly mussed it up again. I am also able to fully appreciate his physique. The muscles of his biceps that poke out from the sleeves of his t-shirt, the veins in his forearms. It takes conscious effort not to drool when I picture what is under all the clothes.

He clears his throat, and I am pulled out of my fantasy. Oops. I think he caught me staring. I raise my eyes to him and give him a flirty smile.

“Where are you staying?” he asks me. “I don’t really feel comfortable with you walking around alone right now even though this guy isn’t going to be a problem.” He looks over to the lump on the ground who expels a moan, reminding me that we shouldn’t stick around in case someone finds us. “Are you staying in the motel?”

“Oh. Well, no. I’m sleeping on the beach.” He looks at me incredulously.

“You’re what?”

“I’m sleeping in a small alcove on the beach. It provides shelter, it’s warm enough and reasonably comfortable.”

“What about the money I gave you?” He inquires with suspicion.

“I want to make it last as long as possible because I’m not sure where I’m going to get money from after. The motel will eat into it too much. Food and other essentials are more important, and the beach is fine enough.” I respond, indignantly, to the suggestion that I wasn’t being wise with my money.

He shakes his head. “Fuck, it’s a wonder nothing has happened to you before now,” he mutters under his breath. “Sleeping on the beach. Fucking hell.”

“Hey, it’s none of your business. You wanted to be done with me, remember? I’m figuring things out okay.” He stares at me intently and I wither a little under his gaze. It’s starting to dawn on me that being out in the open while I sleep may not have been the smartest idea.

“I’m probably going to regret this, but I’ll feel guilty as hell if I don’t. I’m going to take you to get your things and then you’re coming home with me.”

### Chapter 23

Here I was thinking that I was starting to regain my sanity and then I go and do something like this. What was I thinking when those words flew out of my mouth? Clearly, I wasn't thinking at all. And now she's coming home with me. Good one, Eagan, invite the murderer and soul eater into your apartment. What a fantastic idea.

What a fucking disaster. My body still trembles with fury at what I just prevented from happening. I heard the disgusting things the man was saying to her and was surprised at the ferocity she gave back. But when he put his hands on her I saw red. I acted without thinking, my instincts pushing me to protect. It was fortunate that my gut feeling about the guy was right and I didn't go home like I intended. The thought of this vile man preying on and assaulting females he deems to be vulnerable sickens me. I can't help but think what would happen if someone tried to do something like this to Sienna. I can guarantee a couple of knocks to the face would not be all they receive.

Protecting her from this asshole happened subconsciously, but when I heard that she was sleeping on the beach, alone and with no protection from predators like the man bleeding on the ground beside us, I was overcome with the urge to keep her close. I look at her standing in front of me, shivering despite the balmy summer air, wearing a pale, mint green sundress with one strap sliding off her shoulder. One thought takes root in my mind as I take her in.

Mine.

It is only a matter of time before something bad happens to her out on the beach and

after tonight I don't want to feel responsible for stepping back and allowing it to happen. At least this way I can keep her safe while also keeping everyone else protected from her.

Kairi still looks at me warily as she processes my offer. "You want me to come with you? Back to your place? I don't know if that's a good idea. I've been doing okay on my own so far. I don't want to cause you any more trouble."

"Don't argue, you're coming. Just lead me to where you have been sleeping so we can get home before someone finds this guy."

"Are you just going to leave him here?"

The man has started to groan and moan and some of my anger returns making me want to punch him all over again. Absolute dick stain of a human being. I nod at Kairi's question and take her hand in my bloody one. She doesn't flinch at the sight of blood, but I notice her quiver when we touch.

Kairi leads me to her alcove on the beach and for some reason I am unable to pull my hand from hers. I can't help but focus on the softness of her skin. It's warm and smooth. This siren is difficult for me to understand. She seems nervous around me but I have also seen glimmers of confidence and sass that indicate that she is not the timid girl that she may appear to some. She's a contradiction—vulnerable but fierce. Sweet but deadly. I don't know how to feel or act around her.

I realize that she didn't answer my question the first time so ask again, "are you okay, Kairi?" She looks over at me and I feel like I'm falling under her spell again just by gazing into her emerald green eyes.

She bobs her head. "Yes, he didn't do anything other than call me names and grab my wrist. You got there just in time though. Thank you."

“How were you going to fight him?” I ask curiously. She looked like she was ready to unleash on him.

She shrugs her shoulders. “No idea. But I wasn’t going to go down without a fight. I may not have my sharp claws and teeth, but I was willing to find out what these human ones can do.” With that, she gives me a grin and I see a peek of that viciousness come to the surface.

“Okay, vicious one, show me where this cave you’ve been sleeping in is.” Not sure where that pet name comes from, but at this point, I’m just rolling with the chaos that is my life.

She shows me the little secluded rock cave that she created as a home for herself, and I have to give it to her; it’s not the worst place she could have stayed. It looks like it would have kept her semi-protected from the elements and I don’t think anyone would have seen her unless they knew she was there. Unfortunately, that wouldn’t stop someone from following her here.

My stomach churns thinking about a young woman sleeping alone here on the beach with only a small blanket for comfort. It must have been uncomfortable.

“I like the sound of the waves. It reminds me of home,” she says softly. I don’t think I really appreciated until now what she gave up for me. She must be missing her home, her friends, her family. I don’t even know if there are other sirens like her—who venture to land and interact with humans.

As quickly as my sympathy for her comes, as do the other thoughts of her true nature. Thoughts of her ripping apart Don, Steve and Brenton, sucking their souls right out of their bodies. I remember that although she looks like a pretty girl right now—okay I admit it, a beautiful girl—there is still a monster that lurks within. I can’t forgive her for these things that easily.

My body tenses at the thoughts and Kairi notices, pulling away and resuming her shy mask. She is very good at hiding her ferocity. No one would ever expect how she had spent her life so far, a creature of the ocean only ever thought of as a myth. I have to remember though; I won't let her suck me in again.

Strengthening my resolve, I wait back while Kairi collects her belongings. Everything she has fits into one medium size shoulder bag.

"Is that everything?" I ask.

"Yep," she responds, popping the p sound.

"Well, okay then. Let's head off and get you somewhere safe for the night"

We walk back to my apartment in an uncomfortable silence while I scan the environment to make sure that there is no one following us. I worry that if I try to start a conversation it will just increase the pull I feel towards her.

"You don't have to do this," she says quietly.

I huff. "Yes, I do; you're going to get yourself killed otherwise." She doesn't reply but I find myself glancing at her wishing she would have taken the bait and shown me some more of that feistiness. She looks slightly annoyed with me but isn't fighting me, I'm not sure why I'm disappointed by that.

When we arrive back at my apartment Kairi takes a moment to take in everything around her. "Where would you like me to go?" she asks.

"There's a spare bedroom here." I show her to the room across the hall from mine. It's small but it has a bed and is a hell of a lot better than lying on the sand. Without hesitating, she flops herself face first on the bed and groans.



“Ummff...This is soooo comfortable,” she says, her voice muffled by the pillow she has her face pressed into. A short bark of laughter escapes me, surprising her and also myself.

“I want to lay here on this heavenly pillow of comfort forever,” she says dreamily, her eyes already closing as she snuggles beneath the blanket.

I cough. “So, yeah, you can stay in this room. There’s food and water in the kitchen, and the bathroom is the next door down from this room. Anything else you need?” I stop talking when a soft snore reaches my ears. She has already fallen asleep.

Like a creep, I watch her for a few minutes. I take in the way she sleeps folded into herself, trying to make herself as small as possible. From here, I can see the smatter of freckles that dust her nose and cheekbones, small marks on her creamy, white skin. The same beautiful spots freckle her shoulders. Her long hair fans around her, some long strands falling over to cover her face. I resist the urge to reach over and push those strands behind her ear. The last time I saw her, her hair was soaking wet from the ocean and the rain. It then dried into clumps from the sand and the salt. Now, it shimmers, shines, and has such a depth of color. God, I want to run my hands through it.

I shake myself out of my trance and walk out of the room, shutting the door behind me. I know I thought this earlier but I am even more certain now that bringing her here was a mistake.

I can’t deny that I am attracted to her. I am entranced by her beauty in the same way that her song bewitched me. I wonder if this desire is a remnant of her song and the madness it caused. If it takes a while to fade. Or if it never will. The thought unnerves me.

In these few interactions I have had with her, I also can’t help but find her interesting.

She has a spark that I can't describe but am drawn to. But that's okay right? I can be attracted to someone without having to act on it. Yes, that's what's going to happen. I'm going to ignore these jumbled-up feelings until they go away.

It's not even that late at night, but I feel weird being up while Kairi sleeps, and once again, I've got too much running through my mind. I go to my room and get ready for bed. I'm hyper-aware of Kairi in the room across the hall. I toss and turn, trying to find a comfortable position before lying on my back and staring at the ceiling. I can't get her off my mind and I'm furious about it.

### Chapter 24

I wake to the sound of a voice. His voice . It takes me a while to remember where I am and how I wound up here, but it all rushes back. The man at the diner, the way he followed me with intent to harm me, Eagan showing up out of nowhere and bloodying up his knuckles for me, and then offering me a place to stay. For a few moments last night, he looked at me like I wasn't a monster. He even held my hand, and I couldn't stop the warmth that spread through my skin at the touch. It didn't last though. I saw the moment that he remembered who I am. What I am. It was like a wall slammed down over his features, and any kindness I saw in his gaze was replaced with disinterest and reproach.

I recall coming back with him to his apartment and meeting my true love in the form of this amazing bed. I don't recall anything after that. I take stock of my appearance. I'm still in the mint green dress from yesterday. I can't believe I fell asleep without even taking the time to take off my shoes. I must have just passed out the moment I got comfortable. My cheeks warm as I realize I have no recollection of saying good night to Eagan. Goddess, did I fall asleep right in front of him? I let out a yawn and stretch out my body. Even after a full week of being human, the sensation of stretching my muscles, hearing the little pops as everything falls back into place, still feels wonderful.

Eagan's voice sounds from outside my room. That's what woke me up. The shades are pulled down over the window, making it impossible for me to tell what time it is, so I reluctantly pry myself away from heaven to look outside. As I suspected, the sun is high in the sky indicating that, again, I slept for a long time. I swear all this body wants to do is sleep! And now that I've discovered this bed, I'm not sure I ever want

to stop.

I kick off my shoes, grateful to feel the floor on my bare feet. Note to self: shoes come off before sleep. I leave my room and hesitantly enter the kitchen where Eagan sits at the island bench. I'm nervous to see him again and a bit embarrassed about falling asleep so quickly last night. He glances at me. "Gotta go Tom, I'll see you and Lacey in a couple of hours." He ends the call, placing it down in front of him.

"Good morning," he says, and a pang of disappointment stabs my chest when I recognize the same closed off tone of voice he used last night and not the warm one I caught a glimpse of. "Did you sleep well?" The corner of his mouth lifts up in a small smirk and once again my cheeks heat in embarrassment.

"I can honestly say I've never slept anywhere so comfortable before. It's like sleeping on a cloud. I am sorry that I fell asleep so quickly though, you didn't even really get a chance to show me around or let me know what you expect from me being here."

He sighs and runs a hand through his hair that is gorgeously tousled from his own sleep. "God I don't even know what to expect from you. I don't like the idea of you being exposed on the beach and running into trouble again like last night but to tell you the truth, I'm not super comfortable with you being here either." Ouch, that hurts.

"I'm not sure how this is going to work but for now, just hang out here, sleep here and eat the food in the fridge. I'll try and figure out what to do with you later. I'm going out soon though."

I nod and my stomach lets out a loud grumble. His little lop-sided smile returns, and I swear I'd give anything to witness the power of his full smile. "Hungry are we? Sorry I don't have human flesh on the menu today," he says dryly and seriously, picking up a glass of water to drink. There it is. Just another sign that he thinks I am despicable and despite him showing kindness by allowing me to stay, it's temporary and he will

be trying to get rid of me as soon as possible.

My shoulders slump forward a little but I draw upon my snark and give it right back to him. “Oh damn! And here I was thinking you look so delicious and hoping you might serve yourself up to me on a silver platter.” Eagan chokes on his water and after catching his breath he looks at me warily, his mouth twitching. I can see him trying to decide if I am serious or not. I let him off the hook this time. “I’m just joking! The food humans eat is fucking delicious. I’ll have anything you’ve got. Can I please have a shower first though? I’m feeling pretty gross after sleeping like the dead.” I don’t really wait for an answer before walking to the bathroom. I smile to myself at my ability to keep him on his toes even though I don’t always feel the confidence I display. I don’t want him to see that the way he reacts to me hurts.

After spending a minute or so playing around with the different temperature knobs until the water flowing from the shower head is beautifully hot, I can’t help but groan as the spray seeps into my skin, causing a state of relaxation that makes my legs feel wobbly. I could get used to the luxury of the human world. I find some body wash and rub that over my skin until I feel clean and soft. I inhale and breathe in the hints of coconut and spices. It smells like him.

I realize when I’m finished that I don’t want to put on the same dress I was wearing last night. I’ve been wearing it for a while and it’s in desperate need of a wash. There is a towel though, so after giving my hair and body a quick dry I wrap it around myself. It covers everything that humans get weird about seeing so I don’t think twice before leaving the bathroom.

“What are you doing?” I look down the hall and see Eagan leaving what I assume to be his bedroom. He’s staring at me, pupils blown and with a faint tinge of pink to his cheeks.

I smile at him. “I’m going to change into some of my other clothes. The dress was a

bit disgusting, and I didn't want to put it back on now that I'm clean."

He coughs. "Can you er... maybe... not walk around naked when you are here?" I look at him confused, an eyebrow raised.

"But I'm not naked. My tits and my pussy are completely covered. That's what normally makes you humans uncomfortable right?"

"Fucking hell," he mutters under his breath while rubbing a hand over his face. "Just put some clothes on okay."

"Alright, alright, I'm going. Don't stress," I huff. Humans are so strange with their views about other people's bodies but I am hit with the satisfaction that seeing my body seemed to have an effect on him. He's not so repulsed by me after all.

Eagan has been out of the house for a couple of hours now. He didn't say where he was going or when he would be home. I guess it isn't really my business. I'm very unsure about my place here and what I am supposed to do when he is out. He said I can sleep and eat here but what else?

Am I allowed to leave? I'm going to get bored if I have to stay around this apartment all the time. I wonder if being here is simply delaying the inevitable. He isn't going to want me around forever. If I get used to these human luxuries and his attention, it will hurt all the more when he kicks me to the curb. I should leave now before he gets the chance to rip my heart out. Figuratively of course, after all, I was the one who ripped out hearts.

I wander into the kitchen for the second time since he left. I'm not used to having such a wide range of foods at my disposal. The fresh fruit is particularly delicious but, of course, does not come anywhere close to the burger from the diner. I pick out a red apple that is sitting in a bowl on the kitchen island. I take a large bite and relish

the sweetness that coats my tongue. I bring it with me to the sofa, continuing to take bites as I go.

Eagan has a television. I've seen them in the diner and at a couple of the places I went to with men I seduced. I know it's controlled by some kind of remote. After looking for a couple of minutes, I find it. I settle into the comfortable cushions with my feet tucked underneath me. I press a few buttons on the remote before the extremely large television comes to life. I stare in awe as I have never really spent much time paying attention to these things before now. I manage to navigate my way to something that has various television shows and movies available to watch at any time. I find something that catches my interest called Love Island which looks like they have shoved a bunch of attractive men and women on an island together to see what will happen. It sounds fun. This will keep me occupied until Eagan comes home. Sitting in a comfortable chair, relaxed, and fully sated with food at my disposal, I decide that I'm going to hang around. At least for a little while.

### Chapter 25

I couldn't get out of the apartment fast enough after seeing Kairi soaking wet and in just a towel. And fuck! Hearing her say the words tits and pussy had my mind wandering to those times on the beach when I did see her completely naked. Despite my muddled memories, I can still very clearly recall the shape of her body. She was teasing this morning, first with the comment about eating me, which kind of made me nauseous and then, leaving the bathroom in just a towel. Now though, my mind is merging the two of these things together and I can't help but think what she would taste like. Of course, I'm not thinking about actually eating her. Eww. But picturing her naked is making me want to press my lips to every part of her body and take in her salty ocean scent that hasn't dissipated in the time she's spent on land. I want to move my lips over her neck, her breasts, her stomach and eventually between her legs... Fuck! I shake my head and give myself a mental slap. I am not going to go there. I have self-restraint. I think.

Because I left the house earlier than I needed to, desperate to get away before I threw myself on her, I spend some time driving around aimlessly. I attempt to will my raging hard-on to soften before I have to go to Tom and Lacey's. I'm not having much luck though as the memories of her seem to have imprinted themselves. I try to think about some of the worst things to get my dick to go down and finally have success.

I pull into Tom and Lacey's driveway and pause for a moment before getting out of the car. I'm nervous. It's a positive sign that they wanted to catch up today. It's more than I deserve after screwing over Tom at work. I'm worried that they are going to still be angry with me and demand more answers than I will be able to provide. I've



already decided that I'm going to stick with the story of being mentally ill and now receiving help. It's not too much of a stretch and means I will have a consistent story. I take a couple of deep breaths to center myself. I put the siren out of my mind so I can focus on rebuilding these friendships.

Tom and Lacey greet me like nothing has changed. Lacey gratefully accepts the wine I offer with a kiss on the cheek and Tom gives me a handshake that turns into one of those one-armed bro hugs. My nerves remain present but lessen due to their warm welcome. It feels different to be here without Kelly beside me, but Tom and Lacey are my friends, and I have always felt comfortable with them. We start the conversation with neutral topics. I can tell that Tom wants to ask about what happened. He's fidgeting in his seat and keeps glancing at Lacey. I steel my resolve and choose to get the conversation out of the way sooner rather than later.

"Look Tom, I know you have questions, but I'd like to get my apology out of the way first if that's okay?" He nods so I continue. "The boat accident messed me up man. I wasn't close to Don, Brenton, and Steve but I still grieve their loss and feel guilty as hell for coming away from it unscathed. I did not handle the aftermath of this well and made some fucked up decisions. I know now that what I was experiencing was post-traumatic stress disorder but at the time I refused to accept that something was wrong. I know I've talked to you about my upbringing before. My father never allowed me to show emotions so I tried and tried to push it all down but obviously that doesn't work. I can't apologize enough for the way I treated you, Tom. It is completely unacceptable that I just stopped showing up to work without even talking to you. You had every right to fire me. I just wanted to let you know how sorry I am and that I'm really trying to get my life back on track now." My eyes start to burn but I refuse to cry.

"I knew you were struggling, Eagan. I think we all did but we just didn't know how to help you. I'm not gonna lie and say I wasn't pissed off. I still am to be honest. But mostly, it sucked to see you hurting and shutting us all out. I know Kelly was having

a really hard time with it as well,” Tom said gently.

I sighed. “Yeah things did not go well with Kelly. I’ve made my apologies to her as well, but things are definitely over.”

“We’re sorry, Eagan,” says Lacey.

“Don’t be. I don’t like how it ended but I’m glad we’re over. We weren’t meant to be forever.”

Tom pauses and I can see the tension in his shoulders. I hold my breath as I wait for what he is going to say next. What if he doesn’t forgive me? Have I ruined years of friendship? Tom glances at Lacey who gives him an encouraging smile. He then slaps a hand on the table, making me jump. “Okay now that’s out of the way, let’s just put it behind us. I appreciate and accept your apology, Eagan. We may even be able to talk in the future about you coming back to work but let’s not do that today. I’ve missed my friend, and we are glad to have you back.” He smiles at me, and I return it, a heavy weight lifting off my chest. With every conversation I have, I feel like things are getting back to normal.

Lunch with Lacey and Tom is exactly like our catch ups have always been. After the awkward initial conversation we don’t speak about anything too deep and just enjoy each other’s company. Tom offers me a beer. Then another. And then one more before I decide to cap it there. I remember that I am going home to Kairi, who I have no business being this attracted to, and I do not want to be drunk when I go back there. We joke and laugh, reminiscing about the past and I feel lighter than I have in a long time. I can’t believe that I almost ruined this irreparably. It’s early evening when we decide to call it a day. There’s a part of me that is reluctant to go home and face Kairi, but my base instincts seem to be pulling me there. Being around her is going to be harder than I could have ever anticipated. Especially if she is going to live by the ‘clothing optional’ philosophy.

I don't know what I expect to walk into when I get home. I've left Kairi home alone with absolutely no instructions. She could have torn the place apart for all I know. Shit. I didn't even consider that she may rob me. Oh well. Too late to do anything about it now. I was absolutely not prepared to find Kairi sitting on the sofa, legs tucked beneath her and watching some ridiculous reality TV show. She also looks like she's been raiding the kitchen for food as wrappers and apple cores litter the space around her. She's so engrossed in the show that she doesn't even hear me walk in.

I clear my throat, and she startles. "Fuck, I didn't hear you come in." She smiles widely and I swear my heart skips a beat. She is so god-damned beautiful.

"Having fun?" I question with a smirk.

"Goddess yes!" She bounces in her seat and tells me all about the show she is watching in far more detail than I need. I can't help but smile back as her excitement is contagious. "... oh, and the food you have is so good. I've just been wanting to try everything, but I think I've stuffed myself so full there is no room for anything else." She leans back and rubs her stomach. I laugh and her eyes brighten.

"Did you have a good day?" she asks.

"Yeah I did," I acknowledge. She smiles again in a way that is different to those I have seen previously. This is not snarky, teasing, or unsure. She looks genuinely happy right now and my chest warms at the realization.

"What did you do? Where did you go? Can you tell me about it? I've never really had the chance to just talk with someone about their day. I want to know everything." She rambles all excited and bubbly. It's kind of cute actually. No. Not cute. Monster, remember?

“Wanna sit down and watch with me for a bit? I can explain what’s happening,” she questions with a tinge of insecurity in her voice, gesturing towards the TV. And for some completely unknown reason I sit myself down beside her to do just that.

### Chapter 26

K airi has now been staying in my apartment for a week. Things are going well but I swear if I have to tell her to put on more clothes one more time I'm going to lose my fucking mind. She has absolutely no problem wandering around the place in a towel, tiny little shorts or even her underwear. Sometimes I wonder if she is completely oblivious to the effect it has on me but then I see her look at me and bite her lip and I know that this vicious one knows exactly what she is doing.

This week I have jerked off more frequently than I ever have before. The need to come is relentless. And every single time I picture her. The way she smiles so brightly at the most mundane things, like chocolate and a soft blanket. The way she bites her lip seductively when she strides into the kitchen in a thong and barely there bra to get a snack while I grip the counter with white knuckles using every bit of strength I possess not to lay her down on the island and feast on her. The soft little snores she makes as she falls asleep on the sofa watching TV and the touches she gives me far too often to consider them accidental. All of these things are leading to an obsession I am struggling to contain. This is different to when I was under her spell. I didn't know her then. Now I'm seeing all of these parts of her, and I can't seem to connect this version of Kairi to what she used to be before. I often find myself forgetting all the things she has done and becoming far too comfortable in her presence, but I have not allowed myself to cross that imaginary line.

And that is why, just like every other day this week, I'm in the shower with my hand wrapped tightly around my cock. I replay the way her fingers traced my thigh last night as we sat together and watched that fucking reality show she's now become addicted to— okay, I admit she has gotten me into it too. It makes me laugh that she's

gone and got herself addicted to reality TV. It's such human behavior.

She ran her long fingers up and down my thigh while sparks of electricity flooded my body. Kairi is never overtly sexual, but I've learnt that she is flirtatious by nature. She never pushes for anything, and I feel confident that she would stop if I ever showed any discomfort, but god does she push the limits of my restraint.

I let myself fantasize about what I would have done last night if my head hadn't gotten in the way. I picture that it is her hand around my cock right now, stroking up and down, giving small squeezes at the tip. I let out a loud groan and my left-hand braces against the shower wall as I close my eyes and give in to the sensations. I picture her straddling me on the sofa, holding my dick between our two bodies and then I taste her the way I've been dreaming. Her lips, her neck, her nipples. My hand speeds up, in time with hers in my fantasy and I moan again. My balls tighten and I yell out her name as I spray cum all over the shower tiles. Fuck! What is this girl doing to me?

I exit the bathroom using a towel to dry my damp hair. I bump into Kairi who is coming out of her room at the same time.

"Nice shower?" she asks with a smirk. Fuck, did she hear me? I wasn't as quiet as I should have been, too caught up in the moment to even think about her hearing me. Or... maybe I wanted her to. I momentarily wrestle with that thought before giving her a shrug and moving into the kitchen. She follows and sits close to me at the island. Probably closer than what others would see as necessary, but I choose not to comment on it.

My phone buzzes with an incoming call and I pick it up not bothering to move away from Kairi once I see Sienna's name flash.

"Eeeeeeee!" she squeals. "I'm on my way. It's going to be so good to see you, it's

been way too long.” It hasn’t been that long, but I know we both wish we could see each other more. She continually tries to convince me to move to her city, but I have never liked the idea of leaving Witches Cove.

“Can’t wait to see you, Enna. Have you booked a room at the hotel?” While I don’t hate the idea of Sienna staying here, it’s more complicated with the addition of Kairi. I have no idea how I’m going to explain her presence. I’m not really going to be able to hide it.

“Yep,” she replies. “But you know I’m going to be coming to see you right away. I miss my big brother.”

“Miss you too, Enna. Drive safe and I’ll see you in a couple of hours.” I end the call and look over at Kairi who is completely focused on me with one arched eyebrow, the question clear on her face.

“So that was my sister Sienna,” I begin.

“Oh! Tell me more,” she exclaims.

“Well, she’s a biology professor at Blackwood College and classes just finished for summer break. I haven’t seen her since... well before everything happened and she insists on coming to check up on me.”

She nods and stands up to get herself something to eat from the fridge. Man, this girl can eat! I swear if she goes longer than an hour without snacking she gets snappy. I’ve been making sure to stock up on food this week, so we don’t run out. I’m quickly learning her favorites. It’s pretty easy to tell what she likes when she moans like she’s coming every bloody time she finds something delicious. I thought she was doing it on purpose but no, she really just likes food that much.

“Am I allowed to meet Sienna?” she asks and I still. Do I want that? At my apparent hesitation she back tracks, “I don’t have to. I’m sure I can make myself scarce while you hang out.” Despite her words, Kairi’s eyes are filled with hope, and I want to make her smile again.

“Yeah, you know what? I think you both would get along.” And there it is. That smile. The one that holds my heart hostage and makes me want to forget all my morals and ideas of right and wrong, and just drown in her. “Maybe you can both go shopping or something, get some new clothes and things?” I offer nonchalantly. I’m hyper aware of everything that involves Kairi, so it hasn’t escaped my notice that she rotates through the same couple of outfits. Her smile widens even more.

“Really? Would you be okay with that? I don’t have any money though.” Her face falls at the realization.

“Don’t worry about it, I’m happy to give you some. We will eventually have to talk about trying to get you set up with a job though. You have to start planning for the future.” She nods in agreement and her smile dims, as she retreats into contemplation for a moment. I still don’t really know what her future plans are. I suppose at some point I should ask.

Her expression quickly brightens, and the spark returns as she throws her arms around me in a hug.

“Thank you so much, Eagan. You don’t know how much this means to me.” I remain in her arms, reluctant to pull away. The warmth of her body presses against mine. Her face leans softly into the crook of my neck and I rest my chin on her head, allowing myself to just breathe in her ocean scent. My arms slip around her waist, and we just stay there in each other's embrace, neither one of us wanting to ruin this moment. God, when I’m this close to her all I want to do is kiss her. It would be so easy to tip her chin up and taste those perfectly pink lips. So easy...



She pulls away just as I feel my head beginning to give in to the whims of my heart. A pang of disappointment causes an ache in my chest, but she looks out at me from under her eyelashes, bites her lip and I swear I'm going to tell my brain to go to hell and throw myself at her. But before I move, she gives me a wink and leaves me alone in the kitchen, once again with a dick as hard as a rock.

### Chapter 27

I leave Eagan in the kitchen and walk confidently to the room I'm staying in, working hard to keep the excitement at bay. When the door closes behind me I let it all out. A squeal leaves me, and I jump up and down in a weird little dance. I think Eagan's starting to like me and I get to go shopping.

This last week has been a test of my strength. I want Eagan. I was drawn to him from the moment I saw him, and unlike him, it wasn't a spell or enchantment that made me feel this way. This week has been wonderful. One of the best of my life. I feel like I'm getting to know Eagan and I can tell that I have captured his attention. We seem to be able to cohabitate quite peacefully together but I still see the flashes of anger in his eyes when he feels we have gotten too close. I notice the way he pulls away and slams his mental walls back up, shutting me out.

I can't help myself though. The desire to be close to him is overwhelming. Without conscious thought my body reaches out to his and I often find myself gently stroking his skin or resting my head on his shoulder while we watch TV together. While I don't control these movements, I definitely choose to walk around the apartment in little clothing. There's no doubt that I've learnt what he would consider an 'inappropriate amount of clothing,' but I can't resist the look of absolute need in his eyes when he sees me like that. It's a look so full of lust that I could get drunk off it.

A moment ago, I truly thought that Eagan was about to give in to the temptation and kiss me. When I noticed, I was flooded with fear because I don't want us to take that step and then have him reject me. I don't feel strong enough to cope with being turned down. So, like a coward, I bailed. Eagan is the first man who has ever had the

chance to know the real me. I don't act with him. I want to be authentically me now that I'm living as a human but with everyone else I still have to keep a big part of me a secret. But not with Eagan. I'm afraid that being rejected by him will hurt more than anything else I've endured because it will mean that I'm not enough for him.

Eagan said that it's going to take about two hours for Sienna to drive here. I can't wait to meet her, but I wonder what Eagan is going to do to explain my presence in his apartment. I use the time to have my own shower and get dressed in the mint dress I always wear when I want to look nice. It's not like I have many other items to choose from. But I will soon!

Eagan lounges on the sofa while I pace back and forth behind it, filled with nerves at meeting Eagan's sister. "Can you cut that out?" he asks with a sigh. "You're making me nervous to see my own sister."

"I can't stop," I say, bouncing on the balls of my feet. "I'm so excited to meet another human." His eyes darken.

"Don't say shit like that. Remember you are a human." I'm briefly chastised before the bouncing starts up again. He rolls his eyes but can't stop the little lift of the corner of his mouth.

A rapping on the door causes a little squeak to escape me and my hands fly to my head to make sure my long hair is flat and smooth. I want to make a good impression, and I want her to like me. Eagan jumps up to answer the door and I flit nervously behind him.

The moment he unlatches the door, it flies open, and a hurricane blows in—a whirlwind in the form of a leggy, blond bombshell who starts talking before she's barely crossed the threshold. She throws her arms around Eagan, and he squeezes her right back, lifting her slightly off the floor.

“Oh my god, Eagan, I swear this semester has been an absolute nightmare at work and I am in desperate need of some down time and relaxation. Please, please, please tell me we can have some time together watching movies and eating ice cream like we used to?” She stops abruptly when she catches sight of me standing awkwardly behind Eagan. “Umm, E, want to introduce us?” she asks, gesturing towards me.

Eagan rubs the back of his neck. “Sienna, this is Kairi. She’s a... friend?”

I let out a snort and when Sienna asks, “was there a question mark at the end of that statement, Eagan?” I can’t help but giggle.

“Don’t mind him, we haven’t quite defined what we are yet. It’s a strange situation we have found ourselves in.” Eagan sucks in a breath and I continue, “I had to leave my town suddenly. I was... unsafe. I wasn’t able to bring anything with me and was struggling to find somewhere safe to stay. Eagan found me after a run in with a drunk asshole and kindly offered me his spare room. We’ve only just started to get to know each other.” The story worked on Kelsey in the boutique so I thought this would be a safe explanation to use again. Just enough truth to be believable. Eagan meets my eyes over Sienna’s shoulder and mouths a “thank you,” his eyes shining with stark relief. Did he expect me to just blurt out that I’m a siren-turned-human? I’m not stupid.

Sienna pauses briefly and gives me a slightly suspicious look. I hold my breath until she shrugs in acquiescence and laughs. “Hmm I feel like you’re leaving something out of the story but trust my brother to take you in. He’s always trying to help others. You wouldn’t know it because he’s always brooding and is super anti-social, but he cares a lot about people.”

I can see what she’s saying, yes, he puts on the grumpy guy act and plays it well, but I’ve seen parts of the kindness Sienna mentions. Obviously taking me in and offering me help despite our history was the biggest act of kindness. But it’s also in the

smaller things, like him watching Love Island with me every day this week and the way the kitchen is always stocked with crunchy apples and chocolate bars because he's learned those are my favorite. He doesn't have to do these things, but he does because I think, beyond his fear, he might actually care.

Eagan just huffs at Sienna's compliment and rolls his eyes, but he can't hide the love he has for his little sister and the joy he feels at having her home. She softens his whole demeanor. Looking at them both, you wouldn't guess the two are siblings. While Eagan is dark haired and pale skinned, Sienna sports a golden tan and pin-straight long blond hair. The one feature they seem to share though, is their eyes. When Sienna looks over I see sapphire eyes, so like Eagan's staring back at me. She's surprisingly tall, quite a bit taller than me and only a little shorter than Eagan. Must be those legs of hers, they seem to go on for days and I can't help but feel a little jealous when I compare them to my own short ones. The two of them together are stunning and I can already tell that Sienna has a beautiful personality to match, just by the way they interact with each other.

"To answer your question before, Enna, absolutely we can have a movie and ice cream night. Be warned though, you might find it hard to get Kairi to turn off Love Island . She's formed a bit of an obsession with it since she's been here."

"Like you don't know everything that is going on in the current season we are watching," I scoff, and Sienna looks between us both with a wide smile on her face.

"Oh, I think you and I are going to get along splendidly if this is the way you handle my brother," she laughs, and my body warms at the feeling of ease and comfort I feel around these two humans.

"Enna, as Kairi said, she wasn't able to bring much with her to Witches Cove. Would you mind taking her shopping while you're here?"

“Absolutely! That sounds like so much fun. Tomorrow okay?”

I trip over my words a little with eagerness at her suggestion. “Yep, er...um... yes please. That would be so great,” I swear my smile could not get any bigger today. Sienna nods and just like that I have plans tomorrow with someone who, dare I say, might come to be a friend.

### Chapter 28

Sienna spends the afternoon at Eagan's apartment, and we hang out just the three of us. Eagan relaxes once he realizes that Sienna isn't going to probe me with a barrage of questions and so far seems happy to accept the story I have given her. I can't help but watch the change that overcomes Eagan in the presence of his sister. He looks so... light. Free. Like his burdens and worries have slipped away. I don't think I've seen him like this, without his stressors around work and friends and me, being at the forefront of his mind. My stomach twinges with the awareness that I am the cause of the frown lines that so often mar his face. But in this moment it's like our past doesn't exist. I feel like a human, as if I actually belong here and a couple of times I found myself considering that maybe he wants me here too.

When Sienna eventually leaves I try to relax but my body is too keyed up with excitement at the possibility of having a friend. "What is with you?" Eagan asks, irritated as I get up off the sofa for what feels like the hundredth time, walk into the kitchen, realize I'm not hungry before coming back to sit down. I fidget with my hands and change position on the sofa a couple of times before responding.

"I've never been on a shopping trip before. With another person, I mean. I'm excited."

"I'm glad something as small as this makes you so happy, but your fidgeting is driving me crazy. Sit still or go to bed." I glare at him, but he laughs in response.

"Good night," I say cheerfully and before I'm even aware of it, I'm leaning over him and placing a soft kiss on his cheek. We both still, unsure how to react and I come to my senses and scurry off to my bedroom.

I can't sleep. I don't know how long I've been in bed for, but I can't stop tossing and turning. Too many thoughts are racing through my mind and too many emotions for me to keep track of. The feeling holding me hostage right now though is raw and unfiltered need. My skin feels far too hot and every brush of the bedding on my skin chafes. I feel like I'm going to die without his touch. The ache between my legs burns like molten lava. Every thought disappears except the urge to go to him to relieve it. The need becomes so intense and it's more than I can bear.

Desperation directs my fingers to delve under my shirt to lightly circle my nipple. I pinch it softly and gasp at the electric shocks that seem to run directly to my core. I moan as my hand runs over my stomach and down lower before slipping under the waistband of my sleep shorts. I'm so sensitive and my body shakes with every touch, coiled so tight I know it's only a matter of time before I explode. My eyes close and I picture Eagan's fingers trailing the same path as my own. It's his long fingers I imagine spreading my folds and entering me, first one finger and then another. His thumb, applying pressure and gently circling my clit. And it's his face I see as I scream with my release, calling out his name.

With the ache relieved, at least for now, I'm able to finally drift off to sleep.

Sienna arrives bright and early for our shopping day and Eagan is quick to usher me out the door. My excitement is far too much for him in the morning. I've noticed he is particularly grouchy until he's had at least two cups of coffee and so far he's only had one.

I've noticed that there aren't a huge variety of clothing stores in Witches Cove and Sienna decides that our trip needs much more than just one or two stops. She decided to drive us to Arndale, a larger town that has a whole department store. Eagan generously allowed me to borrow his credit card for the day, somehow trusting me enough not to get too carried away with spending his money. I absolutely wouldn't, but he doesn't know that, so I'm honored to receive his trust.



“So, what clothes do you have?” Sienna asks. “And what do you want to buy?”

I mentally catalog my meager purchases so far. “Um... I have this dress, shorts that I sleep in, some underwear, leggings, and a t-shirt...” I shrug my shoulders when she looks over at me. “I told you that I don't have much.” Sienna starts listing all the items she believes I must have, clothing for every kind of occasion and I have to admit, I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed at the thought.

At the first store we enter, I stop in my tracks, gazing around at rack after rack of clothing. How am I going to find anything? Where do I even start? Unlike the boutique, this place is huge and busy with other customers.

Fortunately, Sienna takes pity on me when she sees that I'm struggling with all the choices. Amongst all the different styles, colors, and fabrics I am truly lost with what could look good on me and what is in style. She appoints herself my personal shopper and proceeds to take her job very seriously. I don't need to spend any time considering my choices because she pulls things off the rack with such speed that I barely have time to look at them before she is shoving me into a dressing room to try them on.

True to her word, Sienna drags me around to store after store. She has so much energy and spark that it's contagious and although I tire with the more shops we enter, I'm in no hurry to end our day.

Before long we are loaded down with shopping bags and I'm hoping that Eagan isn't unhappy about what I spent. Sienna assures me he won't be and even chipped in herself to buy me some items that are apparently ‘must haves.’ We've been shopping for a couple of hours now and I'm officially exhausted. My feet ache and my movements are becoming more sluggish. I don't think I've ever spent this much time on my feet in one go. I've got a lot of stamina to build up in this body.

We take a seat in a coffee shop to rest before we make the drive back to Witches Cove. I resist the urge to moan when sitting gives me instant relief in the muscles in my legs and feet.

“So, Kairi, what’s going on with you and my brother?” she asks, wasting absolutely no time before diving into the tough questions.

I pause for a moment to consider my answer. I’ve never spoken about any kind of relationship with anyone before. How much is an appropriate amount to share? Does she even want to hear about me and her brother? “At the moment? Nothing. But I think I’d like there to be something, but I don’t want to push too hard. You’re right that Eagan is kind, but he is also closed off. I want to make sure I don’t come on too strong.” Maybe that was too much but Sienna makes me feel like I want to tell the truth. Well as much of it as I can.

She laughs. “Oh honey, if you're in his apartment, he wants you. Eagan doesn’t just open his space up to anyone. It took Kelly a year before she could convince him to move in together.” I screw my nose up at this, not really wanting to hear about his ex-girlfriend. I assume she’s talking about the one I saw arguing with Eagan in the coffee shop that day. I have absolutely no right to be jealous, but I feel a possessive urge to claim him anyway.

“Do you need someone to talk to about what happened to you to make you need to escape to Witches Cove?” she asks, genuine concern in her tone.

Nope, don’t want to go there. I shake my head. “Thank you. I appreciate it, I truly do but I don’t want to go into the details. I made some choices and now I’m living with the consequences. That’s all there is to it. I’m just fortunate that Eagan came along when he did to help me out. He’s definitely gone above and beyond.” I smile, holding up the shopping bags.

“I’ve had fun with you today, Kairi and it’s been so good to not have to worry about anything other than finding clothes to make you look hot! I’ve needed a good distraction from these last few months.” Her eyes drop as a flicker of something sad crosses her face before it is quickly replaced with another grin.

“I know we just met, but if you would like to talk to me about anything, I’m here to listen,” I reply softly, sensing that she’s had some troubles in her life recently.

“Oh no, don’t worry about me. Let’s get you home before Eagan worries I’ve kidnapped you.” She swiftly changes the subject and seems to shake off the thoughts that were bothering her. “Eagan is going to love you in that little black dress you bought! Make sure you wear it for him.”

I laugh but immediately stop when Sienna’s face twists into a scowl. “But if you ever hurt my brother, you’ll have to answer to me.” She’s unable to keep up the serious facade, her face breaking into a smile with mine joining a moment later.

Sienna drops me back at Eagan’s apartment but declines to come in this time. “Don’t worry, he’s not going to get rid of me that easily. I’ll be back tomorrow,” she jokes. “Maybe you can use this time to show off your new clothes, maybe your new underwear...” she trails off with a suggestive wiggle of her eyebrows. I laugh and give her a playful punch on the shoulder before thanking her once again for the day out. It truly has been one of the best days.

I cross the threshold into the apartment and find Eagan preparing himself something to eat in the kitchen. Without thinking I launch myself at him, so high on happiness and gratitude for the day I had. The day he has given me.

I throw my arms around his neck, having to rise up on my toes to reach comfortably, and press my body close to his. So close that I can feel his corded muscles tense against me as his arms slide around my waist. “I had such a fantastic day, Eagan.

Thank you, thank you, thank you for giving this to me,” I whisper before taking the plunge and pressing my lips against his.

### Chapter 29

At first he doesn't move, his body becoming preternaturally still as my cheeks heat and I pull my lips away. I don't step back though, instead tilting my chin up to face him, displaying my confidence and trying to hide my fear of rejection. His sapphire eyes hold mine and I can see the battle raging within. In a fraction of a moment that seems to stretch on forever, apprehension turns to determination before his lips crash against mine.

There is such force behind his movement that I have no choice but to hold tightly to his neck and hope my legs don't give out. All thoughts empty from my head as our mouths move together in a primal way. Fierce. Each of us fighting for dominance. He gives me no reprieve as he explores my mouth, our tongues twisting together and teeth clashing. His hands roam my body, starting at my shoulders, then running down my sides before slipping under my dress to cup my ass. He moans into my mouth as he squeezes tightly. He bites down on my lip. Hard. And I whimper, not in pain but out of desire. I can't get close enough. I need to touch all of him.

Just as quickly as he began, Eagan pulls himself off me, turning away.

"Fuck!" he bellows as he throws out a hand swiping at everything on the counter, causing it to fall and shatter on the ground. The next second he rounds on me, pushing me to the wall, his right hand at my throat in a movement so reminiscent of our first meeting. He's boxed me in with no escape, one hand at my throat and the other pressed to the wall above my head. His face is so close to mine that I can feel his warm breath as it tickles my skin. Even if I could get away from him at this moment, I wouldn't want to. When we first met, I was afraid of him. Now I trust him

not to hurt me.

I stare into his eyes and see desperation tinged with anger. “Why the fuck are you doing this to me, Kairi? Is this still some part of your spell, some trick? You killed my friends for god’s sake, you almost killed me too! How can I want you like this when you’ve done those things? What is wrong with me that all I want to do right now is turn you around and fuck you against the wall so hard that you’re screaming my name?” As he speaks he tightens the grip on my throat. Hard enough to bruise but not hard enough to completely cut off my air supply. I’m still not afraid. His anger and desire visibly swirl together, tormenting him as he fights against his instincts.

“I hate you,” he spits.

“No, you don’t,” I rasp softly in reply.

“I should hate you.”

“Maybe.”

“You’re a monster.”

“I know,” I breathe.

His breath is escaping in ragged pants, his pupils are blown wide, and he loosens the pressure on my throat, causing me to gasp for more air. He still doesn’t allow me to move as he slowly, gently moves the hand that is above my head down to caress my face, the gesture at odds with his words and the hand that grips my neck. He uses a finger to trace my lips and my tongue darts out to lick it. His body is pressed so hard against me that it’s hard to tell where my body ends and his begins. The bulge in his pants, while obvious before, is now so prominent I can feel every inch.

“Please, Eagan,” I beg. “I need to feel you.”

He looks away for a moment, trying to catch his breath before turning back to me. “You’re going to be the death of me, vicious one,” he murmurs, and I can see the exact point where he lets go. He captures my lips once more and I whimper into his mouth, maneuvering my body so that his thigh rests between mine. I try to rock against him, desperately seeking friction and release. His hands snake back down to my ass, and he uses his hold there, to lift me, my legs automatically wrapping around his waist. He doesn’t break the kiss for a single moment as he carries me to his bedroom, never wavering in his ferocity.

He throws me on the bed and a squeak escapes me before he’s on top of me again, barely allowing me to catch a breath. He moves his lips from mine down the side of my neck and sucks hard on the hollow where my neck and shoulder meet. I groan and my hands scramble to try and pull off his top, desperate to feel his body. He rocks back, so that he is kneeling between my legs, and I bite my lip as I watch him undress. He pulls off his shirt with ease and then pulls down his loose gym shorts. Wetness soaks my panties immediately at the sight of his cock and I scramble to sit up so that I can have a taste.

“No vicious one, that’s not how this is going to work. Strip,” he commands, and I happily obey, pulling off my dress in no time at all, leaving me in just my thong. “Fuuuck. You really are a seductress. But right now, I’m done fighting it,” he murmurs, licking a path from my ankle to my panties. “Off,” he growls and in one smooth motion he tears them right off me. Luckily, I bought more when I was out today.

He uses his index finger to slowly circle my clit and then with no warning, thrusts it inside me. “More,” I groan. “I need more, Eagan.” He complies and adds another finger. The sounds of his fingers moving back and forth are indecent and I’m surprised at how wet he has made me, and so quickly too.

“Can you take another finger, vicious one?” A needy moan escapes me as I bob my head in enthusiastic consent. At the same time as he pushes another finger inside me, his thumb presses down on the bundle of nerves and I shatter. I completely fall apart with a howl as my eyes close and I throw my head back. An orgasm like none I’ve ever experienced overwhelms every one of my senses and I feel like I’ll never recover.

As my climax subsides and I fall back to Earth, the rustling sound of a packet being torn open breaches my consciousness. “You come so beautifully, Kairi,” he whispers reverently. He lowers on top of me, and I feel the head of his cock nudging at my entrance. I open my thighs wider and wrap my legs around him, holding him tighter to me. My back arches off the bed as he enters me with a firm thrust. He pounds into me hard and fast, determined and dominating. He might think that I am his destruction, but I know for certain, in this moment, that he will be mine. And I will gladly be destroyed by him in the hopes that maybe, just maybe, he will put me back together.

I’ve never fucked like this. I’ve never given up control to another. The vulnerability I feel frightens me. It’s like I’ve been cracked open and all my insides, the very core of my soul, are spread out for him to see. My instincts push me to use the leverage of my legs to roll us over, so I am straddling him. The only reason I am successful in this motion is because I catch him by surprise. He’s temporarily immobilized but quickly thrusts up into me at the same time as I push myself down on him. The movement causes him to go even deeper and our movements speed up to a frantic pace.

“Oh no you don’t, vicious one,” he growls. “You don’t get to be the dominant one here.” I don’t have the strength to stop him from rolling us back over. As he does he lifts up my legs, pressing my thighs to my chest, opening me wide for him as he leans back on his knees and takes a few moments to stare at my wet pussy on display. “So beautiful,” he murmurs before entering me once more. His hands hold my legs in a



bruising grip, and I can tell he's getting close and I'm right there with him as his cock hits that perfect spot.

"I'm about to come, Eagan. Fuck, I'm about to come."

"Then come, vicious one," he growls and once again reaches between us to play with my clit. We roar as we come together, stars filling my vision and I swear I lose consciousness for a second. Eagan's hips stutter as he comes to a stop.

I was wrong. I thought the last orgasm was the best I've ever had but this one just topped it and every other one before it. Eagan collapses onto me, the sweat slickens our skin and my long hair is plastered to both our bodies. He nuzzles into my neck for such a brief moment that I almost miss it before he rolls to his side.

"Rest, Kairi, I'll go clean up." My eyes drift closed, my need for his touch finally sated. I'm woken up for a fleeting moment when Eagan uses a warm washcloth to clean between my legs. I'm surprised at his gentleness and the care he takes. I'm even more shocked when he climbs into bed beside me.

He sighs. "Go to sleep, vicious one. We'll talk in the morning." Once again I comply and, in seconds fall asleep with the warmth of Eagan's chest pressed to my back.

### Chapter 30

My eyes drift open, my eyelids heavy and my sight blurry from sleep. It takes me a few heartbeats for my awareness to return and for me to realize where I am. I'm in bed. I'm in bed with a siren. A siren whose very naked ass is pressed against my cock that is hard again. I mentally berate myself for getting myself into this position, for not being strong enough to resist her seduction. But fuck, I've never, ever, had sex like that before. I would say Kelly and I had a decent sex life, but it was boring. It was enjoyable and got the job done, but it lacked passion, like so many other areas of our lives. Something that last night with Kairi certainly did not. We were explosive together like sparks igniting into a raging inferno.

The way she tried to take charge half-heartedly but submitted to me so willingly was something I didn't know that I craved. Having her throat beneath my fingers, her lust-filled eyes holding mine with the recognition that I held her life in my hands. Twice now she has had my life in hers, but with her in that position, I knew that all I had to do was apply more pressure, and I would cut off her air. She is so fragile in this body. So utterly breakable. I don't want to kill her or hurt her in a way that is not wanted. But if the way her eyes lit up with my bruising touches is any indication, she wants to feel pain with her pleasure as much as I want to inflict it.

I'm not certain that I regret what we did last night but I am surprised that I allowed myself to fall asleep wrapped around her small body. Kairi moves a little, still deep in sleep and I suppress a moan as she pushes her ass even more firmly into my cock. She's a different kind of beautiful when she's sleeping. Her long hair, tousled and tangled with sleep, fans out around her. I have to be careful not to get caught in it. I'm not normally the type of man to spoon after sex. I like my personal space. But I

couldn't resist the urge that pulled me back to her. I wasn't able to stop myself from encouraging her to fall asleep naked in my bed, and when she did so, I positioned myself at her back with an arm under her head and the other around her waist. It took mere moments for me to join her in slumber.

Right now, our bodies are sweaty and stuck to each other. And I have to pee. The more awake I become the more I consider how intimate our current position is. It makes me feel uncomfortable, like I'm doing something wrong. Guilt churns my stomach when I consider how disrespectful my actions are to the memory of Don, Steve, and Brenton. I'm in bed with their murderer. I can't imagine any scenario where this would be considered okay.

I can't deny that the Kairi I have been spending time with over the last few days bears little resemblance to the creature of the sea I know she was. She's funny, flirty, and energetic and I'm drawn to her like a moth to a flame. How is it possible that these two vastly different sides exist within the same person? How can I know which one is the truth? I don't want to give her the power to burn me. If I let my walls down, I'm afraid that is what she will do. The fear of her true nature taints my ability to feel completely at ease with what we are doing.

I run my hands over my face and through my hair. It's better if I get out of bed now. With the way she's pressed against me, I'm not sure I can resist waking her up and taking her again. Or forcing her head down so that I can feel her luscious, soft lips wrap around my cock. Or slipping my head under the covers to feast on her... fuck I'm in trouble.

Careful not to wake her, I gently pry myself away and untangle our limbs. I pause on the edge of the bed and watch her sleeping form. She looks so innocent like this. You would never expect her to be capable of violence and death. Yet the urge to wrap myself around her again hasn't subsided.

I force myself to get up. It's still very early in the morning and the sun has not risen yet. After relieving myself and spending some time convincing my dick to chill the fuck out, I resign myself to laying on the sofa. I'm pretty certain that I'm not going to be able to fall asleep again. I feel an odd sense of loneliness without her body pressed against me, and multiple times I almost give in to my thoughts and go back to her. Instead, I tuck myself into the sofa, moving around until I find a position that is somewhat comfortable before closing my eyes to try to catch a bit more sleep.

"Eagan," the quiet voice pulls me from my dream of the ocean. I open my eyes to see Kairi standing close by. She's wearing my t-shirt, and it looks like nothing else. I avert my gaze to the ceiling in a failed attempt to not get turned on from seeing her in my clothes.

"Why are you out here?" she asks, a tinge of vulnerability in her voice. I grunt in response, fully aware that I'm acting like a bit of an asshole. She comes over and sits beside me and I can't help but flinch away from her at the touch of her hand. Hurt fills her eyes, and I'm once again frustrated with my conflicted emotions and morals. It feels like I can't win. When I'm with her I'm disrespecting my work colleagues and when I push her away I'm hurting her.

"I'm sorry," I say, trying to keep my voice gentle. "I'm just not sure if what we did last night was the right thing." She nods her head but is unable to hide her disappointment.

"I just thought..." she trails off and I turn away from her not wanting to see the look of rejection in her eyes.

She shakes it off and jumps off the sofa. "Breakfast. I'll get us some breakfast." I don't move from my position as I hear her bustling around the kitchen. I need to get out of the house for a bit. I've been wanting to catch up with Tom again, but because it's a weekday he's at work. I need to talk to him about what I can do to get my job

back. These last couple of weeks at home have been good because I've been able to get back into a routine and I've also wanted to keep an eye on Kairi to make sure that not only is she safe from others, but that people are safe from her. Fortunately, she doesn't appear to be a threat or be in danger herself so I'm confident that I can return to work. At some point, I'll offer to try and help her find something to do with her time as well but that's a problem for another day.

After our breakfast of toast and fruit—because Kairi doesn't know how to cook, I let her know that I'm going out for the day. She shrugs her shoulders. "I'll probably just stay here watching TV again," she says forlornly. We haven't really discussed her plans for the long-term, but I think we will need to soon. She's restless being cooped up inside but I can also tell she's nervous to be out on her own.

"How about I give Sienna a call and ask her to come over later." She brightens immediately at the suggestion. She seems to have bonded with Sienna immediately and although I'm wary of her around my sister, I'm quite certain that Kairi won't do anything to jeopardize her new-found friendship.

I wonder how Sienna would react if she knew the truth about Kairi. Despite her career in science and her analytical disposition, Sienna is surprisingly open to most things. Even those that can't really be explained or are hard to believe. She has always had the opinion that unless something has been irrefutably disproved by science, then there is the possibility that it exists. I know she even has a friend or two who dabble in witchcraft. Now that I think about it though, I'm sure that those friends are very different from Vala and are not even close to having the abilities that she does. God, I hate thinking about Vala, and I hope we never have to deal with her again. Kairi fulfilled her end of the bargain so there should be absolutely no reason that we would ever have to cross paths with her. She can live on happily in her little cave with her creepy as fuck ravens, and I'll go on pretending that she doesn't exist. Win win.

The air around the apartment is stifling and Kairi and I continue to dance around each other. There is an awkwardness that didn't exist before now, and I can tell that she is trying not to overstep. Her flirty looks and touches have disappeared, and honestly, I'm disappointed. I've only been awake for a couple of hours, but I know I have to get some space to think. I say goodbye to Kairi and leave her to her reality TV. She barely acknowledges me, and I feel a pang in my gut.

### Chapter 31

I start by going to the gym to try and burn off some of my excess energy. I had to get out of that apartment before I caved and fucked Kairi again. I thought having some time away from her, where I didn't need to see her bright emerald eyes, her little nose that crinkles when she teases me or the long auburn hair that I want to wrap around my fist, would be good for me. Instead, I've just been fantasizing about all the positions I can fuck her in, what her ass would look like, bright red from my hand, and her cries as she screams my name. I take out my frustrations on the boxing bag suspended from the ceiling of the gym. I don't bother wearing gloves, choosing instead to focus on the pain in my knuckles as I punch over and over again.

One, two.

One, two.

Jab. cross.

Jab, cross.

I try to let everything around me fade into the background as I concentrate on the rhythm of my fists against the bag. I'm aware of the beating of my heart and my breaths increasing in speed. When any other thought enters my mind, I try to push them away, refocusing on the beats. My goal is to exhaust myself, to distract myself from the chaos in my mind that has no answer.

I move from the bag, to weights, to the treadmill, and then back through again until

my muscles are screaming at me in protest. My skin is slick with sweat, and my muscles are fatigued, but it's barely taken the edge off my obsession with Kairi.

I shower at the gym and spend far too long under the warm spray. I rest my forearms on the shower wall in front of me as the water cascades over the tense muscles in my neck and back.

I decide to message Tom to ask if he would be willing to catch up for a drink after work. I know he has forgiven me on a personal level but I'm not sure if he has, or can even forgive me as my boss. Only one way to find out and I know it's time. I need to have a purpose in life again, something to get up for in the morning. Tom responds quickly, agreeing to meet me at the bar. Fantastic. Now I only have the whole afternoon to keep busy until it's time to meet Tom.

I wander around town with no purpose whatsoever, purely in an effort to avoid returning to the apartment. I hate how I'm afraid to be in my own damn house but I've got no one to blame but myself. Well maybe Kairi. But mostly me because I couldn't keep my cock in my fucking pants.

Without anything to really do, I can't stop thinking about my predicament. By the end of the afternoon, I've pretty much convinced myself that having sex with Kairi wasn't the problem. It's intimacy and a relationship that I truly want to avoid. So I can set some ground rules. Anything regarding foreplay and sex is on the table but no dates, no confessions of love, and absolutely no snuggling! This will work. Right? After all, it's my sexual attraction that's the problem.

I attempt to push down any thoughts of doubt that try to push their way in. Yes, I know that trying to keep sex and feeling separate can be a challenge for some people but I'm confident that I can do it. For all I know, this is what Kairi wants as well. She has given no indication that she is interested in anything more substantial than a sexual relationship. Feeling more at ease with this path forward and knowing that if



she agrees, I won't have to deny myself anymore, I don't feel quite as anxious about returning home later tonight.

I couldn't tell you how I spent my day. It almost felt like when I was under Kairi's spell and large chunks of time simply disappeared. This was different though; I wasn't completely unaware of my surroundings; I was just spending too much time in my head. It wasn't until Tom walked through the door of the bar that I realized that perhaps I could talk to him about my predicament. I obviously can't give him all the details but maybe he will have some sage advice.

Tom falls into the seat of the booth I have procured for us. The bar is quiet this early on a weeknight which I'm pleased about. I've never been super comfortable around crowds. I'd already ordered a shot of whiskey for each of us, figuring that after a long day at work, Tom could use one. I know I'm right when Tom picks it up and downs it. "How was work," I ask.

"Fucked," he sighs. "We are so far behind on deadlines at the moment. They just aren't keeping up." He rests his head in his hands.

I guess now is as good a time as any to ask to return. "I was wondering if it would be possible for me to come back? I could help get things back on track. I know I let you down, but I promise I'm doing so much better, and I won't jeopardize your company or our friendship again."

Tom watches me in contemplation and I fidget under his gaze. "Hmm. We could really use your skills. You're able to do the work far quicker than the others. I'm not sure if it's going to look good for me though if I take you back. The rest of the company saw how you just ghosted us. I don't want it to seem like you are getting preferential treatment just because you're my friend."

"I understand," I reply, trying to keep the disappointment from lacing my tone.

“But...” he continues. “How would you feel about doing some contract work? I could tell the others that I’m outsourcing some of the graphic design tasks due to the backlog. You can do the work from home. It won’t be as much work as you were used to, but it could be a good way to rebuild trust and to ensure that your mental health is stable enough to cope with work again.”

I think about it. It’s not a bad idea actually. It will also allow me a bit of extra flexibility to deal with my siren issue. I nod and graciously accept the offer. I’m lucky that he even considered this, and I know I can prove myself to be a valuable asset again.

We order another round of drinks, and I consider how I’m going to broach the topic of Kairi. “So, there’s this woman,” I start. Tom raises his eyebrows and gestures for me to continue. “She’s currently staying in my apartment.”

Tom’s eyes widen. “Seriously? You never let people into your space!”

I nod in agreement. “She ran into some trouble and needed a place to stay. We aren’t together or anything.”

“But you want to be?” Tom asks, reading between the lines of what I’m saying.

“No!” I say with a little too much conviction. Tom smirks.

“Oookay. So, what’s the problem?”

“The problem is she’s hot as fuck and I can’t stay away from her.”

“Why do you need to stay away from her?”

“Because she isn’t good for me. I don’t need a relationship right now.”

Tom nods in agreement, taking a sip of his second whiskey. “Let me get this straight, there’s a hot woman in your apartment who you want to fuck, but you also don’t want to because you don’t want a relationship.”

“That about sums it up,” I mumble.

“Well, is she looking for a relationship? Does she want to sleep with you?”

“A little too late for that,” I reply, unable to stop the smirk.

Tom laughs. “Okay so that ship has sailed then. But what about the whole relationship thing?”

I shrug. “No idea.”

“Maybe you need to ask what she’s looking for. You can have a fuck buddy arrangement,” Tom says, echoing my thoughts from earlier. I knew I was onto something. “But what if she wants more?” He questions and my stomach drops. I don’t know how to answer that question honestly.

I shrug. “Then I guess I’ll be back to square one. I can look but I can’t touch.”

“Uh-huh, sure you can manage that?”

“Of course I can,” I snap, immediately regretting my tone.

“Oh boy she really has you riled up, doesn’t she? Can I meet her?” he asks with a grin.

“We’ll see,” I respond, pretty certain that if she hangs around much longer, the two of them meeting will be inevitable.

### Chapter 32

He left. He fucked me within an inch of my life and gave me two life-changing orgasms, and then he just left. I couldn't help the hurt that filled me when I woke up to find him gone, the cold bed sheets telling me that he had left much earlier. Every time I feel like we are getting closer that maybe he is starting to see the real me under the monster, he slams those protective walls back up. He even said it last night. I hate you. You're a monster. Is he ever going to be able to see me as anything else?

I'm angry with myself. So damn angry that I have become so tied to him. I don't want to want him as much as I do. I wish that once I had struck the bargain with Vala, we had been able to go our separate ways. But from the moment I saw him, desperately swimming to safety in a treacherous storm, I felt like our fates were tied, that things would never be the same for me again. Everything that has transpired since then has continued to force us together. I don't know what it is like to love someone. I don't think I've ever experienced it. But I wonder if it feels like this madness that consumes me. The feeling that if I am not around him then I will cease to exist. He's my anchor, and without him, I don't know where I would be.

But what does he feel for me? Surely it's not love. He couldn't— he wouldn't love a monster. His actions are so confusing and they're giving me whiplash. Does he like me or hate me? Want me or despise me?

After pacing around the apartment, unable to sit still and relax. I know I need to start building my life here. What Vala has given me is permanent, and I can't continue to laze around eating snacks and watching TV. I have to admit that I've been using Eagan and his apartment as a security blanket. While I'm here I don't have to face the

challenges that I will inevitably come across when I fully integrate into the human world. Just because I've dreamed of this life doesn't mean it's not terrifying.

I want to work, to be fully immersed in human life, and to learn the skills that I'm going to need here on land. I don't know how people go about getting jobs. I don't think I would rate high on employability, given that I've only been human for a couple of weeks and am still learning basic life skills. But I want to try. I have to try. I want to show Eagan that I am more than what he sees.

A thought enters my mind, and before long, I've come up with a plan to try and get some work. I quickly get dressed, although I'm reluctant to take off Eagan's shirt. It smells like him, his spiced coconut scent wrapping around me and imbuing feelings of safety and calm. I hide his shirt under my bed covers, hoping that he doesn't look too hard for it. I want to wear it again.

I dress in one of the new outfits I bought with Sienna. I choose something more professional than my usual attire, a knee-length black skirt and an emerald green blouse. Sienna said that it enhances my eyes, and looking at myself in the mirror right now, I'd have to agree. I use one of the hair ties that I purchased to pull my hair into a sleek ponytail. It takes a while for me to have it looking the way I want as I've never had to put my hair up before. I'm used to the weight and the feel of my long hair, but I have to admit that summer heat has been making it feel like a bit of a nuisance lately. It's a nice feeling to have it off of my neck for once. When I am happy with my appearance, I begin my walk into town, determined and with one destination in mind.

"Hey!" Kelsey greets me cheerfully as the doorbell chimes to let her know someone has entered the boutique. "I haven't seen you in a few weeks, and I've been wondering how you're going."

"Things are good. I'm settling in." Her gaze trails me from head to toe, taking in my

appearance.

“I can see that,” she says with a wide grin. “You look wonderful!” I blush at the compliment.

I decide to cut straight to the point. “Are you looking for any help here in the boutique?” I blurt out, speaking faster than usual. She pauses for a moment and blinks her eyes. “I mean, would it be possible for me to work here with you, maybe? It doesn’t have to be much work... it’s just that I’m starting from scratch here and having a job, a purpose, is something I think would really help me. You were so kind to me when I had nothing, and I immediately thought of you and this shop when I was trying to come up with ideas of paths forward.”

She turns contemplative, and I wait silently while she mulls the idea over. “Do you have any experience in retail?” she asks.

I shake my head. “I’m sorry, I don’t. I wasn’t really able to work before...but I’m a fast learner and a hard worker. I promise I’ll give it my all.”

Fuck, she's not going to say yes, is she? I have no experience and what is she going to do when she realizes just how little knowledge and few skills that I have. This was a stupid idea.

My self-doubt overwhelms me but dissipates immediately when she gives me a gentle smile that reaches her eyes. “You know what? Let’s give it a go. How about we start with a couple of trial shifts to see if you pick things up okay? It’s not a difficult job but I just want to make sure that you feel comfortable. If the trial shifts go well then I can look at something more long-term”

Without thinking, I throw my arms around her letting out a little squeal. “Thank you so much! You won’t regret giving me a chance. I promise.”

She gives me a slightly awkward pat on the back, and I pull away, thinking that I may have pushed the personal space bubble a little too much there. “When can I start? Can I start today? What can I do?” I babble.

She chuckles, “Slow down. Your name is Kairi right?” I nod. “Kairi, how about you come in tomorrow morning at about nine o’clock before the shop opens at ten. Does that work for you? First thing in the morning is usually quiet so it will give me some time to train you.”

“Yes, of course. Nine o’clock. I’ll be here!” I reply, barely able to keep my body still as it thrums with energy. I dart in for another quick hug. I’m surprisingly tactile in this body, always seeking out touch in some way. Siren’s aren’t particularly physical, so my only form of physical affection came from humans when I was on land. So now that I’m here permanently, I can’t stop myself from taking the little bits I can get.

Kelsey doesn’t seem too perturbed by the affection I’m thrusting upon her and doesn’t pull away, so I assume that she’s okay with it. I thank her again profusely, and she waves a hand to brush off the gratitude. I leave the boutique with a spring in my step. I can’t wait to tell Eagan that I have a job.

I’ve been waiting a few hours for Eagan, and it’s been impossible to contain my excitement. A job. I have a job. Like a real human. I wonder if he’s going to be proud of me? I’ve never had such a wide range of strong emotions before, and I wonder if this is unique to my human form or perhaps this is my personality when finally given opportunities and new experiences. I’m feeling so much all at once, and it’s exhausting but exhilarating at the same time.

I finally hear the key turn in the lock, and I almost jump out of my skin to tell him the good news. I wait though as I want to ask him about his day.

“Eagan! Hi, how was your day? What did you do?”

He looks at me warily, seeing that I’m excited about something but not sure what. “My day was good. I saw my friend Tom who also used to be my boss. He offered me my job back. Well, not the same job, but similar at least.” He can’t keep the smile that matches mine off his face.

“Oh, my goddess! That’s fantastic news and gives me the perfect segue to say… I got a job too!” He looks at me with his eyes wide and eyebrows raised.

“What? What do you mean you got a job? How? Where?” He fires off the questions in quick succession.

I start to ramble again, another habit I’ve formed in this body. “After all the shit that happened with Vala and after you gave me money I knew I couldn’t walk around looking like I did. I was a mess, covered in blood and my clothes were torn to shreds. So, I wandered around for a while until I found the little clothing shop on the main street. Do you know the one? It’s run by Kelsey, who, by the way, is the absolute sweetest person. Short, bright pink hair, lots of facial piercings—” He doesn’t say anything and continues to stare so I keep going, “Anyway, Kelsey was so nice to me, she helped me find some new clothes that were cheap and I went back there the next day and she helped me find more useful things.”

“I was thinking today while you were out that I need to start planning for the future. I need to act like a normal human being. You’ve helped me so much, but I can’t rely on you for everything like I have been doing. And then the idea came to me. A job. If I could get a job then I could earn some money and at least contribute in some way. It will also keep me busy, especially since I’m running out of Love Island episodes.” I’m pleased when this earns me a chuckle. He continues to find my obsession with the show ridiculous. “When I decided I wanted to get a job, the first thing that came to mind was Kelsey’s boutique, so I walked on over there and asked for a job, and she



said yes!” I finished, partially out of breath from the words pouring out of my mouth.

Once again I am completely enraptured by the deep blue of his eyes and the brightness within him. Even when hardened by the thoughts of me and my history, he’s never able to dull their shine. They are particularly filled with warmth today and I bask in his gaze. He takes a moment before speaking, “That’s fantastic Kairi; well done.”

I do a little happy dance at his praise, eliciting another one of his hard-won laughs. I want to celebrate the fact that we both had good days, so I grab both of his hands and pull him into the dance with me. He tries to dig his heels in and move away, but I’m insistent, wiggling my hips and shimmying my shoulders, encouraging him to give me this. To let go with me and have fun.

I can’t believe my eyes when he gives in. He starts by bobbing his head. His cheeks flush pink in embarrassment, and he stops quickly. “No!” I cry. “Keep going!”

His smile grows and he moves his hips in the smallest of movements. It would barely be considered dancing but goddess, I’ll take it! I throw my head back and laugh as my movements become even more wild. I hold up one of his hands and twirl under it, again and again. And he allows it. When I stop spinning, he places a hand on my waist to steady me, and I realize we are face to face, chest to chest. I’m breathing heavily but I feel so light. Weightless. And the look on Eagan’s face makes me think. Maybe he feels this too.

### Chapter 33

What in the world is this woman doing to me? I'm standing in my kitchen, dancing with a woman. I don't dance. Ever. Well, I'm not sure you could call this dancing but it's definitely dance-adjacent. And I feel this warmth in my chest that's unfamiliar. I watch Kairi as she does the most ridiculous wiggle of hips and twerking of her ass. She is so full of joy and light. While I keep my emotions muted and subdued, she shows it all and isn't afraid to let people see it. No matter how hard I try to remain stoic and unaffected, she pulls me in and before I know it I'm laughing. And not just a chuckle either, a full-bellied laugh. I don't even remember the last time I did this. In the last few months, there has been little to bring this out of me, but Kairi just seems to be able to do it.

I find it unnerving how quickly and easily she can break through my carefully constructed emotional walls and I'm not sure what it means. I'm beginning to think that perhaps I don't always have to keep emotions buried. She makes it look so freeing to be living in the moment and feeling everything so strongly. It makes me hyper-aware of just how little I allow people to see of the real me.

After twirling with me enough times to make her dizzy, she stops with her body pressed against me. I look down at her, at her flushed cheeks and twinkling green eyes that stare up at me. I can feel her chest rise and fall with her breath and my gaze is drawn to her lips. We don't speak, both of us choosing to remain in the moment. Her tongue darts out to wet her lips and I'm done for.

I crash my lips against her without a shred of tenderness. She makes me wild, untethered and all I want to do is consume her. Her initial gasp of shock morphs into

a moan as my tongue pushes into her mouth, deepening the kiss. It's inevitable. We are constantly being pulled together and after my day of contemplation and my conversation with Tom, I'm done resisting this.

My hand wraps around her hot-as-fuck ponytail, pulling her head back. Hard. She lets out the most adorable whimper and I break our kiss for just a second to take her in. I loosen my hold on her hair, and she takes the moment of reprieve to kneel before me. The sight of this goddess on her knees at my feet has me weak. I don't think I've ever been this hard in my life.

"Get naked for me, vicious one," I growl, desperate to see all of her. I don't want a scrap of clothing hiding her body from me.

Ever so compliantly, she undresses quickly. My cock strains at my jeans the whole time. She resumes her submissive position at my feet and looks up at me, pupils blown wide. "Are you going to suck me, baby? You're going to look so damn good with my cock in your mouth. Can you take it, vicious one?" She nods eagerly and I notice the way she rubs her thighs together, aching for friction. "Are you wet for me? Does the idea of choking on my cock make you drenched? Hmm, I bet it does. You're desperate for me aren't you?" I don't even know the words that are coming out of my mouth, but fuck do I like the reaction she has to them. She whines and unzips my pants, not even stopping to pull them down before pulling me out. Precum drips from the head and she leans in and uses her tongue to lap it up. I groan and tangle my fingers in her hair, holding her to me.

She slowly, torturously, licks the length of my shaft, causing me to twitch in her hands. She does it once more and then sucks the tip into her mouth. It takes all my concentration not to blow straight away as she pulls me down her throat. Fuck, she's taking all of me. I hit the back of her throat and she barely even gags. I wouldn't even think this was a challenge for her if I didn't see her eyes begin to water.

“Fuck baby, you’re taking me so god damn well. Look at you. So, fucking beautiful.” She moves her head backward and forwards, her nose touching my pubic bone as her throat relaxes to take me. She hollows her cheeks as she sucks when she pulls back. She’s moving slowly. Carefully. And it’s driving me crazy. Before I know it, I’m using my hands in her hair as leverage to push myself into her “I’m going to fuck your face now, vicious one. If you need me to stop, tap my thigh three times and I’ll stop immediately. Tap me now if you understand.” With no hesitation she reaches a hand and taps my left thigh. Oh, thank fuck!

I unleash. Thrusting myself into her mouth. Harder. Faster. I can hear her struggling for breath, but I can’t stop. Both of her hands reach around me to cup my ass which is bare now that my jeans have fallen to my knees. She grips my ass cheeks and digs her nails in, like it's her tether to reality. She gives no indication that she’s going to tap out. Tears are streaming down her face, and I will never forget the way she looks, kneeling naked on my kitchen floor, hair tangled in my hands, and her throat swollen with my cock. The view is better than any of my wildest fantasies.

Our moans are intertwining together, and Kairi begins to fidget more. She’s so needy and wanting. She removes one of her hands from my ass, and I worry that she’s going to tap, but she doesn’t. Instead, she reaches down to her slickened pussy with the intention of finishing herself off. No, I’m not having that.

“Don’t you dare touch yourself, vicious one. You are not allowed to come yet.” She whines again but pulls her hand away. My balls tighten as I barrel towards my release. “I’m going to come, baby, and you’re going to suck down every drop, aren’t you?” She somehow manages to nod around my cock, and in seconds, I’m coming with a roar and spilling down her throat. She takes it all, every drop, even paying attention to lick off any that escapes. She’s gasping for her breath but licking her lips and I’ve never seen anything so wonderful.

“Please, Eagan,” she breathes. “Please let me come.” Fuck she’s so beautiful when

she begs.

### Chapter 34

The whines that leave me are embarrassing as I beg Eagan to let me come. I don't know who this wanton creature is that seems to come out when I'm around him. I've never begged for anything in my life.

My lips still have the salty taste of him, and I feel like I'm going to combust at any moment. Tears still wet my cheeks, and his hands haven't left my hair. His breathing is ragged as he comes down from his release and I'm so fucking desperate for him to touch me.

"Touch me. Please. I need to feel you," I cry, as I pull myself up to stand in front of him.

"Oh, vicious one, don't you worry. I'm not finished with you yet," he growls before pulling me by my hand to the sofa. "I have to taste you." Yes. Oh, goddess, yes. I need that too.

He's in complete control of me. And I love it. I've never been submissive in my life, but he makes me want to give up control. To let go and just feel. I don't have to take what I want from him because he is willing to give it to me. Freely and enthusiastically.

Eagan pushes me down to the sofa. He's pulled up his jeans and now he's completely dressed while I'm completely naked. I squirm a little as he devours me with his gaze, his eyes never leaving my body.

With surprising gentleness, he bends my legs, so my feet are on the sofa and then places his hands on my knees to spread my thighs apart until I'm entirely exposed to him. His breath catches as he looks between my legs.

"God, you are fucking soaked for me, baby," he groans. I know. I've been wet since the moment he kissed me. The more aroused I have been getting, the more I have noticed the slickening between my thighs. He does this to me. He drives me wild. He puts a hand behind my back, pushing my ass forward so that it rests close to the end of the sofa and causes my back to arch. "Perfect," he whispers reverently.

He kneels on the ground in front of me and I begin to pant.

Touch me. Touch me. Touch me.

He obeys my silent plea and leans in, licking me from crack to slit. I throw my head back and cry out, completely overwhelmed by the feel of his tongue. He repeats the motion, and I can feel my legs starting to twitch.

"Delicious, absolutely delicious," he murmurs into my skin. I close my eyes and surrender as he explores me. He alternates between circling my clit with his tongue and then pushing it inside me. He varies in pace, bringing me right to the precipice before easing off and changing things up. It is maddening. Euphoric but maddening.

"More, more, more," I plead, over and over again. I'm barely aware of the words coming out of my mouth, but I know I'm begging, and I'm not even sure how coherent I am at this point. He seems to understand and plunges two fingers straight into me as he simultaneously sucks hard on my clit. My orgasm hits me immediately, hard and fast, and I scream out his name as it crashes over me like a violent wave.

Eagan pumps his fingers a few more times and then slowly withdraws his fingers. He presses light kisses to the insides of each of my thighs before leaning back and

allowing me to see the evidence of my release on his lips and chin. His eyes are still clear and bright, and despite my post-orgasm haze, I'm happy to note an absence of regret that was there this morning, and instead all I see is warmth.

"Congratulations on the job, Kairi," he says quietly before standing up, placing a soft kiss on my forehead, and walking out of the room, leaving me spread on his sofa, dazed and frustrated that he left me. Again.

I take a throw blanket that is on the back of the sofa and decide to just wrap that around me. He's the one that made me get naked for him in the first place so if he has an issue with me sitting on his sofa with only a blanket to cover me, then tough shit. I settle in and get comfortable, resigning myself to another night of TV, certain that I won't see Eagan again for a while. So, when he walks back in moments later, I'm confused but elated. He's not running this time. Oh, and he has snacks!

He sits down beside me, raising his eyebrows when he takes in the fact that I haven't gotten re-dressed yet. "We're just giving up on clothes then are we?" He smirks.

"That's what happens when you get me naked, and I can't be bothered to get dressed again. You're welcome to join me for the no-clothes party," I tease.

He lets out a sigh. "You and I both know that if I get naked with you right now then we are going to be occupied for the rest of the night." His words send shivers down my spine and despite only just coming, I'm aroused again.

"So?" I question, biting my lip and letting part of the blanket covering me slip to expose one of my breasts.

His eyes immediately hone into the extra skin on display. "You are such a tease," he groans, running a hand through his hair. I've noticed that he does this a lot, particularly when he's stressed, and I wonder what's bothering him at the moment.



“I’m only a tease if I don’t intend to follow through with it and I think you know that I am more than willing.”

“I want to talk to you first. Stop distracting me,” he admonishes in a tone that makes it clear he’s teasing me right back. I decide to show him some mercy and cover myself back up again as I chuckle, interested in what he has to say. “I think it’s clear that there’s a pretty strong attraction between us that’s difficult to ignore—” I hum in agreement. “But I need you to know that I’m not looking for a relationship and I’m still not certain that I can completely move past what you are. I mean, what you were.” My stomach drops but I keep my smile plastered to my face. “We can keep having sex. I’d like to keep having sex, but you need to agree that it’s never going to be anything more between us. It won’t work.” He trails off and looks at me expecting an answer.

I have to swallow a few times, my words seeming to catch in my throat. I’m not an idiot, I know that what I am is an undeniable barrier to him thinking of me as someone he could have a relationship with. I don’t even think that I was expecting anything from him at all. Hoping, yes. But not expecting. Is sex all that I’m good for? His words feel like a kick to the gut so strong that I have to resist the urge to wrap my arms around my stomach.

I’m so confused by his actions. If he only wants me for sex then why does he make an effort to spend time with me? Why does he do little things that he knows will make me happy?

As if he can read my feelings as easily as if I were to voice them, his eyes soften. “You know it can’t work between us Kairi. We are too different.”

“Mhm,” I manage to force out. “Yeah, sure...um okay... no problems. It’s just sex. Nothing more... of course,” I stammer, cursing myself for my complete and utter lack of chill. I can do this. I’ll accept the parts of him he is willing to give me and that

will have to be enough because I'm learning that I'll do almost anything to keep Eagan in my life. I know that I could find someone else. As a human there are far fewer barriers to me meeting someone and falling in love than there were before. But I don't want anyone else. There's only him.

Eagan exhales and appears satisfied with my response. "Okay, cool. Glad we got that out of the way. Is it TV time?" I smile as he throws me a bag of potato chips. I'm uncomfortably aware of the fact that I'm still naked beneath this blanket and I feel much more self-conscious now than I did before this conversation. I politely excuse myself, letting him know that I will be coming back. I'm disappointed that the light-hearted fun we were having before seems to have dissipated but I'm not going to pass up spending time with him. The talk we had may have dulled my arousal but not enough to get rid of my flirty nature, so even though I put on clothing, it's his t-shirt I wear. And it still smells like him, I realize as I bring the shirt to my nose and inhale his scent.

I return to the sofa and sit close to him. He raises his eyebrows at my choice of clothing but doesn't comment. He allows me to lean into him slightly and throws one of his arms around my back. He seems much more relaxed than I have seen him before, but his actions don't always match his words. Is this something you would do with someone who is only here for sex? I don't know and honestly, I'm not sure he does either.

### Chapter 35

Eagan and I had an enjoyable night last night, relaxing and eating snacks but it felt muted somehow. It was comfortable but lacked the flirtatious teasing and the playful banter that I've been getting used to these past few days. Our conversation was stilted and more formal than I liked.

I'm trying to navigate this new dynamic in our relationship and attempting to figure out what is and isn't acceptable within the boundaries he has set. Because I'm thinking about it so much, I find myself filtering my own behavior. Not drastically, but I have been second-guessing my actions towards him.

I went to bed last night and wasn't able to sleep. I'm learning that when I'm able to fall asleep quickly, I have the most amazing sleep, but lying in bed, trying to sleep but feeling completely awake, is fucking awful. I hate the feeling of tossing and turning, trying to get comfortable while simultaneously thinking about things that are anything but. It was almost like every minute awake had me moving further and further away from sleep. After hours of this, I finally crashed, but this morning, I am absolutely feeling the effects of my lack of sleep. Not what I need for my first ever day of work. Nevertheless, my fatigue doesn't prevent the excitement that thrums through my veins.

The shower is slightly effective at waking me up and I spend a bit of time in front of the mirror to attempt to make it look like I have my shit together. Once I'm dressed, having chosen a more casual ensemble for my first day, matching the look that I see Kelsey wear when she's working at the store, I'm pleased with how I look. I don't think anyone would be able to tell that I am exhausted by my appearance alone. And I

know I can put on an energetic performance to help. I am excited though, so I won't need to act too hard.

Eagan's waiting for me in the kitchen and my heart does a little backflip when I realize he has already made me breakfast. "You didn't have to get that ready for me," I told him.

The corner of his lip lifts in a smirk. "Yes I did. You still don't know how to cook." I blush, knowing that he's right.

"Well, I could have just grabbed some fruit. Or made some toast. I wouldn't have fucked that up." I reply somewhat defensively.

He holds his hands up in surrender. "I know you can do that, but I wanted to make you something nice for your first day of work." He holds out the plate of what looks like a cheesy omelet and crispy bacon in a peace offering and my mouth immediately starts to water.

"Thank you. This looks delicious," I acquiesce, grabbing the plate from his hands, "but I would really like to learn how to cook sometime soon. Can you please teach me?"

"Sure thing, vicious one. Now eat before it gets cold." The sound of his pet name for me on his lips causes butterflies to flap in my stomach. It's one thing to use the name during sex. Another thing altogether when he says it in casual conversation. I wonder if he's aware of the way the name makes me melt into a puddle on the floor. Or that the way he says it betrays affection for me that he's trying so hard to deny. He's going to have to stop calling me adorable pet names if he wants our relationship to remain purely sexual because how can I resist that? But goddess, I don't want him to ever stop.

I arrive at the boutique precisely at nine o'clock and wait a couple of minutes out the front until Kelsey joins me. She beams when she sees me and then unlocks the door and turns on all the lights.

“Alright Kairi, are you ready to get started?” She asks and I nod eagerly. She spends the next hour before opening showing me around the store. She explains how all the items are organized and where stock is kept out the back. She then demonstrates how to use the cash register. Nothing is too complicated, however; it is a lot of information to retain as everything is so new. Kelsey shows an impressive amount of patience, answering every question and repeating instructions when I don't understand the first time. At no point does she make me feel like I'm dumb or that I'm a burden. I know I made the right decision to ask her for a job before looking elsewhere. I'm aware that her kindness and generosity is hard to come by.

After the basic run through we are ready to open. Kelsey explains that the store isn't always busy. There are periods where multiple people come all at once but there are also many times where there are big breaks between customers.

After being open for half an hour, the first customer enters the store. She's a middle-aged woman, curly hair and dressed professionally, like maybe she's on the way to work, or taking a break. Kelsey gestures for me to be the one to greet and help the customer.

“Hi there, is there anything I can help you with today?” I ask cheerfully. The woman is kind and asks for assistance to find a dress for an upcoming date. It's an easy enough request and I am able to direct her to the section of dresses and pull some items that she might like. I then direct her to the change rooms and Kelsey gives me a sly thumbs up. I grin to myself, pleased that things are off to a good start. When the woman decides on a dress, Kelsey watches from beside me as I ring up the item on the register. It all goes smoothly, and the woman leaves the store, pleased with her purchase.

“Nice job,” Kelsey praises and I feel myself stand a little taller and allow the smile to take over my face.

The rest of my four-hour shift progresses smoothly. We have a steady stream of customers but do not get too busy that I become overwhelmed. For the most part, Kelsey lurks in the background and allows me to practice; however, sometimes, she needs to step in and help me find something that a customer requests.

I’m overcome by a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction that I have never experienced before. The feeling of learning something new and succeeding, of providing a service that benefits others. I’m gradually becoming more independent and able to look after myself and the feeling is euphoric. I never in my wildest dreams could have pictured doing something like this.

Throughout the day I have also realized that I thoroughly enjoy talking and socializing with others. I try to engage every customer that comes into the boutique in a conversation. I have no problems finding a discussion topic and in general, they are more than happy to participate. I’ve had many questions from people who don’t recognize me, but everyone has accepted my response that I’ve moved here from out of town.

At one o’clock when my shift has finished for the day, Kelsey walks up to me having just finished eating her lunch. “You did fantastic today Kairi. How did you find it?”

“I loved it,” I say with complete conviction. “I loved meeting new people and learning new things. When can I come back?” I ask, speaking quickly.

She laughs, “how about tomorrow?”

“Yes!” I practically squeal.

“Okay, okay. Tomorrow it is. We will just stick with the same shift, nine o’clock until one o’clock. I just want to make sure I’m easing you into it before I start throwing full days at you.”

“Thank you again,” I say, and she gestures as if to wave off the gratitude.

“Honestly, it’s no problem. Your help actually benefits me as I might be able to get a break every now and then,” she chuckles. “I do need to get all your details though—you know, ID, social security, that kind of thing.” My stomach plummets and crushing disappointment threatens to overwhelm me. Of course I don’t have these things. Kelsey notices my rapid change in mood and looks at me in confusion. “Is there a problem with that?” she asks gently and I don’t know how to reply. My eyes start to burn and I’m afraid I’m going to start crying.

“You don’t have an ID,” she says and it’s more like a statement than a question. All I can do is nod. She stares at me for a few moments and I wait in fear for her to turn me away. Eventually she smiles. “Okay, we might have to be a bit sneaky then. I really like you, Kairi and I want to help you out because I know you’ve had a tough time. God knows we all deserve to have help in our low moments. So I’m willing to pay you in cash for a bit while you sort everything out for yourself. Does that work?”

My breath escapes me in a woosh and I push down the urge to throw myself at her in gratitude. “Thank you,” I whisper.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Kairi.”

I wave as I leave, a bounce in my step and a wide smile on my face. Everything feels like it is falling into place for me. Now if I can only figure out what to do about Eagan, I would be perfect. I find myself eager to get home to talk to him and I hope that some of the awkwardness from this morning has gone.

Back at the apartment, I find Eagan busy at work on his laptop. Since I've been here, I haven't seen him doing any work and I'm intrigued to learn more about what he does. When he hears the door close he looks up at me. "How was your first day of work?" He asks me.

"Oh, my goddess, it was so good. Kelsey is the nicest person alive, and I loved talking to all the customers. I had such a good time. I promise that I'll give you my first paycheck to start paying you back for everything you've done for me." The words pour out of me as I rush to tell him all about my day.

"That's wonderful that you had a good day. I'm surprised you were able to pick up everything so fast, considering you've never worked before," he says kindly.

"Me too," I admit, "I hoped I would be a fast learner, but I honestly had no idea if I would be. Fortunately, things there seem simple enough and Kelsey was happy with how I did. I've got another shift tomorrow." Eagan nods in acknowledgement and turns back to his laptop screen.

"What are you working on?" I ask.

"Tom sent me through a project that he would like me to start working on. Mostly he just wants me to pitch some ideas to him first before the clients. It's a way to make sure that I'm capable of doing the work and that I'm not going to flake on him again." Guilt rises in my stomach for being the one to cause him to lose his job in the first place.

"Can I have a look? I'd love to learn more about your work." He nods and allows me to sit close to him, looking at his screen while he shows me how he creates his designs. I'm enraptured listening to him and I'm not sure I've heard him speak so passionately about something. I can tell he gets a lot of enjoyment out of his work, and I'm thrilled for him that he has been allowed a second chance.



### Chapter 36

The next few days seem to pass in a blur. It continues to surprise me how well Kairi and I get along and share space. Tom was right when he said I generally don't like to live with anyone. I didn't hate living with Kelly, but I still found that she often pushed me to do things that I was reluctant to do. I didn't feel like I could completely relax around her. Other than Kelly, I haven't lived long-term with anyone else since living with my parents.

Something that I've noticed with Kairi is she is more than willing to go with the flow. This might be because she's new to being human in general, but she rarely has strong opinions about how something should be done. She also seems happy to go along with my choices. It's because of this that I find myself paying more attention to what she likes and dislikes and making decisions with these things in mind. She doesn't demand things from me which makes me more willing to give them. It's some kind of fucked up logic but it means that our dynamic is completely different to what mine was with Kelly.

I also really enjoy spending time with her. She makes me laugh and I find her enthusiasm for mundane things contagious.

We haven't done anything sexual since our talk the other night, much to the disappointment of my chronically hard cock, but her face is far too easy to read, and I can tell that she is struggling to determine how to interact with me.

I've thrown myself back into work and have sent a few designs to Tom for approval. He's told me he is pleased with what I have done and is happy for me to continue

working from home. He doesn't want to overload me with work too quickly, which is understandable. But I am also eager to help out, given that I know how completely inundated with work Tom is at the moment. I'll be patient, though, and succeed at the work he gives me.

Kairi has also found a real love for retail. I was shocked when she told me about the job, and I didn't lie when I told her that I had my doubts about her abilities. But once again, she surprised me and I'm learning that she is a lot more capable than I have given her credit for. I can also see that it's improving her overall confidence in the human world.

She's gone into the boutique every day this week. She told me that Kelsey didn't actually need her every day, but Kairi was so eager that she pushed Kelsey to agree to extra shifts. It's been nice to have the apartment to myself for a few hours each day. It allows me time to work without distraction and gives me the opportunity to think about my next steps.

We have also seen a lot of Sienna this week. She's keeping busy during the days but will often come over for dinner. I get the impression that something isn't quite right with her. If you didn't know her as well as I do you probably wouldn't notice, but I see the way her smile drops when she thinks neither of us are looking at her. I haven't had the chance to ask her yet, but I know I need to make it a priority. She's been here for two weeks now, and I know she will have to go back any day, but she still hasn't mentioned when she has to return.

As the afternoon drags on, I take a break and decide to make a short trip into town. It feels like déjà vu when I walk out the door of the apartment building only to come face to face with that journalist guy again. The nervous looking one with the disheveled hair. What was his name?

"Mr. Reynolds can I please have a moment of your time? It really is important." Jeez

this guy cannot take a hint.

“As I told you before, I’m not interested. Please leave me alone.”

“When the boat crashed did you see anything in the ocean? Anything that you couldn’t explain perhaps? Or did you hear anything unusual?”

I immediately go cold, and my heart begins to race. “I told you I don’t remember anything,” I respond, perhaps too quickly. “I’ve asked you to leave me alone. If you continue to come onto my property I’m going to have to get the authorities involved.”

Once again, I have to be the one who walks away from the conversation. This time, I’m entirely filled with dread. Why was he asking those questions? What does he know? Is Kairi in danger? My thoughts automatically go to Kairi and the urge to protect her. This journalist might be a problem. We need to keep an eye on him.

Later I decide that it might do us all good to have a night out. I doubt Kairi has even experienced going to a bar and I’ll invite Sienna and maybe even Tom and Lacey. Yeah. That sounds like a good idea. It can be a celebration of Kairi’s new job and my return to work.

I send text messages to Sienna and Tom and get replies back almost instantly saying that they’re in. Apart from the small stop at the bar with Tom recently, I don’t even remember the last time I had a night out. I definitely can’t remember the last time I wanted to go out. Now I just have to wait until Kairi gets home to let her know.

Kairi is just as excited as I had anticipated when I tell her that we are going out and I get the pleasure of witnessing her crazy dance moves once more. I love the way she has no inhibitions and isn’t afraid to be herself. She even lets out her signature squeal when I let her know that Tom and Lacey will also be there.

“Oh, my goddess, what if they don’t like me?” she asks, running strands of hair through her fingers.

“Don’t worry, Tom and Lacey like everyone,” I respond.

We are interrupted by a knock on the door, and I open it to find Sienna.

“Hey Enna, what are you doing here? I thought we were going to meet at the bar.”

“I thought Kairi might appreciate someone to get ready with.” The scream that comes from behind me suggests that Kairi would indeed like that. I wordlessly gesture to Sienna, inviting her inside and she walks straight past me to Kairi.

“It’s great to see you too, Enna,” I call out as she and Kairi shut themselves in her room. She just laughs in response.

After what feels like a long time later, I’m ready to go and am trying to hurry up the girls. “Come on,” I groan. “What could you possibly be doing in there that is taking so long?”

“You can’t rush perfection,” Sienna yells out in reply.

The sound of the bedroom door opening draws my attention, and all the breath suddenly leaves my lungs. Kairi stands before me. I thought she looked like a goddess before, but now, now, I wonder if there is any being that tops a goddess in beauty. Her long sunset hair, while usually mostly straight with a slight wave, now falls to her waist in soft curls. Her emerald eyes that capture me in her spell are dusted with a dark shimmer on the eyelids, her eyelashes impossibly long. And her lips, fuck her lips, red and glossy and all I can think about is seeing that lipstick smudged on my cock. It takes me a long moment before I’m even able to look away from her face but when I do, the sight has me wanting to fall to my knees to worship

at her altar.

Kairi is wearing a form-fitting, very short, black, silky dress. It's so tight to her body that it's positively indecent and leaves nothing to the imagination. A deep v neckline shows the swells of her breasts and I think I can see a shimmer to the skin of her cleavage.

I am completely and utterly lost for words. She is every daydream and fantasy I have ever had, wrapped up in a black silk package. I want to devour her. Consume her . How the hell does she expect me to walk out the door with her looking like this? I want her all to myself. The idea of anyone even looking at her in this outfit has a growl building in my throat.

I'm broken out of my trance by the sound of the girls laughing. Sienna leans in and whispers into Kairi's ear. I can't hear what she says but it causes Kairi to beam. I finally look at my sister and notice that she dressed up as well. They obviously decided to go all out tonight.

"So big brother, what do you think? How do we look?" she asks, giving a twirl. But I can't take my eyes off of Kairi. She's going to be branded in my memory forever looking like this.

"So fucking gorgeous," I whisper, looking only at Kairi as the words escape me. Her eyes widen but her attention is pulled away by Sienna's howling laughter.

"Oh my god, Kairi. You made him speechless! Look at him!" My cheeks flush and I make a mental note to get Sienna back for this later. I cough trying to recover from my mental lapse.

"You... er... both look beautiful. You did a good job," I stammer out and can't miss the twinkle in Kairi's eyes and the pink that tinges her cheeks. "Let's just go." I

internally shake myself to try and rid myself of the completely inappropriate thoughts I'm having, which include carrying Kairi straight back into the bedroom, peeling off that dress, and tasting every single inch of her.

We catch a ride share to the bar and wait out front until Tom and Lacey join us shortly after. They greet Sienna with a hug and stand back with smirks on their faces as they wait for me to introduce Kairi. I notice that Kairi is bouncing on her toes and fidgeting with the hem of her dress, both indicators that she's feeling nervous and excited.

"Tom and Lacey, this is my friend Kairi."

"It's so nice to meet you," Kairi jumps in, never one to hold back in social environments. "I have heard so much about you both. Eagan always says the nicest things."

"It's a pleasure to meet you too, Kairi. You and Sienna look so wonderful tonight," Lacey gushes.

"Thanks so much. Sienna helped me get ready," Kairi says smiling.

"Alright let's go inside. I have had a hell of a week and could use a drink, or five," Tom chuckles, and we follow his lead.

Tonight, the bar has a completely different vibe to the weekday I came here with Tom last. On the weekend, this is one of the top places to be for anyone under the age of forty. It turns into more of a club scene, which is not usually my thing but tonight is an exception.

The sound of the crowd crashes over me in a wave and I'm momentarily blinded by the flashing lights. Kairi slowly circles, staring in awe at the people around her. It

looks like my suspicions were correct and she's never been to a place like this before.

We slide into the booth with me sitting beside Kairi and it takes all of my mental strength not to trail my fingers up her creamy, white thighs. Tom, Sienna, and I order a whiskey. Lacey convinces Kairi to try some sort of fruity concoction, and the drinks are brought out to us quickly. It's only as I am raising my drink to my mouth that I realize I'm missing a very important piece of information about Kairi.

"Please, for the love of god, tell me you are over twenty-one years old," I whisper into her ear. I don't have a clue how sirens age. She looks to be in her early twenties, but I don't know whether sirens age at the same rate as humans.

"Of course, I am. I'm fifty-five," she replies, looking me dead in the eyes, and I swear my heart stops beating.

"Seriously?"

"Ha! You should see your face," she says in between fits of laughter. "I can't believe you thought I was being serious. I'm twenty-four you idiot." I let out a long breath, my mouth twitching as I try not to smile.

Kairi's hysterics have caught the attention of our booth, and everyone is staring at us. I can't stop the bark of laughter that escapes me at the perplexed looks on their faces. I have to give it to her; she really got me good with that one. But it's made me realize that I would very much like to get to know her better. I want to look past her actions as a siren because I'm learning there is far more to Kairi than I originally thought.

### Chapter 37

The way he is looking at me tonight has my skin on fire. Every glance sets me alight. I've barely been able to concentrate on our conversation with the others because the feel of his body next to mine has my mind emptying of all rational thought. Is he aware that he keeps running his fingers over my thighs? It's distracting and it's taking a hell of a lot of effort to make it look like I am paying attention. I can't tell if it's the alcohol I've been drinking or Eagan that's causing my lack of focus.

I'm drinking my second cocktail of the night. I've never had alcohol before, but I've seen people when they've been drinking. I want to make sure I don't get too carried away tonight although the drinks are delicious.

A new song starts to play and Sienna squeals, "Come on Kairi, Lacey, let's dance!" She stands up from the booth and pulls us by the hands. I stumble over Eagan, who is blocking my exit, and as I do so, I inadvertently rub my ass over him. Oops.

Still holding our hands, Sienna leads us onto the dance floor. There are more people crushed together in this space than I've ever seen before, and I'm both overwhelmed but also drawn in by the bodies that surround me, gyrating together to the heavy bass of the music. The atmosphere is contagious and as I watch the way that Sienna and Lacey let go and move their bodies, I allow myself to sink into the beat. People surround us, pushing from either side but all I focus on is being here in the moment. Feeling completely free.

As we dance, sweat starts to bead on my skin and sticks my hair to the base of my neck. Adrenaline courses through my veins and causes my heart to beat hard and fast.



After a few songs, Sienna peels away and begins to dance with a woman with dark, almost black hair that falls to her shoulders. I watch as the woman, slightly shorter than Sienna, places her hands on Sienna's hips and pulls their bodies close together as they dance in time with each other. Sienna gazes at the woman with lust-filled eyes, but as their hands start to roam over the other's bare skin, she closes her eyes and appears to give into their movements.

Lacey catches my eye and notices that I am looking at Sienna. "Oh, don't worry about Sienna; she likes to let loose on nights out," she laughs, and I tear my gaze away and get lost in the music once more.

At some point, Lacey moves away and coerces Tom onto the dance floor. They move together to my left and it's beautiful to see the love that flows between them as they sway slowly in each other's arms, completely oblivious to anyone other than each other. They stare into each other's eyes, and I'm hit with such a sharp pain of jealousy it causes my breath to catch. I have always imagined how it would feel to be loved so completely and watching these two makes me desperate to be looked at in the way they look at each other.

I'm dancing alone as both Lacey and Sienna have paired off, Lacey with Tom and Sienna with her mystery woman. I look over to Eagan who remains in the booth and gesture to him to come join me. He shakes his head, leaning back and downing the rest of his current drink. I shrug my shoulders and turn away feeling the sinking disappointment. His loss.

A hand runs over the small of my back and a large body presses into my personal space. I look over my shoulder and meet the gaze of a man I've never seen before. His caramel eyes are heated, and his brown curls fall softly around his face. He leans closer, bringing his lips to my ear. "Can I dance with you?" he asks. I'm surprised but nod my agreement. Dancing with someone else looks far more fun, and if Eagan doesn't want to dance with me, then I'll just have to do it with someone else.

The man wraps a soft hand around my stomach and pulls my ass into his crotch. He directs my movements to match his as we move our hips from side to side. As we move together his hands start to run up and down my sides. A breath of warm air brushes against the back of my neck and I feel the softest press of lips. Goddess, I wish they were Eagan's lips, but I close my eyes and try to ignore the ache that pinches in my chest when I think of him. He's made it clear that he doesn't want commitment so there shouldn't be anything wrong with me having fun with someone else. I'm not sure if I believe that though.

Confusion strikes me when the sound of an "oof," accompanied by the disappearance of the warmth at my back brings me back to reality, my body mourning the loss of that physical connection. I'm suddenly spun around, and strong hands grip my shoulders. I lift my head and stare into the deep, ocean eyes of Eagan. His pupils are blown, and his breaths are heavy as his eyes seem to reach into my soul. Over to the side, the man who was dancing with me disappears into the crowd of people, giving me a look of annoyance as he goes. I barely give him a second thought.

Eagan grabs my chin and pulls my gaze back to him. "What are you doing, vicious one?" he growls, low and deep, sending shivers down my spine.

"Dancing, of course," I reply, attempting, and failing to pull my chin from his tight grasp.

"Are you trying to make me jealous?"

"Of course not. I asked you to dance and you said no. It's not my fault someone else wanted to dance with me." Still partially restraining me, he doesn't move or utter a word for a few heartbeats.

"Fine, vicious one. You want to dance? Then let's dance." Eagan turns me around again and pulls my ass firmly into him, much more demanding than the man before

him. I let out a groan as I feel every inch of his cock through my barely there dress. There's no doubt that he's turned on and I'm right there with him. Eagan's movements are rough and forceful in the best way as he dictates every motion I make.

I'm burning. Electricity pulses through my skin as his touch ignites me. Though we dance so similarly to the way I was dancing before, it couldn't feel more different. I can't breathe from the rush of desire that floods my body.

Eagan buries his head in the crook of my neck and bites gently, causing a hiss to slip through my teeth. He soothes the bite with a stroke of his tongue, and I let out a soft whimper and grind my ass even harder into his cock, desperate to feel every inch of him.

Eagan's hands fall to my legs, and he begins to caress softly up my thighs. He reaches the hem of my dress but doesn't stop. Once his hands move under my dress they pause for a moment. I become hyper-aware of the people around us, the indecency of our actions and then simply decide that I couldn't care less what they think.

When I make no notion to stop him, instead, pushing myself into him even more, his long, soft fingers continue on their journey. A gasp leaves his lips when he moves higher still. "Oh, my vicious one, you're not wearing any panties. Did you think you were going to get through tonight without me noticing?"

My skin heats, not with embarrassment, but with lust. "I couldn't wear panties with this dress," I taunt. "It's too tight and I can't have visible panty lines." My words come in gasps as I feel incapable of drawing in a full breath.

"Hmm," he moans, pressing his head into my neck once more, the intimacy of his actions surprising and delighting me. "Are you drenched for me? Is your cunt dripping with need for me?" My heart beats ferociously at his filthy words and the sounds of the music and people around me cease to exist. All I can hear is Eagan's

breathing and my heart racing. I nod like a bobblehead, desperate to show him how much I want him. How much I need him.

His fingers lightly touch my core, and a shiver runs all the way through my body. For a few breaths, he moves his fingers, feeling my wetness that he accurately predicted was there. The niggling thought in the back of my mind returns, trying to tell me that what we are doing is inappropriate in a public space. But again, I can't bring myself to care. And with the way everyone else here is pressed against each other, hands, and mouths devouring, I'm not certain that anyone else cares either. I banish that little voice for good and surrender to Eagan.

After only a couple of strokes of my clit, he runs his fingers through my wetness and then withdraws them. It's not much but enough to spike my already high arousal and leave me wanting. He lifts his fingers to his mouth, taking care to lick each one clean. He then captures my mouth with his over my shoulder and the taste of myself on his lips drives me wild. Every time we give in to this need between us, our kisses are intense and claiming. In this I don't submit. My lips and my tongue fight with his, teeth clashing and nipping.

He steps away but grabs my hand, pulling me away from the dance floor and I show absolutely no resistance. We weave in and out of the crowd, trying not to step on any feet or bump into anyone. I pull down the hem and smooth my dress with my other hand when I notice that it has risen to an indecent length thanks to Eagan's exploration.

Eagan leads me into a hallway with bathrooms. He looks around, taking note of the small group of girls hanging around the girl's bathroom who are looking rather intoxicated. Instead, he pushes me through a door with a sign that indicates that it's the staff bathroom.

"Eagan," I hiss, "what are you doing? We shouldn't be here."

He pushes me over to the bathroom counter, pushing me forward onto it and my hands fly out to brace myself. “Hands on the counter, vicious one and stick that pretty ass out for me.”

### Chapter 38

Well, I'm doing a fucking shit job at remaining disconnected from Kairi. Nothing in my intentions to just use her for sex included groping her on the dance floor in a possessive show of dominance to any other interested men. When I saw her dancing with that douchebag—okay, to be fair, I don't know that he is a douchebag—a red haze fell over me and all I knew was that he shouldn't be touching her. Nobody should be touching her other than me.

Mine.

There's that word again. The one that makes me think I'm fighting a losing battle here.

Before I knew it I was marching right onto the dancefloor and not-so-gently pushing away the guy that was rubbing his dick against her ass. I didn't even give him another moment of thought before I took his place.

I love the way she melts for me. The way she shows she's willing to give me anything. There was no apprehension in her body language as she allowed me to move my fingers up to the apex of her thighs, and god, she was fucking soaked. I know it was all for me.

The witch said that she took away the obsession that I had with Kairi that was driving me to madness, but I can't help but think that there are some remnants that have remained. Since everything happened I feel like a different person. When I am around her I feel like I have changed. Never in a million years would anyone have caught me

dancing before meeting Kairi. Now I have done so twice in as many weeks. It's one thing that she was able to coax me into her silly celebratory dance at the apartment but another thing altogether that she drew me to her on the dance floor tonight. I danced in front of other people and didn't care who saw.

Not only that, but I find myself craving time with her and wanting to bask in her smile. I never felt like that with Kelly. I did like spending time with her, but I didn't crave her presence like I do with Kairi, and I honestly don't know what to make of that realization. It's terrifying to me that one person has the ability to change the way that I act. Kelly tried to change me for so long with no success so why, without even trying, does Kairi elicit such positive changes? And now, I have dragged her into a vacant bathroom because I can't stand another second of not having my dick inside of her—more extremely uncharacteristic behavior for me. If anyone outside paid even the slightest bit of attention, it would be obvious what we are doing in here. But I don't care. I just need to feel her. Now.

She stands before me now, sweat sticking the front strands of her hair to her face, a slight dark smudge of makeup under her eyes, lipstick deliciously smudged and in a dress that should be illegal.

“Hands on the counter, vicious one and stick that pretty ass out for me,” I growl, pushing her towards the bathroom counter. She obeys immediately and my cock, already hard as steel, grows even harder at the sight of her dress riding up to reveal the globes of her ass. In seconds, I've pulled the zipper down on my pants and pulled out my weeping length, quickly fumbling to get a condom out of my pocket and put it on. I hitch her dress up even further to expose the entirety of her ass to me and then slam into her without any prior warning. She screams in pleasure as I force her hip bones into the counter. She scrambles to find purchase as I drive into her hard and unforgivingly. I can see her face in the mirror and her eyes are open, the irises a beautiful shade of forest green that I can never get out of my mind.

I reach out a hand and tangle it in her luscious, long hair and yank it back, another low moan leaving her throat as she arches her back to accommodate. I snake the other hand around to her front pulling down the strap of her dress, so her breasts spill out. She's almost completely exposed to me with her dress around her waist and her tits on full display. She's exquisite.

I hold her in submission by her hair and squeeze her breast firmly. I run my fingers over her nipple, tweaking and pinching and notice the way her whimpers and moans increase as I do so.

"More, more, more," she pleads as I keep up my relentless pace. My hands claw at any available bit of skin I can reach, fingers digging in so hard that they are sure to leave marks.

"You're so desperate for me. Do you love my cock inside you? Do you feel full?"

"So full," she whimpers. I'm frenzied, drowning in my lust and unable to conjure a single fuck about who might be listening in right now. All that matters is our pleasure.

"I'm coming," she whimpers at the same time as I feel myself racing toward my release.

"I want to feel your cunt squeeze around me, vicious one. I want you to give me everything." I raise a hand and slap it against her ass cheek. Hard. The sound of it hitting her skin rings through the air. With the impact she shatters completely, letting out a scream that mingles with my gravelly groan as I join her in release.

Her arms give way, and she collapses forward onto the bathroom counter. Still inside her, I slump over her, resting against her back and planting a soft kiss there. Our breaths are ragged, and our chests move in time with each other.



I reluctantly pull out of her and dispose of the condom in a nearby trash can. A few moments later, she stands up straight, and I smirk as I take in her freshly fucked appearance. After pulling up my pants I help Kairi freshen up. I gently rearrange her dress, softly massaging the pink that marks her skin from my hand. She fixes up her smudged makeup and runs her fingers through her hair, but there is no way our friends won't know what we've been up to, and I find that I don't really care what they think about it.

We leave the bathroom, and I note the slight tinge of pink that flushes Kairi's cheeks as she avoids eye contact with the other women in the hallway. I walk behind her as she leads us back to our booth where the rest of our group are talking.

At the sight of us they all stop mid-conversation to stare. Sienna gives us a knowing smile while Tom winks. Lacey, obviously filled in by Tom, just grins.

"Where have you two been? You look awfully sweaty. I guess... dancing... will do that to you?" Sienna chuckles and I smirk at her. I glance over at Kairi and see that although she appears to be a little uncomfortable with the attention we are getting, she doesn't shy away.

"You're right! Eagan is a great... dancer," Kairi retorts, causing Tom to choke on his drink and Lacey to pound on his back. God damn I love how she is able to go head-to-head with my friends, refusing to be intimidated.

Lacey encourages Kairi to shuffle in next to her and Tom and they quickly become immersed in conversation. I'm a little wary that Kairi may give something away to indicate her history, especially with the couple of drinks she's had tonight, but so far so good.

Sienna beckons me to sit next to her and I'm certain she is going to give me the third degree about Kairi. Better to get it over and done with.

“Things seem to be going well with Kairi,” she comments. I “hmm” in response but I should know that is not enough of an answer for her.

“Oh, come on E! Is that all you’re going to give me? Are you together now? You’re already living together.”

“Look, it’s a bit more complicated than you think. We aren’t together, we’re just having a bit of fun.” Now it’s Sienna’s turn to reply with a hmm as she raises her eyebrows at me.

“If that’s all you think is happening, then I’m concerned about your lack of self-awareness,” she laughs, and I glare at her. “Okay, okay. I’ll drop it for now. But I will say that it’s clear to everyone, but you, it seems, that there is a lot more than ‘just fun’ between you two...”

“What’s going on with you then Enna? I saw you getting all up and personal with the girl on the dance floor. Are you going to make a move? When do you go back home?” I interrupt, eager to move the conversation on from my complicated kind of relationship with Kairi.

Sienna looks down at her hands resting in her lap, the smile and humor leaving her face.

“Well, here’s the thing, I’m actually not going back,” she says as she raises her eyes to meet my confused gaze.

“What do you mean? You have to go back, what about work?”

“I’ve decided to take a sabbatical. While I’ve been in Witches Cove, I’ve been looking for a place to rent, and I’ve found one. I’m going to be living here for a while so I can work out my next steps.”

I'm filled with concern at the fact she hasn't mentioned a word of this before now. As far as I know she enjoys her job and has a good life in Blackwood. "What brought this on?" I ask.

She sighs and runs a hand across her face. "Things have been...hard lately. I was dating someone, and she broke my heart, and then things at work are a mess at the moment. And then everything that happened with you. I should have been here. It's just the two of us and we promised to always be there for each other. You were here going through something awful, and I couldn't come and support you because my employers are assholes."

She's right. Growing up with a dead mom and an absent dad meant that we had to rely on each other far more than was fair. We never had the sibling rivalry that I saw among my friends and their siblings. I think we knew that we didn't have anyone else in our corner, so things were much better if we worked as a team. I haven't liked living in separate towns these past years, so part of me is glad that she's moving here, but I hate that she's been having such a hard time.

I try to suppress the strong flash of bitterness that hits me when I remember that the reason I wasn't aware of my sister's struggles is sitting right opposite me. If I weren't so consumed with my obsession then I would have been there for her. Every time I start to forget, there is another reminder about Kairi's past.

I wrap an arm around Sienna's shoulders pulling her into my side a little more. "I'm so sorry that I didn't know that things are hard for you right now, Enna. And I'm even more sorry that you must have felt like you couldn't speak to me about all of this before now."

She jabs me in the ribs with her elbow causing me to squirm out of her reach. "Oi! None of that. We have both been struggling. I didn't tell you about my sabbatical because it's only just been finalized, and I wasn't a hundred percent certain that's

what I wanted to do. Being back here has made me realize how much I've missed you and I want to be a bigger part of your life. Especially to help you stop being an ignorant fool when it comes to Kairi," she sniggers trying to elbow me once more.

Her comment momentarily throws me into deep thought. It's clear that Sienna likes Kairi and she's made it well known that she wants and expects us to end up together. But she doesn't know Kairi's true nature like I do. Would that change her opinion? Sienna sometimes has trouble making friends and I don't want her to be hurt when she finds out we have been lying to her. This is just one more thing to feel guilty about. I'm so sick of that emotion.

"It's going to be amazing having you back in Witches Cove little sis," I say after a few moments of silence, pulling her into me once more and placing a light kiss on the top of her head.

Another round of drinks is delivered to our booth, interrupting our conversation, but we spend the rest of the night drinking, laughing, and completely enjoying each other's company. It's a perfect night and I'm glad I thought about organizing it.

### Chapter 39

The sounds of groaning and shuffling reach my ears, and I turn to see a raccoon by the name of Kairi moving slowly into the kitchen. Laughter bubbles out of me before I can suppress it. She clearly went to bed last night without removing her eye makeup. It is now smudged around her eyes giving her the appearance of a trash panda. Her long hair is tangled and wild and she's wearing my t-shirt again. I doubt I'm ever going to get it back.

She squints her eyes into a glare as she pulls herself to sit at the island. "Wow, you look rough this morning," I snicker.

"Fuck you," she snaps back, wincing and placing a hand to her head at the sound and causing me to laugh even more.

"Why did you let me have so many drinks last night, Eagan? I was doing so well at the beginning of the night," she groans. After we rejoined the others following our time together in the bathroom, the drinks started flowing much more freely. It wasn't long before Sienna called out for us all to do shots. To be honest, I lost track of how much we all drank but given the size of Kairi and the fact she's never had alcohol before, I'm not at all surprised she's struggling today.

"Goddess, who knew that alcohol makes you feel this shit the next day? I knew it could make you messy when you're drinking it, but I did not expect this," she says resting her head in her hands. I pat her on the back, trying and failing to appear sympathetic. I don't think I've ever seen her like this. She's always been bright and optimistic. This is probably the most human she's looked to me.

“How about I take you out for a greasy breakfast at Jessie’s Diner this morning? The food there is always good for a hangover.”

“How do you look so perfect? You drank even more than me and you don’t even look like you had a sip. It’s not fair,” she whines. My chest puffs up with the compliment. Perfect.

“Go and have a shower and clean yourself up. You look like a raccoon,” I tease, and she shoots me a glare once more before shuffling back out of the kitchen and into the bathroom.

It’s half an hour later when Kairi finally emerges from the bathroom. I was starting to worry she may have drowned in there because she was taking so long. She definitely seems to be more like herself after the shower, but if you look closely enough, you can see that her skin is paler, and her movements are more sluggish than normal.

Kairi winces at the noise of the diner as we find a small table amongst the families and other hungover party-goers. As funny as I find her predicament, knowing that we’ve all been in her shoes, I don’t like seeing her in pain. I encourage her to drink a big glass of water and offer her a couple of aspirins for her headache.

“What would you like to eat?” I ask.

“I don’t even know if I can stomach anything. Even the thought of food makes me queasy.”

“You happy for me to order for you then? If you don’t want to eat it that’s fine but I promise that eating something helps.” She nods before resting her head on the table.

When the server arrives at the table, I order two servings of bacon, eggs, hashbrowns, and toast. I also order myself a large, steaming cup of coffee. I take pity on her and

stay silent for a few minutes and she doesn't move her head. I realize that this is the first time we have been anywhere, just the two of us. It kind of feels like it could be a date. Not a very good one, though, considering Kairi's current state.

Kairi barely lifts her head when our meals are delivered to our table, only peeking up enough to look at it, let out another moan and then flop her head back down. I nudge her with my foot. "Come on vicious one, time to eat," I encourage. I tuck into my food, and after a few short moments, Kairi takes a tentative bite. And then another, like she's testing the strength of her stomach. After a few bites, she begins to eat with more enthusiasm, and I take that to mean that she's confident that she's not going to barf it back up. She's already vomited around me once and, to tell you the truth, I'm known to be a sympathetic vomiter.

We sit and eat in comfortable silence, neither of us feeling the need to fill it with mindless conversation. Despite the noise of the busy diner surrounding us, I feel peaceful.

"What was it like, being— well you know— what you were before?" I ask the question popping out of me without warning. She looks at me suspiciously and I can't say I blame her, considering how I have treated her and the things I have called her. "Honestly, I'd like to know," I say to try and reassure her.

She relaxes slightly but there's still tension that makes me think she's uncertain how I'm going to react. "It isn't really an easy life," she begins, "I mean we don't have commitments and things that we have to do during the day like humans do. Most of our life is focused on our next meal and the fear of having to find enough souls to survive..." she trails off wincing. A shiver runs down my spine, but I find that I'm not as repulsed by the fact as I once was.

"So, what happens if you can't find enough souls? How often do you need them?"

“A soul lasts us about a year but coming to land drains us quicker. Many of my sisters don’t bother coming to land often, they don’t really see the appeal. I was a bit different though.”

“What do you mean?”

“I came on land as often as possible. We are only able to take on a human appearance for twenty-four hours at a time, and as I said, it drains us quicker, so I still had to be careful, but I loved being on land. I still love it.” She gives me a soft smile that, surprisingly, I return.

“Did that mean you had to eat more souls? What happens when you’re, like, running out?”

She looks at her hands, fidgeting in her lap. “Yes, I did need them more frequently, but I was always careful not to drain myself too much. I spent a lot of time sick, lethargic, and hungry. When we are close to needing another soul, our life force dulls and everything becomes more difficult. Most of my sisters can’t stand that feeling, but for me, it was the price I was willing to pay to walk amongst you all for as long as I could.”

I sit with this for a moment and think about what it must have been like for Kairi to want to take her human form more frequently than her sisters but then having to feel sick a lot of the time as a result. I wonder what it was about being around humans that held such an appeal for her that she was willing to put up with the consequences. I ask her as much.

“You all have such freedom, the choice to spend your life doing whatever you want. I used to sit and watch you all go about your day and every single person did something different. It is completely fascinating to me the amount of choices you have available to you on a daily basis; what to eat, when to eat, who to spend time



with, how to spend your free time. As a siren we don't really have any of these choices and I was always envious of you." I'm surprised by her answer. From our interactions, I have been able to get the sense that she is happy to be human, but I didn't suspect just how deep her longing for this life was. That she was unhappy with her life before. Perhaps I haven't been completely fair to her.

"Do you miss being a siren?"

She pauses, considering the question. "I don't know. Maybe? I don't miss having to hunt for food and the boredom of existing with little to do. But I sometimes do miss the connection to the ocean, and I definitely wish that I didn't have to leave my sisters. Overall, I'm much happier here. I just wish that I didn't have to leave them behind."

"Your sisters, are they all related to you?"

She shakes her head. "Oh no, none of them are actually. But because we are part of the same group it's just how we refer to ourselves."

"Do you all get along?"

"Hmm, kind of. We didn't fight or anything, but I never felt like I was truly able to be myself around them. The only one I felt completely connected to was Raidne. She's my best friend and the closest thing to a biological sister I could have." Her eyes drop and her shoulders slump.

"Tell me about her," I encourage softly.

"She's amazing. Snarky and sassy but also mushy on the inside. There weren't many of us that got to see that side, but I was definitely one of them. Raidne and I tended to be a bit more isolated from our group. For me, it was because I felt like I didn't quite

belong, but for Raidne, I honestly just think she didn't like to be around others in general," she laughs and it's clear just how important Raidne is to her.

"Goddess, I miss her so much," she says as her eyes dim once more.

Changing the subject, I ask her if her hangover is easing.

"Yes, thank you. The food and aspirin helped."

We pay and leave the diner, and I find that I'm not quite ready to return home just yet.

"Would you like to go for a walk?" I ask and Kairi nods in response. We start walking towards the ocean and I resist the urge to hold her hand. Up ahead I notice a small group of people talking loudly. As we approach, I recognize the journalist again. Why does he keep popping up? Ryan? Roland? No, Rylan, that's the one. He's from the Cove Chronicle.

"— I work with Pete and it's so unlike him to just not show up to work one day," an older woman with frizzy hair exclaims. "And no one has seen or heard a peep from him. We reported it to the sheriff's department when none of us could get hold of him," she continues.

A middle-aged man with a bushy mustache and dark rimmed glasses chimes in, "I haven't seen my buddy Lachlan for a week. We talked on the phone every day, and one day, he just didn't call. Me and my wife Darlene have been going crazy with worry." As they talk, Rylan is writing everything down.

"It's the witch!" a woman cries out. "She's not content stealing people from the ocean anymore. She's coming and plucking them straight from their homes." Murmurs break out amongst the group.

Rylan looks at the woman who spoke. “So, you think these disappearances are linked to the ones of the fishermen?” he inquires. “What makes you think this? Do you have any proof?”

“I don’t need proof to know that this is the mark of something evil happening in Witches Cove. We should all be afraid. No one is safe,” the woman continues, speaking loudly enough for other people passing by to hear and causing many to stop to listen.

Kairi pales at the mention of the witch and I must admit it, just the thought of Vala makes my stomach churn. This time I do reach for her hand and pull her past the group that has gathered. She doesn’t speak for a few minutes as we walk. I haven’t let go of her hand. It feels natural.

“Do you think the woman was right?” she questions. “Is it possible that Vala is making people go missing?”

I think about it for a moment before I respond. “The people in Witches Cove believe that a witch is responsible for the people missing at sea but we both know that it is sirens. If Vala wasn’t taking people before, why would she be doing it now? And sirens can’t take people from land, can they?”

“Technically, we could coerce them with our song to walk into the ocean, but we don’t do this anymore. It’s too easy to get caught and we don’t risk it. None of my sisters would do it. You’re right, it’s probably nothing.”

I’m filled with unease when I think about the journalist digging around in the disappearances, especially the ocean ones, and the pointed questions he asked me, hinting that perhaps he knows more than he should. It would be disastrous if anyone found out about the sirens. They would be hunted and slaughtered. A couple of weeks ago, I would have been all for that. But not now. Now that I am starting to get to

know Kairi and am learning about those she cares about. I don't want her to be hurt.

We wander around, stopping to sit by the beach and enjoy the warmth of the sun on our skin. Kairi gazes mournfully at the beach and I wonder what she's thinking. What would it feel like to give up such a huge part of your life? How do you move on from that? I know she said that she was always interested in being human, but I can't imagine how difficult it would be to have been pulled out of your life with no warning. I don't even think she would have been able to say goodbye to Raidne. At this moment, I feel a surge of affection and sympathy towards her that I don't quite know how to process.

### Chapter 40

Eagan and I return home after spending some time soaking in the warm summer day. We walk back in silence, and I'm lost in thought. Eagan must realize it because he doesn't ask me what's wrong or try to coax conversation out of me. Talking with Eagan about my sisters has churned up some unpleasant emotions and the discussion we overheard outside the diner replays over and over in my head. I have been so caught up in my new life, learning how to be human and forming new friendships that I haven't really stopped to think about what I left behind. Talking about it has brought all my suppressed feelings to the surface and I don't know how to cope with the turbulent emotions currently flooding me. I should have made an effort to contact them somehow and let them know what happened. Instead, I just started a new life. What kind of person does that make me? Guilt roils my stomach along with a pang of loneliness.

I miss Raidne. I miss her so goddess damned much. No matter how many friends I make here, no one makes her absence less painful. There's not a single person in my current world that understands everything about me. I can see that Eagan is trying to learn more, attempting to put his negative emotions aside to understand my point of view. I appreciate it more than I can express but he still doesn't get it. He can't fully comprehend the anxiety that comes with a limited food source and the feeling of responsibility for keeping others alive as well as yourself.

And then there's the missing people. From what we heard, it sounds like there are at least a couple of people that have disappeared over the last week, and something about it feels wrong. Like it isn't a coincidence that this started happening not long after a siren became fully human for the first time in known history. I can't formulate

an explanation for the disappearances, but my gut tells me that I need to pay attention.

After my quiet contemplation I decide what I need to do. I leave my room and find Eagan doing some work on his laptop. He looks up when he hears me.

“Anything you want to talk about?” he asks as I take a seat next to him, pulling my knees up into my chest. He puts his laptop on the coffee table and to my surprise, takes my feet into his lap. He gently starts pressing his thumbs into the arches of my feet and a soft, pleased sigh escapes me. He waits patiently for me to put my thoughts into words, turning his attention from me to my feet and removing a lot of tension throughout my whole body.

“I need to go see my sisters,” I start. “I have to see them, to explain what has happened. I just left with no explanation, and I owe them one. I need to make sure they are okay. Can you please take me out on your boat?”

He stills, his hands withdraw from my feet and the tension rolls off him in waves. His breaths quicken and he pulls away, putting distance between us once more.

“I can’t,” he rasps. “I can’t go back out there. You told me... you told me not to go back out in the Witches Cove waters. I can’t do it. Your sisters will kill me. I just can’t.” His words are fast and panicked. He runs his hands through his hair, pulling at the strands. The simple thought of going back out onto the ocean has unraveled him and he’s falling apart right in front of me. He continues to gasp for breath, and I don’t know how to calm him, but I can’t let this continue.

Without a second thought, I crawl into his lap and straddle him. I bring his head down to my chest and hold him there, hoping that the sound of my heartbeats and the feel of my chest rising and falling with my steady breaths is enough to soothe him. His body stiffens with the movement, but he makes no attempt to pull away. I don’t speak.

Instead, I sit with him, hold him, and I wait as his breathing evens out and his body begins to relax.

I don't know how long we sit here for but I refuse to be the first to move from this position. Eventually, he lifts his head from my chest and tilts his chin to look at me. His blue eyes are still wild with panic but most of the tension has left his body, and I can feel that his pulse has slowed.

"Fuck. I'm sorry... I don't even know what that was," he murmurs, his cheeks darkening with a tinge of pink.

"I am so sorry for everything we put you through," I admit, meaning it with my whole heart. I know that as a siren, I had to do what I could to survive, but I made a decision for Eagan that had many disastrous consequences, and I will forever feel guilty for my part in that.

Eagan seems to shake himself out of his current state and I move off his lap. "I guess I still have some unprocessed trauma around the water," he admits.

"We can talk about it another time, don't worry."

"No. I'm calmer now, I think you just caught me off guard that's all. Is this something you need to do? Go back to see your sisters?"

I nod. "I really do. If I had any other way of finding them, I would do that instead of asking you for your help. If you really don't think you can do this, it's okay. I can wait."

"If I go back out on the boat, how do I know that your sisters won't sing to me and put me right back where I started? And for that matter, you're human now too. Won't their songs affect you as well?"

He raises good points and ones that I have also been thinking about. “We need to be able to hear a siren’s song in order to be influenced by it. If we can’t hear it, we aren’t in any danger.” I smile at him. “If we wear earplugs, I’m quite certain we will be fine. And once they know it’s me, they won’t try anything, but you can keep yours in, just in case.” I offer.

He nods slowly as he processes my words. “I think... I think I can do this for you. I don’t want to—god, I don’t want to, but I can understand the need to see your sisters. I know how important family is. Can you give me a couple of days to try and get my shit together, so I don’t have another breakdown?” he asks with a dry laugh.

“Of course. Thank you so much for doing this for me.” I lean forward and press my lips to his cheek. “I’m hungry, I think it’s time for a snack,” I say as I get up to give Eagan some space.

I’ve always got the impression that Eagan is the type of person to keep his feelings bottled up, reluctant to let people past his walls. In the weeks I have known him, it has been rare to see a display of strong emotion. I can tell that he is happy when he is with Sienna, and Tom and Lacey. There’s been times where I recognize some kind of positive feeling when he is with me, although I’m not always able to identify what that emotion actually is. I’ve also seen flashes of anger, frustration and, of course, lust. But these are only flashes. There one moment and gone the next as he masterfully reigns in the escaping emotion. I was taken completely by surprise by the outpouring of panic that he just allowed me to see. And even more shocked by the fact that he allowed me to comfort him. I must admit that I didn’t expect my request to be met with that reaction but when I think about everything that has happened, it is understandable that he would feel that way. I swear to myself that I’m going to do everything in my power to protect him. From my sisters if needed but also from Vala if we ever have to face her again. I refuse to be the cause of more destruction in his life.



The next three days pass quickly. I work at the boutique each day and Eagan works from home, completing the projects assigned to him by Tom. Every day at work I feel more comfortable, and Kelsey has even been able to leave me in charge of the store while she runs to the bank or to run an errand.

I still thrive on conversation and meeting new people and instead of feeling tired at the end of the day, I'm filled with energy. Kelsey and I have had lots of time to get to know each other in between customers. Although I haven't been able to disclose much about my personal life, Kelsey is more than willing to share details of hers. I've learnt that she's thirty-two years old and lives with her partner Brodie, who is forty-three. They met through a mutual friend ten years ago and have been inseparable ever since. Kelsey told me that her life mostly consists of working and spending time with Brodie. There isn't much time for anything else. I wonder if Eagan will be okay with me inviting her and perhaps Brodie next time we go out for drinks.

Eagan's waiting for me when I arrive home just after lunch. Usually, he would be busy with his own work and doesn't even notice me returning home. So, I'm caught off guard when I walk in and he's standing in the kitchen looking like he's been expecting me.

"Hi..." I say with a quirk of my eyebrow in question.

He inhales deeply, "Alright we are doing it. Now. We are going to see your sisters. Before I change my mind."

I can't stop the grin that takes over my face and I throw myself against him, wrapping my arms around his waist. This time when I touch him there is no flinch of surprise, no initial discomfort. He allows me to show him my gratitude in the way that is most natural to me and if I'm not mistaken, I think he's starting to like it too.

"Okay, okay, vicious one. I get it, you're excited," he says kindly, and my body

warms at the realization that this man is going to do something that he is afraid of simply because he knows it's important to me. The thought makes me want to jump straight back into his arms again and find other, more indecent ways, to show my thanks. But no. There will be time for that later, right now he's taking me to see my sisters. And I can't fucking wait.

### Chapter 41

Eagan gets us out in the water with ease, but his behavior is in stark contrast to my own. While my excitement has me unable to keep still, bouncing and pacing the short length of the boat, Eagan is pale and withdrawn. I will have to find a way to show him how much this means to me because he is struggling being back on the ocean.

Eagan and I have both put in earplugs that have blocked out all external noise. I am uncertain whether the song of my sisters will affect either of us. I am technically human now so it is possible that I will be influenced. And who knows what Vala did to Eagan when she removed the initial effects of the song from his mind. My plan is for us to keep the earplugs in until we locate Raidne, and she convinces my sisters not to use their song on us. I would like to think that the bond between us is strong enough to overcome the differences in our current biology, but I also think it depends on how hungry they are. I'm also concerned that they may see the permanence of my current form as an act of betrayal. I'm not sure how they could respond to that. At the very least, I am sure that Raidne would never cause me or anyone I care about harm. And I do care about Eagan. I care about him so much and in a way that's different from anyone else in my life.

Eagan drives the boat following the directions I gave him prior to us putting in the earplugs. I don't know exactly where they will be, but I know how to ensure that they will find us. Eagan stares at the expanse of the ocean in front of him, his jaw tense, and his back stiff. I move behind him, slip my hands around his waist, and rest my head on his back, offering comfort without words. He moves one of his hands down to my own and softly moves his thumb back and forth over the skin.

I take some time to be fully present in the moment, opening my senses to everything around me. The rough touch of his thumb brushing the back of my hand, the feel of his stomach moving with each breath, the kiss of the hot sun on my skin, softened by the cool breeze as it tousles our hair. And the smell of the ocean, so familiar and comforting but more foreign than ever before. I close my eyes and enjoy the peace that washes over me. I'm entirely aware that Eagan doesn't share these feelings but as I breathe in the fresh air around us, I feel some of the tension leave his body, almost as if he's absorbing my calm.

The boat stops when Eagan reaches the place I suggested would be a good spot to wait. I eagerly scan the ocean that surrounds us, looking for any sign of my sisters. Eagan doesn't make any motion to move from where he has sat but as the minutes drag, my excitement doesn't wane.

And then I see it. A flash of familiar dark brown hair that breaches the surface for a moment. My breath catches and I gesture to Eagan to let him know that they are here. His skin pales even more but he pushes his shoulders back and appears to steel himself for what comes next.

I wait a few more moments and then I see it again. This time closer. I catch another glimpse, and I think it's Raidne. She is in front of the others leading the group to what they imagine will be a hunt. My heart is racing, partly with excitement and partly with fear of the unknown. I'm hoping that this plan is a good idea, that Eagan and I will be able to avoid the influence of their song and their appetite for humans.

I can sense them moving closer, so I cup my hands around my mouth and call out to them. "Raidne. Raidne. It's me, Kairi. Please don't sing." They are close enough now that I can see the shadows beneath the water, moving swiftly.

"Raidne, it's Kairi. Please don't hurt us," I call again. This time they stop. I hold my breath as I wait to see what will happen next. Did they hear me? They must be

confused to hear my human heart beating along with Eagan's. They won't understand.

I finally exhale when the siren at the head of the group breaks off and continues towards the boat, leaving the others behind. I'm even more certain now that it is my best friend. I lean over the railing of the boat as far as I can to see the water lapping below. I gasp when she breaks the surface, her caramel eyes more familiar to me than my own.

"Raidne," I cry, overwhelmed with the need to be with her, to hug her.

"Kairi?" I can't hear her, but I can read my name on her lips, recognition in her eyes but also confusion.

"I'll explain everything but at the moment I'm wearing ear plugs because I don't know how your song might affect me. Can I take them out? Can you let everyone else know not to sing?" She nods in response before submerging herself once more and swimming back to the others. I wait for her to return. This takes longer than expected and that doesn't seem like a good sign. Would they really act against me? After all I've done for them? When she finally returns and gestures that I'm safe, I remove my ear plugs.

"Oh, my goddess Kairi, I can't believe it's you! I thought you were dead. We all did. You just disappeared. I've been so worried and upset. I've missed you like crazy."

Tears fall down my cheeks at the grief that tinges her voice. "I am so sorry Raidne, so much has happened, and I don't even know how to explain it all."

"Start at the beginning," she encourages. And so, I do. I go right back to the beginning. She knows about my choice not to kill Eagan when I had the opportunity initially, but I explain the impact that this had on his life and his mental state. She

gasps when I tell her about finding him throwing himself off the boat in the middle of the storm in pure desperation and then my decision to find the witch from our stories.

“Kairi you didn’t,” she whispers, shock lacing her tone, but she doesn’t interrupt any more than that as I continue my story, letting her know about the bargain I struck with Vala and how I’ve been able to have a human life since. I also can’t stop myself from telling her about my relationship with Eagan, or whatever he wants to call it. The weight that leaves my chest at being able to speak about all of this fills me with pure relief. I hadn’t realized how much I needed my best friend.

When I eventually trail off Raidne gapes at me, her eyes wide. “I sure as hell did not expect any of that,” she says, and I let out a strangled laugh. “You’re a human now? Fully human?” she queries.

“Yes,” I reply, “how are you? And the others? Are you all okay?”

“We are fine. Still pretty full from our last hunt so everyone’s rather content.” I wince at the mention of hunting and I’m glad that Eagan still has his ear plugs in, so he doesn’t have to hear it.

“So, Eagan... can I meet him?” she questions, the right side of her mouth lifting in a smirk. “Don’t worry, I’ve sent the others away so he’s safe.”

“Wait a sec,” I tell her as I move over to where Eagan is sitting, a questioning look on his face. I motion to him to take out his ear plugs and after only a brief hesitation he removes them.

“Are you okay?” he asks quickly.

“I’m amazing. Would you like to meet Raidne?” I offer. He looks unsure but agrees after my insistence that she won’t harm him. He joins me at the boat railing and looks

down tentatively at Raidne who bobs in the water below.

“Oh, you are gorgeous, aren’t you?” Raidne drawls seductively. “You look positively delicious.” I choke on a laugh at the surprise on Eagan’s face.

“She’s just teasing you; she’s not going to eat you, and I promise she’s not interested in your body for anything else either. Men aren’t her type,” I chuckle, Raidne’s laughter joining my own. I reach down and take Eagan’s hand in my own for reassurance.

“So, you’re the snarky best friend?” Eagan fires back, causing Raidne to howl with laughter.

“You’re damn right I’m the snarky best friend.”

“This still doesn’t feel real,” Eagan mutters to himself as he takes in Raidne’s siren form. To me, she’s beautiful but it’s going to take him some time for him to see her in a positive light although I don’t see the repulsion I expected.

“Are you happy?” Raidne asks me, concern furrowing her eyebrows as she takes in the close proximity of Eagan and me. I pause, running through the question in my mind. Am I happy? I don’t think I ever was truly happy in my siren form and there is a stark comparison between my life in the ocean and my life on land.

“Yeah, I think I am,” I reply as my mouth stretches into a grin. “I miss you though.”

She nods. “It’s not the same without you. You know how much our sisters drive me crazy with their yapping. You’re always the one that distracts them so I can get away.”

“And then I would get stuck with them! You’re lucky I love you so much,” I joke.

Goddess, it feels good to be laughing with her again. I love everything about my new life except for Raidne's absence.

Raidne's face turns contemplative before she asks, "so you're not sure if you are able to hear our song anymore?" When I bob my head in agreement, she hmms. "And you can't sing anymore?"

"No, I gave up my voice to Vala. Why?" I ask as I begin to grow suspicious.

"It's weird, we have been able to hear a song coming from somewhere close to land but it's different somehow. It's familiar, but also... not. Obviously, it's none of us and you know how rare it is for another siren to venture into our territory."

She's right. We always hunt in groups and never venture out on our own. We are also territorial and so it's highly unusual to hear the song of another of our kind. It's concerning to think that there may be a lone siren in Witches Cove that Raidne and my sisters haven't been able to locate.

"You don't think..." Eagan looks at me in confusion as I trail off, unable to voice my suspicions.

"What is it?" he asks.

"Is it possible that when the witch took your siren abilities, she found a way to harness your song and use it herself?" Raidne questions, having reached the same possible conclusion as me.

I run my fingers through my hair and chew on the inside of my cheek. "I don't know. Is that even possible?"

"Fuck," Eagan hisses when he realizes what this might mean.



“Do you think she could have been using my song against humans this whole time while I’ve been out enjoying life as a human?” Guilt coils in my stomach. I can’t even begin to comprehend the extent of the damage Vala might be able to cause with a siren’s power. “What would she even be doing with it?”

Eagan turns to me, eyes wide and lips parted in horror. “No,” he whispers.

“What?” Raidne and I both ask.

“The missing people,” he answers, and a lead weight drops in my gut. No, it can’t be. Surely, she isn’t using my song to lure humans to her cave. Why would she do that? What purpose does it serve? She doesn’t need souls to survive. How does she even use it without being in siren form? I’m silent as the questions whirl around my brain as I try to comprehend just how completely I have fucked up. I gave a powerful witch even more power. In trying to save one human, I have condemned others to death.

### Chapter 42

My head feels like it's going to explode. There is pressure throbbing behind my eyes and the sound of my pulse thuds in my ears. This is so fucking messed up. Kairi has turned ashen and tears pool in her eyes at the realization that Vala not only took her song but is also using it to harm others. I know enough about her now to know how horrified she is by this. One thing I've learnt about Kairi is that she has a kind soul. Despite her questionable history of food choices, she would never voluntarily harm someone.

I take in the appearance of Kairi's best friend, Raidne. It is similar to the vague memory I have of Kairi's siren form with only a few differences. Her hair is short and chocolate brown, falling just past her shoulders. Her eyes, a warm golden brown that I almost didn't notice as the slitted pupils, distracted me. Her skin is the same blue-gray color as Kairi's was, however, Raidne's is a little darker. I wonder if her skin is also darker than Kairi's in her human form. And just like Kairi, Raidne is also gorgeous. Perhaps all sirens are extremely attractive.

It strikes me how different this meeting is to the first time I saw Kairi and understood what she was. I am apprehensive of Raidne but not afraid. I am also not repulsed by her appearance like I expected to be. There is beauty in the siren form and in talking to her, I can recognize that there is a person worth knowing.

Moments pass in silence as we all come to terms with the new knowledge we have discovered. I can't even begin to contemplate what we could do to fix things. Kairi holds onto my hand like it's an anchor keeping her grounded. I'm shocked by the realization that my anxiety about the water and the sirens has dissipated, the threat of

Vala pushing the thoughts of smaller dangers to the back of my mind.

“What are we going to do?” Kairi says softly.

“It’s okay. We will figure something out. You’re not alone. Now that I know that you haven’t perished in some weird accident like I thought you did, I can help you. You don’t have to face this alone.”

I want to tell Raidne that Kairi isn’t alone, she has me. But I see the smile that lights up her face at Raidne’s words, so I keep my admission to myself for now.

“Do you think you’ll be able to come and visit me on land sometime?” Kairi asks hopefully.

“I’ll come as often as I can without needing to feed too frequently,” she replies with a glance at me that sends a shiver down my spine. “It feels different now to think of hunting after what you’ve told me about the humans,” she admits to Kairi.

Kairi nods. “It’s felt wrong to me for a while but it’s necessary. Only come visit when you feel like you can manage. I’d love to show you around. I think I’ll also need to brainstorm with you what we can do about Vala. I’m struggling to see how we could possibly do anything at all, but I feel like it’s my mess to clean up.”

“When we get back, I’ll do some research, see if I can find anything documented about Vala. It’s unlikely but perhaps something is recorded, disguised as a myth that might be useful,” I offer, running a hand through her long hair and staring into her eyes.

“Goddess you guys are so adorable it makes me want to barf,” Raidne jokes, ruining the moment and pulling my gaze away from Kairi’s.

“And you’re as bitchy as always,” Kairi bites back, the smirk on her face telling me that she too, is teasing.

“I have to get back to our sisters and answer the million questions they probably have for me. I love you so much Kairi and I could not be happier that you’re alive and doing so well.” Raidne then meets my eyes. “It was nice to meet you too, Eagan. I don’t have much experience with humans but if Kairi likes you then you must be all right. You better look after her though. Remember what I can do to you if you don’t.” She emphasizes the threat by flashing her long talons and razor-sharp teeth and I gulp.

“Don’t forget to wear condoms!” She cackles before swimming off.

“Oh, my goddess,” Kairi whispers as Raidne disappears from sight.

I laugh at her discomfort. “I can see why you like her so much.”

### Chapter 43

When we walk through the front door of the apartment, Kairi walks straight to the fridge looking for some comfort food. She barely spoke on the way back and I don't like the frown that has settled on her face. It's vastly different to the smiles I'm used to seeing; the teasing ones, the sarcastic ones, the peaceful ones, and those of pure, unadulterated joy. The furrow between her brows and the gnawing on her bottom lip makes me desperate to bring back her happiness. But I don't know how, given the new information we have learnt.

Kairi moves to go to her bedroom, I don't want her to be alone right now so I place a hand on her hip to halt her. She sighs and turns to face me. "Don't hide away right now, vicious one. Let's talk it through, okay?"

She pauses before nodding and I guide her gently to sit with me on the sofa, throwing an arm around her shoulders and encouraging her to lean in. "What's going on in that head of yours right now?" I ask. She continues to chew on that bottom lip, and I'm flooded with the urge to take over and bite it myself.

She takes time to process her thoughts and it's a few long moments before she answers. "What have I done, Eagan?" she whispers, so quietly I have to lean in closer to hear. "How many people have gone missing? How many has she killed? Goddess it's all my fault." She chokes on a sob, despair lacing her voice.

"We don't have all the information yet and we are making a lot of assumptions. How do we know that she wasn't killing people before this?"

“But she’s using my song. She tricked me into giving up my abilities without telling me that she would be able to use them. I knew making a bargain with her would be dangerous. I knew it. I’ve heard the stories, but I did it anyway!”

“You did it to save my life,” I remind her gently.

“It was me who put your life in danger in the first place!” she screeches as tears begin to track down her cheeks. “Every time I try to make something better, I just end up making it worse. I was so blinded by the offer to be able to live as a human that I missed her true manipulation.”

“We can figure this out together. You’re not alone. You have me and it looks like Raidne is more than willing to help.”

She tilts her chin to look up at me and her beauty leaves me breathless. Tears cling to her long dark eyelashes and her emerald eyes glimmer. “You would help me? After everything I’ve done?”

“I mean I’m partially responsible as well, aren’t I? You wouldn’t be in this position if it weren’t for me.”

She pushes up to brush her lips against mine, softly and far too briefly. As she pulls away, I close the distance between us and capture her lips again. She lets out a soft exhale and deepens the kiss, allowing my tongue to push in. This kiss is different from our previous ones. While our others were hard and unforgiving, sparks of electricity and a raging inferno, this kiss is softer, more intimate, like that first gasp of air when you’ve been underwater for too long. It’s foreign and terrifying, threatening to break apart all the walls I’ve tried to place to keep my soul from reaching out to hers.

The wetness of her cheeks leave moisture on my own and her hands reach up to

tangle in my hair. She digs her fingers into my scalp, and I moan at her touch. More. I need more. The taste of her is a drug and I'm hopelessly addicted.

She moves to straddle me on the sofa, but I don't allow her to, instead picking her up by her ass and walking as quickly as possible with her to my bedroom. I lay her gently on the bed and take my time to remove each item of her clothing, kissing a pathway on her soft, silky skin as I do so.

She's beautiful.

Her body has always attracted me, but more than that, it's her soul that is calling out to me. I stare reverently at her, realizing that I was an idiot to ever think I could stay away from her, to be able to stop emotions from getting in the way. She makes me feel.

She squirms under my gaze and whimpers with need as my lips move closer to her core before moving away again to kiss her shoulders as I slip down the straps of her bra.

"Please," she whispers, arching her back and pressing her breasts to my chest. My legs are on either side of hers and our torsos are pushed against each other. She's gloriously naked but I'm still fully dressed, a matter she immediately tries to rectify. She pulls off my shirt and I move off her briefly to unbuckle my pants and release my cock that is screaming for attention and pushing uncomfortably at the zipper. Her lust-filled gaze locks on mine as she runs her tongue over her delicious lips.

I stand next to the bed and greedily drink in the sight of her naked body on my bed once more, her vibrant, long hair splayed around her. I run my eyes over every inch, taking in every curve and dip and the freckles that dot her collarbone. She is perfection.

I lower myself on top of her, feeling her push up against me. I cover her lips with my own and resume our kiss. Her hands go back to my hair, lightly pulling at the strands and mine trail over her skin, following the path my eyes took moments before.

My cock aches for her and the precum gathering at my tip slickens her stomach where it rests. I can feel her heat as she tries to grind against me, desperate for friction.

“Please,” she pleads once more and I’m unable to resist. She no longer has her siren song to enchant and seduce but she doesn’t need it for me. With one word from her luscious lips, I’m ready to burn the world down for her. How did we get here?

I trail my fingers down between us, seeking out her wetness. As suspected, she’s soaking for me and after quickly rolling on a condom, kissing her the whole time, I line up the head of my cock and enter her with one strong thrust. She cries out, moving her legs to wrap around my back as she takes me. Fuck her cunt is so tight.

She’s amazing.

She’s made for me.

I push up on my hands taking in the look of pleasure on her face before leaning in to suck on the crook of her neck. The motion makes her moan, moving her hips in time with my thrusts. I stop briefly, maneuvering a pillow under her hips before pushing back in. The new angle and tilt of her hips has Kairi screaming as I move against her relentlessly. Her hands wrap around my back, and she digs her nails into my skin causing me to hiss with the pain while also heightening my pleasure.

The way we are entangled right now is different from other times. There’s no dominance, no desire for Kairi’s obedience and no talking. We are wholly and completely in the moment with each other. The intimacy between us is



overwhelming. I don't even recognize the emotions writhing within me. All I know is that I never want this to end.

"I'm going to come," Kairi gasps. I crash my lips to hers in another searing kiss before propping myself up to look into her eyes. She holds my gaze with wide eyes, her pupils dilated so that only a small ring of emerald remains. The look she gives me is unlike anything I've ever seen before. It's vulnerability, hope, and something else I'm afraid to name. I have no doubts that the same emotions are reflected in my own eyes.

"Then come for me, vicious one. I need to see your beautiful face as you come around my cock."

She screams out my name as she shatters around me, and her orgasm pushes me over the edge as well. The feeling of her pussy tightening around me like a vice is almost more than I can bear, and I cry out her name before burying my head in the crook of her neck as we still. We remain like this, sweaty bodies pressed together as our chests rise and fall in time with each other. Her hands stroke my back softly and I bask in the comfort. Eventually I roll off her and take in her flushed and sweaty body. My dick twitches as if to tell me it wants to go again but exhaustion lines Kairi's face and I can tell how much today took out of her.

"Do you want me to go back to my room to sleep?" she murmurs and I'm shocked at how strongly I abhor the idea.

"No. Stay," I respond and she releases a sigh of relief.

I lay on my back and Kairi places her head on my chest, her subtle ocean smell permeating my nose and filling me with a sense of peace.

"Thank you, Eagan," she whispers before falling asleep.

### Chapter 44

I startle awake, unsure of what woke me. Eagan breathes softly next to me, undisturbed by my movement. Last night was a dream, one I never want to wake up from. Something has changed between us but I'm afraid to voice it in case it's taken away. I know he told me that what we have together is just sex. But last night felt a hell of a lot like what I have imagined making love would feel like. It was passionate but lacked the ferocity of our previous sexual encounters. It was gentle and intimate in a way that I have never experienced. I wonder if it felt different for him too. His eyes told me that he feels a lot more for me than he has admitted to. Do I dare hope that he feels the way that I do?

The information from Raidne yesterday rattled me to my core and I don't know how to process it. Guilt continues to feel like a lead weight in my stomach and despite the joy it gave me to hear that Eagan is willing to help me, I know I can't let him. I chose to let him live and then saved his life again when I didn't even know him. Now I truly know the man he is, the man who doesn't let others in often but when he does, loves them fiercely and will protect them with his life, I can't imagine putting him in danger again.

Things are finally going back to normal in his life. He's working again, spending time with his friends and Sienna is moving back to Witches Cove. He's happy and the impression his friends have given me is that he wasn't like this before. Sienna even told me herself that he appears more light-hearted than she has seen in a long time. How can I take this away from him? How can I thrust him back into danger when he should have never been involved in this world in the first place? The bottom line is that I can't. I won't.

The whole way back to shore after meeting with Raidne I was desperately wracking my brain to find a solution to this mess. I think I've come up with one but I'm risking everything I have built these last few weeks.

The way I see it is that I have three options. Firstly, I can ignore it, let Vala continue to do whatever she is doing to the people she captures. My conscience will not let me do this. That's not the person I am or ever want to be.

My second option is that I take the time to formulate a plan with Eagan and Raidne to take Vala down. The problem with this is that it will take time. And in that time, Vala can take more humans. I'm not okay with that. It will also mean putting both Eagan and Raidne's lives at risk. I can't do that either.

My final option is to face Vala myself. I can request another bargain. Is it stupid? Absolutely. But it keeps the people I love safe. I'm not sure what I can offer her that she would deem valuable enough but I'm willing to risk my own life to clean up my mess.

This is the option I have decided on. Tears well in my eyes once more when I think about what I might be leaving behind. Eagan, Sienna, Tom, Lacey, Kelsey, the boutique. Somehow, I managed to create a meaningful life for myself and even though it has not been for as long as I would have liked, I am so grateful for the time I have had.

If I'm going to do this, it needs to be now. If Eagan catches wind of what I'm planning, he will stop me or come with me. I can't have that. I have to protect him and keep him safe. I know he will be angry with my choice but if I survive, I'm hopeful he will forgive me. I'm certain he doesn't want to face Vala again but offered to help me due to the same guilt that drives me. But I have far more to atone for than he does. He can be angry as long as he is safe.

Now is the perfect time to leave. The soft glow peeking through the gaps in the curtains tells me that dawn is approaching, and Eagan is unlikely to continue sleeping this deeply for much longer. I hope that when he wakes, he doesn't immediately realize where I have gone and follow me.

Eagan's chest moves up and down with his breaths and his ebony hair falling across his face. He looks so peaceful and all I want to do is wrap myself back up in his arms and pretend the evil of the world doesn't exist. Option one looks incredibly appealing right now.

I steel my resolve and place a soft kiss on his cheek, my lips barely brushing the skin so as not to wake him. The realization hits me all at once and I gasp for breath. I love him. This beautiful man who had the misfortune of being out on a boat at the wrong time has changed my life. He's given me everything I have ever wanted for myself but never dreamed could be possible.

I love him.

I love him.

I love him.

And because I love him, I have no doubts that this is what I have to do. It has always been worth it for him.

The sky is lit with hues of red and orange as the sun rises for the day. The streets are empty. Despite the time of day, the temperature is already warm, and beads of sweat drop down the back of my neck. Although that could be because of my nerves.

This is foolish and I could very well be walking to my death. I don't have a plan. Well nothing beyond asking what Vala would want from me in exchange for not

harming the humans. I have no idea what she will say or if she will even entertain the idea. But I'm going to try. I have to try.

It takes a while, but I eventually reach the cliff that houses Vala's cave. The ocean is still today. Quiet. Not even the sound of a bird breaks through the silence. I remember the last time Eagan and I were here. We were exhausted and Eagan was barely holding on to his sanity. I was afraid. Uncertain. But even though I didn't know him yet, Eagan's presence comforted me at the time.

I take a deep breath, willing my heart rate to slow and trying to suppress the panic that is bubbling under the surface. I begin my descent down the cliff face. The absence of a breeze and the dryness of the rocks makes the climb down easier than last time. I'm not afraid of falling. I'm afraid of what's to come when I make it down.

By the time I reach the opening to the cave my face is dripping with sweat and my palms are clammy with nerves. I don't hesitate for long, knowing that if I do, I might talk myself out of this, so I push my shoulders back and hold my head up high, projecting a confidence and bad ass attitude that I certainly don't possess right now. I say a silent apology to Eagan and Raidne and then walk into the cave, the darkness consuming me.

I haven't gone far before the flap of wings causes me to almost jump out of my skin as one of Vala's ravens swoops me. A couple more steps and it does it again, this time eliciting a squeak of fright. I can't see them, but I can sense their stares. Their warning to turn around and leave.

A glow from deep in the cave directs me and as my eyes adjust, both ravens come into view. They are still, but their eyes follow me.

"Pretty siren, I'm surprised to see you here again," purrs a voice that seems to echo throughout the cave. Vala. "Such a pretty little siren but you mustn't be very smart.

We've made our bargain, and I'm not interested in seeing you again."

I close my eyes and will my voice to be strong and confident. "Vala, you tricked me. I know that you have found a way to harness my song to use it for your own gain. That was not part of our bargain. I can't let you do that." Her responding cackle raises all the hairs on my skin.

"You gave up your song willingly, pretty siren. There was no stipulation of what would be done with it once I had taken it from you. You don't need to worry about it. You got what you wanted, right? How's human life with your handsome boy? Is it everything you dreamed of? You should leave things alone that don't concern you."

My hands clench into fists by my side. "You can't do this. What are you even doing with the humans? What use do you have for them?"

She laughs again, this time it's tinged with cruelty. "Pretty siren, I told you before that you have no idea what I'm capable of."

The candles flash and I scream as a beautiful young woman appears directly in front of me. Her hair is long and midnight black, the color matching the darkness of her eyes. There is no differentiating between her irises and pupils, they are wholly black. She's draped in strips of gauzy material that wrap around her slim body, her flesh visible beneath. She smiles a wicked smile and my body chills.

"Sirens are so very powerful. And your unique talents offer me more than I could ever achieve with my magic alone. Let me show you, pretty siren."

No, no, no. This feels wrong. So deeply, horrifyingly wrong. She turns to walk to a dark corner of her cave, her hips swaying and the material of dress swishing along with them. She begins to hum softly at first but I sense the power building. The hum turns into a melody and terror fills me at the recognition of my song. I don't know

why I didn't hear her use it before like my sisters had but I can definitely hear it now. I can tell that it is not directed at me, so I can't feel the song's effects but that doesn't stop the music wrapping around me in a terrifying caress.

My attention is drawn to a deep blue marking that wraps around her upper arm. I wouldn't have noticed it if it weren't for the way the swirling design seems to glow and move with her song.

Vala senses my fear and smirks at me, pausing her tune. With its absence, the mark stops glowing and stills. "Don't worry, pretty siren. You won't be affected by the song. It did belong to you after all. This man, however, isn't so lucky." I gasp as she reaches out her long fingers, latching onto a wrist as she pulls a man into my sight. Horror overwhelms me as I recognize him immediately. It's Sam, the cute guy I went home with before any of this nightmare began. His blond hair is shaggy and windswept just like the day I met him, but his warm brown eyes show a complete lack of awareness. He is fully entranced by Vala, completely under her spell. And I'm sure, soon to be dead.

"What are you doing to him? Let him go!" I cry and Sam gives no indication that he even hears my words.

"You see, I don't need souls to survive like sirens, honestly that seems like hard work for you all. But the human souls provide me with something else. Something better."

She resumes her song, and the mark begins to move again. Is this strange marking on her skin somehow linked to the song?

I both hear and feel the change of the melody Vala sings. She's taking his soul. I feel frozen to the spot, helpless to do anything to stop her. It's over in seconds and I stare in shock as Vala's skin begins to glow from within. She throws her head back and moans in ecstasy as she absorbs the soul. And then she changes. It's barely

perceptible but her skin becomes smoother, any blemishes disappearing completely, her hair grows longer and thicker until it flows around her in luscious waves and the glow beneath her skin continues.

“What are you doing?” I breathe.

“This is not my true appearance, pretty siren. I have been alive a long time and the look of my true body does not match my soul or my mind. Human souls provide me with youth and beauty and most importantly power. It's exhilarating. And totally worth it don't you think?” she asks, gesturing to her body and twirling.

I feel sick. I can't breathe. I don't know if I'm going to vomit or pass out, or both. This is such an abomination of the natural order of things.

“You're taking and killing humans simply to become more beautiful?” I ask incredulously.

“Oh, don't forget the power, pretty siren. I have been confined to this cave for far too long. It's my own curse that I can't seem to break. But if I can consume enough souls, then perhaps I can increase my power enough to finally break free. And what a delight that would be. You sirens won't get to be the only beautiful, powerful creatures anymore.”

I can't keep listening to her twisted ways of justifying her choices. I have to do what I came here for. “I'd like to make another bargain.”

Vala stills, turning her predatory gaze to me once more. “Now why on earth would you want to do that, pretty siren?”

“I can't keep letting you use the song you took from me to hurt innocent people. What can I offer you to make you stop?”



I stand rooted to the spot as Vala laughs and laughs, every one of my survival instincts telling me to escape. “You have nothing that I want anymore, pretty siren. I took what I needed from you. You’re stupid to have come back here.”

“Please,” I beg, “what would make you stop?”

“Nothing at all,” she replies and my stomach drops. I’ve failed. She’s not willing to negotiate now that she has what she has been coveting. Despair threatens to drown me, and I question if she will let me leave here alive.

“Pretty, pretty siren. You’ve got yourself into a bit of trouble, haven’t you? Trespassing into my cave to try and get me to make another bargain. That’s not how this works. You’re not a siren anymore. You’re a useless human and one I can’t even sing to at that.”

This is it. She’s not going to let me live. I don’t know why I thought this would even work.

“You’re lucky I’m feeling particularly merciful today. There’s really no benefit to killing you if I can’t take your soul. If you want to live my pretty siren... you better run!”

The candles lighting the space around us are extinguished and I’m pitched into complete darkness. My legs move involuntarily as I obey, needing to get out of this fucking cave. Vala’s maniacal laughter bounces off the cave walls and I scream at the sting of talons and beaks as they rip at my skin. It becomes clear that even though she’s allowing me to leave her cave, I won’t be leaving unscathed.

A strangled cry escapes my lungs as I pump my legs harder and use my arms to try and swipe the ravens away. The ravens are relentless, pecking and clawing at any available skin. Tears fall down my cheeks as the pain lashes through me.

I scramble in the darkness, trying to escape and avoid the attacking birds. I bang into the cave walls, scratching and cutting myself on sharp rocks. The wings of the ravens flap in my face and the trickle of blood warms my cheek as it drips down from where one of them has pecked my eyebrow. My foot catches a rock, and I tumble to the ground, sobs leaving me. I curl into a ball with my arms over my head, trying my best to protect my face as the ravens peck and cut and scratch, drawing blood with every strike. I whimper, helplessness threatening to overcome me as I hope desperately for their assault to stop. But it doesn't.

I rally all my remaining physical strength and mental willpower to push myself up. This is not how my life ends. I will not be torn to shreds by the vicious pets of a witch.

A light appears before me as I near the exit of the cave. I'm so close. I'm gasping for breath through my sobs and blood drips into my eyes, blurring my vision but I'm almost out. With a last burst of adrenaline, I launch myself out of the cave and fortunately the ravens cease their attack the moment I escape.

My body screams in protest, my muscles aching and the dozens of cuts marking my skin burning like I'm on fire. But I'm out. I'm out and I'm alive.

### Chapter 45

I moan as I stretch out my limbs, relishing the small pops of the releasing tension that was caused by my contorted position. Without opening my eyes, I roll over and reach for Kairi with the need to feel the warmth of her skin against mine again, despite being wrapped around her all night. However, my arm only finds empty space and I open my groggy eyes to see that the bed is empty. My stomach churns with the thought that maybe she left me alone in bed because she regrets what we did. Perhaps she felt the same blurring lines that I did and isn't happy that we are venturing into a territory that is more than just sex. Or... maybe she's just gone to the bathroom.

I quickly pull myself out of bed to find her, determined to have a conversation but she's not in the bathroom. A brief look around the apartment tells me she isn't anywhere in here. It's still far too early in the morning for her to have gone to work and Kairi rarely leaves to go anywhere else. So where is she?

I pace the length of my apartment while I filter through possibilities of where she could be. My gut tells me something is wrong, and I know I won't be able to settle until I find her. I'm certain she didn't mention having to do anything today. Maybe she went to the beach to be by the water. Maybe she went for a walk to clear her head.

No. I still, horror washing over me. She didn't go for a walk to clear her head or find somewhere to relax. She went to Vala. Echoes of her words from last night play through my mind.

“It's all my fault.”

“Every time I try to make things better, I just end up making them worse.”

Fuck.

Kairi holds a lot of guilt for everything that happened, and I haven't made things any easier on her. I've seen the way that she's beginning to care about me. But I didn't expect her to try and fix things on her own. Especially not after I told her I'll stand by her. I can't believe she would do something as reckless as face Vala without a plan.

I get dressed in record time and use my car to speed to the location of Vala's cave. When I arrive at the cliff, I call out Kairi's name, hoping that I'm not too late because I can't picture Vala being receptive to any intervention from Kairi. Please let her be safe.

At the edge, I look down and a cry escapes me when I see Kairi below laying on the ground unmoving. I can't see if she is alive but even at this distance, I can tell that she is injured.

“I'm coming, Kairi,” I call out, offering reassurance in the hope that she is conscious and can hear me.

Without paying any attention to my body's movements, I scale the cliff face, my only thoughts on the woman below and how I'll never forgive myself if she is dead.

I race to her, pulling her into my arms and pushing her hair back so that I could see her face. I exhale in relief when I see her chest moving and feel the soft breaths escaping her lips. She's alive. Blood covers her skin coming from scratches and cuts on every part of her that I can see. Most don't look too deep, but they must be causing her agony.

“Kairi. Kairi, my love, my vicious one, wake up for me, okay? I need to know you're

okay,” I murmur in her ear as I stroke her hair and wipe blood off her face.

She lets out a soft whimper at my words.

“That’s it my love, open those beautiful eyes for me.” Her eyelids flicker and after a moment, she does as I asked.

“There you are my vicious one,” I say, smiling down at her.

She begins to cry, sobs shaking her body as she holds on tightly to me like she’s afraid that I may disappear. “You came for me?” she questions through her tears.

“Of course. If you haven’t figured it out yet, I’m quite fond of you. Although, to be fair, I don’t think I had really figured it out myself.” She lets out a small laugh, a hint of a smile on her face.

“There’s my Kairi,” I praise. “Can you move?”

She stretches out her body, wincing with each movement. “I can move. The cuts sting but nothing is broken.”

“Did Vala do this?” I ask.

“No, it was her asshole birds. She let me go but they attacked me on the way out.” She slumps over, looking at the floor in front of her. “Vala wouldn’t take another bargain. I asked what she wanted in exchange for no longer taking the humans, but she laughed and said I was useless to her. I’m sorry I couldn’t fix this.”

My heart breaks for her. She put herself in danger to save people she doesn’t know. If I hadn’t already realized that my first impressions of her were incorrect, this would convince me. She may have killed people, but she is not a monster. She has a bigger

heart than many humans I know.

“Shh,” I soothe, “we need to get you back home and clean you up. Are you strong enough to climb?”

“I think so,” she whispers.

We climb back up slowly and carefully as I offer her as much support as possible. I think she collapsed due to the flood of adrenaline and pain from the cuts, but fortunately, it doesn't look like she is seriously injured. This could have been so much worse.

When we arrive back at the apartment, I gently undress Kairi, growling when I see the damage the ravens have left. I want to wring the necks of those bastards.

I lay her down on the bed and grab a first aid kit from the bathroom. One by one I carefully clean each of her scratches and cuts, placing bandages on the ones that require them. It takes a long time. At the beginning of the process, Kairi whimpers as the disinfectant touches her wounds but as I continue she falls in and out of sleep, her brain trying to escape the searing pain.

When I'm done, I lay down beside her but I'm unable to close my eyes. I almost lost her. The thought of her not being in my life anymore is inconceivable. I don't know how it happened, but she has become irreplaceable in my life. I look forward to seeing her every day and she has fit so seamlessly into my world. I've been denying it, but I can't escape the truth anymore. I love her.

I thought what I felt for Kelly was love. And maybe it was. But it wasn't love like this. My love for Kelly was steady. Calm. But with Kairi it is an all-consuming, desperate, and intense love. The kind that builds from the passion of hate, creeping up on you until you realize that it was never truly hate at all.

I don't know how long I spend with my eyes trailing every inch of Kairi's body, not with lust but with a determination borne from the desire to protect. She's hurt and I won't allow anyone to harm what's mine again.

Kairi groans as her eyes flutter awake. She rolls tentatively to face me, and I stare into her emerald green eyes.

It takes me a moment to form the words I want to speak, but eventually, I'm able to utter them. "I love you," I murmur.

A soft gasp escapes her as her eyes widen. "What?"

"I love you. It's not just sex between us. I don't think it ever really was. I was afraid and I judged you unfairly for circumstances out of your control. I love you and the thought of losing you is terrifying. Promise me you won't do anything like this again."

"I promise," she replies, her eyes glistening with unshed tears.

"Good. Because we've both been through a hell of a lot in a short space of time to find each other and I'm not prepared to give you up."

Her face lights up with the smile I'd sell my soul for. It's funny. She saved my life by not consuming my soul, but it seems like I've given it to her willingly anyway, along with my heart.

"I love you too," she says, and I can't stop the smile that takes over my face. Conscious of her sore body, I wrap a hand around her back and gently pull her closer to me. She tilts her head to look at me and I kiss her. She attempts to push closer to me and deepen the kiss, but I pull back. She gives me the most adorable little pout in response.

“Vicious one, you’re injured. I’m not going to do anything that might hurt you right now.” She lets out a frustrated sigh but doesn’t try again. We will have plenty of time for all the ways I want to ravish her later.

“What are we going to do about Vala?” she questions.

“I don’t know but we are not going to talk about it until you have rested and are feeling better. That’s all we are going to do today. We are going to stay in bed and rest.”

“Hmm,” she agrees and nuzzles her face into my chest.



## Page 46

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### Chapter 46

He loves me.

I can't stop my lips from turning up in a smile when I feel the warmth of Eagan's body pressed against mine as I slowly regain awareness.

He loves me.

I would have taken any scraps of affection he offered me, but the thought of love was something I had tried not to let myself hope for. Not after the hatred he directed towards me at the start of all this. I wasn't sure if he could ever truly put our differences aside and the atrocities I committed in the name of survival. I know that I am deserving of love but that hadn't stopped the doubts from taking root, the fear of rejection so potent that it crushed my self-confidence along with my hope.

My eyes open and I'm forced back to reality. My whole body stings, burns and itches. The care Eagan took in cleaning and bandaging my wounds last night was wonderful and at least I can be reasonably sure that I won't get any nasty infections. But the pain reminds me of everything that has happened. And everything that still needs to be done. I can't let Vala get away with what she is doing and although Eagan has told me he will back me up, we are no closer to a plan to overcome her. Add in her asshole birds and the whole thing feels impossible.

Grief and sadness churn away within me as I remember the life leaving Sam's eyes as Vala consumed his soul. Our encounter was brief but I know he was a good guy, a sweet guy. He didn't deserve what happened to him. It occurs to me that the people

Vala is killing might not all be strangers. There's nothing stopping her from entrancing the people I've grown to care about. She could take Sienna, Tom, Lacey or Kelsey. The realization hits me hard and this problem becomes more personal than it was before. I can't let her do anything to the new family I have made for myself.

I fidget, the need to get out of bed and start formulating a plan warring with the desire to stay curled up with the man I love and forget the rest of the world exists. I curse under my breath, deciding that it's time to pry myself away.

The moment I move, Eagan's arm snakes out and wraps around me, pulling me close once more. I wriggle against his tight hold even though the movements cause my wounds to pull and sting. "We need to get up, Eagan. We can't just stay here together in peaceful ignorance. The more time we waste, the more people she can kill."

He lets out a sigh. "You're right. I just know you're safe here, and getting up means discussing ways you can put yourself in danger again, and I'm not looking forward to that."

I nod in understanding. "I don't like it either, but I can't let this go."

Groaning, he pulls his limbs from mine and rolls out of bed. I take a moment to peruse his gloriously naked body—the slightly tanned skin, his muscles, not huge and bulky but show that he is strong, and the light trailing of dark hair that runs from his navel downwards. He smirks when he notices me unabashedly checking him out.

"Like what you see?" He teases.

"You look good enough to eat," I joke back. This time he laughs and it's a testament to just how different things are between us that I can make jokes about eating him without him looking horrified.

I go to shower, and to my surprise, he follows me in. It's barely big enough for the both of us, and I giggle, trying to position our bodies in a way that allows us both to be under the stream of water. I hiss as the touch of the water causes a searing pain that radiates from each and every cut and scratch.

Declaring our feelings has caused a shift in the way we interact with each other. I feel at peace, and from the way his body is free of tension, I think the same is the case for him. We don't speak as we shower but Eagan turns me to face the wall and gently washes my long hair. He takes his time, gently massaging the shampoo into my scalp and making sure that my long strands are covered. As he does so, he peppers light kisses over my back, my shoulders, and my neck.

After he rinses my hair, he covers me in body wash, ensuring that he meticulously and carefully cleans every part of me. He's mindful of my pain, avoiding any sexual touch but ensuring that I feel the intimacy and love from this sensual act.

When we are both clean and dressed we make ourselves something to eat. It's late afternoon, and we've slept most of the day away, and it's only now that my body recognizes how hungry I am.

As we are sitting down to eat at the kitchen island, my stiff body making large movements difficult, a loud banging comes from the door.

"Hey Eagan! You better open the door right fucking now because you haven't responded to my messages in a couple of days now and you promised you wouldn't ghost me again," Sienna yells, continuing to smash her fists into the door.

"Fuck," Eagan mutters, running his fingers through his hair.

He gets up to answer the door, realizing that Sienna isn't going to stop. I'm not sure how he expects to explain away my current state. I look like... well, I look exactly

like I've been attacked by birds, but I doubt she's going to believe that this was just some kind of freak occurrence.

I don't move from my spot as Eagan answers the door and is bombarded with a storm of questions and jabs from Sienna. I twist my hands together in my lap while I wait for her to discover me.

"Oh, my fucking god!" Sienna screeches when she stops speaking to Eagan and finally turns her gaze to me. "What happened to you?"

"Um..." I reply, looking to Eagan for assistance. What does he want me to say here?

I realize that I don't have it in me to come up with some elaborate lie. I really like Sienna, and I can see us being great friends in the future, especially if things work out between Eagan and me. I don't want our friendship to be based on a lie. It will be exhausting to keep up with it, and I'm sure, at some point, she is going to want to know more about me.

I glance at Eagan and ask, "Can I tell her everything? I really want her to know." Part of me is terrified that she will reject me, that the friendship we have been building will crumble to nothing the minute she knows the truth. But I don't want what we have to be built on lies. I want her to like me for me.

He doesn't say anything for several long moments, and I can see the twitch of his jaw as he contemplates what I'm asking. Sienna stands between us looking back and forth with confusion.

"Someone better tell me what the hell is going on right now," she says, her voice lower and more threatening than I've ever heard.

Eagan nods at me and I sigh, "You better sit down, Sienna. This might take a while."

Sienna stares at me, eyes wide and she blinks once. Twice. She doesn't speak, doesn't move. Just stares. I fidget uncomfortably while I wait for her reaction. I told her everything. Every detail, beginning with what I am—well, what I was—and everything that has happened since the first time I came across Eagan. Eagan barely spoke, only chipping in when he felt like I left out an important detail.

After what feels like an exceptionally long time she lets out a loud exhale. “Okay that was not at all what I was expecting when I turned up here today,” she says as she rests her head in her hands. “I think my head is going to explode. I don't even know how to process all of this.”

I chuckle nervously. “Yeah, I know it's a lot.”

“Understatement of the freaking century,” she mutters under her breath.

“It was a lot for me too. But you're already handling the information better than I did,” Eagan adds.

“You're telling me sirens and witches exist? What else are we blissfully unaware of?” I shrug my shoulders, I honestly don't know. “This is both a cool and absolutely terrifying revelation. One that you—” she points at Eagan with a glare, “should have told me about sooner. I can't believe you were dealing with this all on your own.”

She's silent for a few moments, a frown furrowing her brow. “Moving on from the whole, siren-who-eats-humans-thing, I'm sure that's going to mess with my head later—what are you going to do about Vala?”

Now it's my turn to rest my head in my hands and Eagan moves to stand behind me, offering comfort by placing his hands on my shoulders. “I don't know. She's extremely powerful.”

“Hmm,” she responds. “I want in on defeating the evil witch bitch.”

“Wait, what?” I gape at her confused and Eagan tightens his grip on my shoulders.

“Absolutely fucking not,” Eagan growls. “It’s bad enough that Kairi is putting herself in danger again, I’m not having you do it too.”

“Excuse me. I am a grown-ass woman who can make my own decisions, thank you very much,” she says indignantly. She turns her gaze to me. “Kairi, I know we haven’t known each other long, but despite everything I’ve just learned, I know that you are a good person. I think we can be good friends, and I already see how much you mean to my brother. I agree with you that it feels wrong to know what’s happening but do nothing to stop it. And if you both are going to throw yourselves into dangerous situations then sign me up. I’m not letting you do it alone.”

I have to swallow a few times and blink away the tears pooling in my eyes. I swear I’ve cried more in the last few days than I have in a lifetime.

“I don’t like this, Enna,” Eagan says, his voice low and dominating.

Sienna flicks her hair. “And I don’t care what you like or don’t like, big bro. I’m coming whether you like it or not.”

Eagan lets out a sigh and walks out of the kitchen, muttering and cursing under his breath.

“Oh, don’t worry about him, he’ll stomp around for a bit, get all grouchy, but he will come around to the idea,” Sienna says, smiling at me. I throw my arms around her in a tight hug, wincing a little when my wounds are touched, but I don’t let go.

“Thank you for accepting all this,” I whisper.

“Girl, I still have like a million questions, and you bet your ass I’m going to be asking them. I just recognize that there are more pressing matters right now and I will have time to assuage my curiosity later. Trust me, my scientific research brain is going wild right now.” We laugh together and I feel like a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders. She knows about me, and she doesn’t hate me. She doesn’t think I’m a monster and luckily, unlike her brother, hasn’t tried to kill me yet.

“Do you think with the three of us we may have some luck outsmarting Vala?” Sienna questions.

“Honestly? No, I don’t, but we are all there is.”

“Not exactly...” Sienna says under her breath, turning contemplative.

“What?”

“You mentioned your friend before, the one that is still a siren that you saw with Eagan yesterday. What was her name again?”

“Raidne.”

“Ah that was it, Raidne. Do you think she would be willing to help us as well? An extra person couldn’t hurt, and I wonder if her siren abilities would work on Vala. After all, she isn’t a natural-born siren.”

I think about that. She has a very good point and I’m certain that Raidne would help us.

“Do you want to meet a siren?” I ask and Sienna beams right back.

### Chapter 47

My tantrum—as Sienna called it—didn’t last long. I stormed out of the kitchen, pissed off and worried, slammed a door, and threw some things around in my room before eventually realizing that none of what I was doing was going to change her mind. My sister is as stubborn as they come and when she sets her mind to something, there is no talking her out of it. If anything, my fierce resistance to the idea probably served to strengthen her resolve.

When I returned to the kitchen, Sienna and Kairi were talking animatedly. I was surprised at my sister's nonchalant reaction to information that likely changed her whole perception of the world. I know that Sienna believes in many things that others don’t. Her analytic mind has driven her to learn about anything she can, whether it be science or things more mythical in nature.

I don’t think she ever could have imagined beings like sirens existing but if I know her like I think I do, she’s already brainstorming ways to learn more about them. I wouldn’t be surprised if she’s designing a research study in her mind right now, with Kairi as the subject.

When the girls notice that I’ve re-entered the room they both turn to stare at me expectantly. I don’t acknowledge my little outburst. Instead, I ask them what they are discussing.

“We need you to take us out on your boat to find Raidne. We are going to ask her to help us with Vala. She might even be able to use her song against her,” Sienna explains. I have to hand it to her, that’s actually a pretty good idea.



“We can’t go until tomorrow though,” I say. “It’s too late now and I sure as fuck don’t want to get stuck out in the ocean in the dark. Not with what I know to be lurking beneath the surface,” I smirk at Kairi, letting her know that I’m only joking—well mostly. I believe her and Raidne when they say that none of Kairi’s sisters are going to harm me, but I don’t want to test the theory. Once this is all over, I’m not sure I ever want to go out on a boat again.

“Have you had any more ideas on how we might be able to actually survive?” I ask, trying to hold back the snark in my tone. I know this is important and that no matter what, I’m helping, but I’m not particularly happy about the whole situation.

“Actually, yeah,” Kairi responds. “Something has been bothering me about how Vala is using my song and I’ve been trying to figure out what it is. When she took my siren abilities, she didn’t yet have the power to consume a soul, so she couldn’t have absorbed that part of my soul. So how is she accessing my song? It’s not a tangible thing that can be passed from person to person.”

“Oookay?” I question, not following her train of thought.

“When I was in the cave with her I noticed something strange. There was a marking on her arm. It wrapped around her bicep like a tattoo.”

“And?” I ask, still not getting it.

“And it wasn’t like any tattoo I’ve seen before. It glowed and it moved. But only when she sang. When she was simply talking, it was still and looked completely normal; however, when she began to sing, it writhed and pulsated in a way that seemed to mimic the rhythm of the song. What if... what if, she has somehow bound my song to something physical? Trapping it with her magic and then harnessing it through the object, using it like a conduit.”

“Is that even possible?” Sienna asks.

Kairi shrugs. “I have no idea. I feel just as in the dark about this as you both do. I have no knowledge of witches and what they are capable of, but something drew my focus to the tattoo, and I can’t describe the way it made me feel.”

“You’re thinking that this physical conduit could be the mark?” I probe.

“I mean... maybe? It kind of makes sense. Like I said, the mark looked like it was connected to the song somehow and if she bound my song to something on her skin, there is a far less chance of it being destroyed.”

Her plan starts to click together in my mind, and I finally realize what she is telling us. “You think that if we are able to get close enough to Vala to destroy the mark then that might sever her connection to your song. Is that right?”

“It’s possible,” she confirms. She’s right, it’s definitely possible and might actually be something we can achieve. “But then we still have her witch powers to contend with.”

“But she won’t be able to take the human souls anymore and that’s the major danger she poses right now,” Sienna reminds her.

“You’re right. Now we just need Raidne,” Kairi replies, her lips tilting up in a tentative smile.

I hate the fucking ocean.

With every swell and crash of the waves I’m transported back to the times where I barely made it out of their clutches. I’m less concerned about the creatures below the surface now and more anxious about the ocean itself. I’ll never forget the feeling of

drowning, the panic as water filled my lungs. While I'm no longer completely incapacitated by my anxiety, it still lingers under the surface, creating a sense of unease and dread that's hard to shake.

This time I have Sienna to worry about as well and the thought is making it even harder for me to relax. I remind myself that we just need to contact Raidne and that's it. Hopefully, we won't have to linger for long.

Once again, I wear ear plugs and Sienna does as well. Kairi explained that Vala told her that a siren song doesn't have any effect on her, even in her now-human form, so Kairi chose not to wear the ear plugs today.

She scans the ocean seeking out any unusual movements beneath the surface. She informed us that the sirens have the ability to detect boats from a certain distance away, so we are hoping that Raidne is close enough to our location to sense us and come to investigate. Our impending task hangs over us, dulling our moods, although I can still see the curiosity buzzing through Sienna.

It feels like we are out here for hours, just watching. Waiting. Finally, Kairi gestures that she's seen something. Sienna rushes over just in time to see Raidne breach the surface and gasps, staring at her in awe. Kairi confirms with Raidne that the others aren't around and lets us know that we can remove the ear plugs. Raidne explains that once she saw and recognized my boat she sent their sisters away ensuring our safety.

Kairi quickly fills Raidne in about the events of the last thirty-six hours and it's shocking to me how much has happened in such a short period of time.

Sienna, who had remained quiet throughout the exchange, stares at Raidne with unabashed curiosity. I get it, I really do. It's magical, something out of a fairytale but one of the darker, creepy ones for sure. I'm a little jealous that she doesn't have to experience the same fear that I did upon the discovery of these creatures. How

different would things have been if Kairi and I didn't meet the way that we did.

"Raidne, this is my friend Sienna. She's also Eagan's sister. It was too difficult to keep my secret from her, and when she found out everything, she insisted on helping," Kairi explains.

"Er... hello...um, hi," Sienna stutters and I can't help but laugh at my talkative, energetic sister being rendered speechless.

"Hey, beautiful," Raidne purrs and Sienna's cheeks fill with color.

"So, will you help us?" Kairi asks.

"Hell yeah I will. I can't let you have all the fun, can I?"

"You know that this is going to be dangerous right? I'm lucky I even made it out alive the last two times I faced her."

Raidne laughs, "Yeah, yeah. I know Vala is a dangerous bitch but you're crazy if you think I'm going to let you face this alone."

"I won't be alone. I'll have Eagan and Sienna."

"And now you'll have me too. After all, you are all just human," she teases with a wink.

I smile, grateful for her help. It certainly can't hurt to have a siren on our side. It might help to even the odds.

I let down a ladder on the side of the boat and Raidne uses her arms to pull herself until she is hanging with her tail out of the water. As her full body is exposed to air, I

watch in wonder as she takes on her human form. The scales on her tail are smooth, and it separates into legs. her skin takes on a warm, golden tone, and the spikes lining her spine fully retract.

She climbs the remaining rungs on the ladder and pulls herself to the boat. I avert my eyes from her completely naked body, looking for something to cover her up.

Luckily, Kairi thought ahead and throws Raidne a towel to dry off with and one of her dresses that she brought with us specifically for this purpose. Thank god we can go back to solid ground again now.

### Chapter 48

My lips curl up in a smile as I watch the banter unfold between Sienna and Raidne. Eagan sits beside me on the sofa, absentmindedly playing with the strands of my hair as we quietly observe the interaction in front of us.

“Do you even know how to use a knife?” Sienna asks Raidne.

“Surely, it’s not that hard,” Raidne drawls in response.

“We still need to figure out how to get rid of the ravens before they take more skin from Kairi than they already have.” They turn their gaze to me before returning to look at each other.

“Maybe you can be the distraction,” Raidne suggests.

“Maybe you can be the distraction,” Sienna throws back. I sigh and Eagan chuckles. They’ve been at this for a good hour already, throwing ideas back and forth, both determined to be the one that comes up with the plan to fight Vala. With the four of us we think it’s possible to keep Vala distracted long enough to sever her mark. From there, we just have to hope that my theory is correct in that the connection to the siren song will be destroyed. The plan gets murky after this though. We don’t truly know what magic Vala can wield on her own and we are putting a lot of trust into the idea that she can be injured and killed.

“Okay so I think we need to split into two groups,” Eagan says, interrupting whatever Sienna and Raidne had moved on to talking about. “Sienna and Raidne, you are on

raven duty. They are going to attack when they perceive us as a threat, and it will be both your jobs to try and incapacitate them as soon as possible. While you do this, Kairi and I will continue on to Vala.”

“How are you going to get close enough to destroy the mark?” Sienna asks.

“Look, I wouldn’t say that I am amazing in a fight, but I do know how to defend myself, and I remember a few things from the martial arts classes Tom dragged me to a while ago when he was really into it. I’m hoping that if Kairi can get her talking and keep her busy, I might be able to attack quickly and take her by surprise. I was much more docile last time she met me, and she might not be expecting it.”

“You know this whole plan is pretty shit, right?” Raidne says, never one to mince words.

“Do you have anything better to bring to the table?” Eagan spits back.

“Enough, everyone!” I say loudly enough to bring their attention to me. “Arguing isn’t going to get us anywhere. Raidne, I know our plan has a lot of holes and uncertainty but it’s all we have to go on. If we are going to do this, we just have to go for it and hope we don’t die.”

“Great pep talk, Kai,” Raidne responds, smiling, and I poke my tongue out at her. “You know we are with you, and we are going to do our best.”

“Thank you, should we do this now? We aren’t going to get any more confident the longer we talk about it.”

On the way back to the apartment after picking up Raidne, Eagan had stopped at a store and returned with four large hunting knives, one for each of us. I have no idea if it will do anything to Vala, but it makes me feel more comfortable knowing that we

will all have some way to defend ourselves. At the very least, Sienna and Raidne should be able to use the knives against the ravens. I hope those bastards get what's coming to them.

Eagan passes each of us our knives. "Please don't accidentally stab yourselves," Eagan says warily. A slightly manic laugh escapes me at the thought of injuring myself before we even face the threat.

We've dressed in clothes that cover a lot of our skin to try and minimize any damage the birds will cause. I'm glad Sienna and Raidne are handling them because the idea of their beaks and talons slicing through my skin again is enough to make me want to bail on this whole idea. Every touch of clothing against my skin irritates me, and the itching of the healing wounds is driving me crazy.

We hesitantly gather at the door, anxiety pulsing through our group as we avoid taking that final step to leave the safety of the apartment. With an exhale, Eagan takes the lead, and we make our way to Vala's cave with pulses pounding and stomachs churning.

"So, this is it," Sienna mutters under her breath, staring at the entrance to the cave.

"How deep is it?" Raidne asks.

I shrug my shoulders. "Both times I have been here it feels like we have walked for ages before coming across Vala. It's far deeper than I think is physically possible, so I wonder if there's something magical about it."

I move to walk towards the entrance, but Eagan grasps my hand and pulls me backwards. He leads me a few steps to the side, away from the others.

He uses his hand to tilt my chin so that I can meet his eyes. "I love you, Kairi.



Whatever happens next, I want you to know that I'm thankful for everything that brought you to me."

"I love you too," I whisper in return, a warmth growing inside my chest, temporarily blocking out the fear.

Eagan presses his lips to mine in a scorching kiss. He pours everything into it, and I feel his love and his support and his fear and despair that we may not return from this cave. I try to convey everything that has been left unsaid in the way I meet him, lips to lips, tongue to tongue.

The sound of laughing breaks us apart and I turn to see Raidne pretending to vomit while her and Sienna look over at us.

"What are you ten years old?" Eagan says dryly, throwing a disapproving glance their way, causing them to fall back into hysterics. Eagan and I look at each other, our lips turning up in a smirk. As immature as it was, Raidne lightened the mood and I'm certain that was her intention.

"Let's go," I say, and the laughter stops, replaced by serious, determined expressions. We all give each other one last look before taking our first steps into the cave.

The overwhelming urge to take my girl and get the hell out of this cave floods me the moment I enter the cave. This isn't really our problem is it? Why is it up to us to stop Vala? The moment these thoughts cross my mind I immediately discount them. Of course we could let this go. We could leave this cave right now and live the rest of our lives peacefully in ignorance just praying to ourselves that she doesn't take anyone we love. But Kairi can't do that. I can't do that. How do we live with ourselves knowing that people are being needlessly killed thanks to something we have done? Who else would stand any chance at defeating a witch? I mean, our chance is only a slim one, but still more than other humans, right?

We move through the cave, the sunlight from outside dimming before disappearing completely, plunging us into darkness. The pitch black of the cave is made more disturbing due to the earplugs we are donning again. Sienna and I have been plunged into full sensory deprivation as both our sight and hearing have been stripped from us. Fortunately, we came prepared for the darkness this time, Raidne and I clicking on our torches giving us visibility once more. The addition of light significantly reduces my anxiety as I feel better equipped to protect us if I can see the threat coming.

The sensation of flapping wings behind us causes us all to whirl around, and Raidne and Sienna draw their knives in front of them. Raidne uses her torch to scan the cave walls as we look for the ravens. I tense as I locate two piercing yellow eyes staring at me from a crevice in the wall. The others notice the small change in my posture and turn to look at where I am facing.

Raidne nudges me and points deeper into the cave, indicating that we need to go.

I quickly squeeze Sienna's hand and place a soft touch on Raidne's shoulder as I move past, Kairi sticking close to my side.

Leaving Sienna behind in this cave of nightmares is one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life, and it takes all my willpower to continue forward with Kairi. I have to trust that they can handle themselves against the ravens. In theory, they should be relatively easy to kill as there has been no evidence that they hold magical abilities, but being too confident can be dangerous, and we can't underestimate anything that we face.

Kairi and I walk quickly ahead, determined to get to Vala as fast as possible before she realizes what is happening to her familiars. We reach the part of the cave where we assume Vala resides, the collection of objects and bones lining the walls a familiar and sickening sight.

“Tut tut tut, pretty siren, and handsome boy, you do have a death wish, don’t you?” her voice bounces around the cave. I startle at hearing her clearly despite the earplugs. My stomach drops at the realization that these won’t protect me this time, so I take them out, discarding them on the floor. Kairi stands back-to-back with me as we circle, looking for Vala.

“I showed you mercy last time, pretty siren. I will not be so kind again.” Kairi stiffens, and I whirl around, taking in the appearance of the dark-haired woman that has appeared. She would be stunning if it weren’t for the bat-shit crazy look in her pitch-black eyes.

“I’m so happy to see you again, handsome boy,” Vala purrs as she walks towards me. I shiver as she runs a taloned finger down my chest and Kairi lets out a quiet growl from her position next to me.

“Have you come to fight me?” she murmurs, running her tongue up the side of my cheek. Keep her distracted. I have to keep her distracted.

“Hmm, we could fight, or you could make a bargain with me,” I suggest, trying to keep the revulsion from my voice.

“What could you possibly have to offer me, handsome boy?”

“I’m sure, we could come up with something,” I reply, trying to put as much flirtation into my tone as possible. If she is interested in me, I’m going to feed into that. I remember Kairi telling me that her beauty is important to her so maybe I can use her vanity to my advantage. I aim to keep her eyes on me so when she begins to turn her attention back to Kairi, I reach out to Vala in a panic. I run my hand down the side of her neck and down her waist to rest on her hip.

“There must be something I can offer you, beautiful enchantress,” I say softly, my

thumb moving in circles on her waist. Bile rises in my throat, and I fight against the urge to pull away. God this feels so wrong and I hate every second of it. I hope Kairi recognizes the distraction I'm trying to give her.

“Handsome boy, do you like to play?” Her eyes are bright with interest, and I know I've caught her in my snare.

“Oh, I'll play. For a price,” I lean closer, moving my lips to her neck, trying to keep my breaths steady to not show my rising panic. She closes her eyes as I commit to the act, kissing her neck softly until...

Vala lets out a wild scream as Kairi takes the small moment of opportunity I have given her to launch at Vala with her knife directed towards the mark on her bicep. She puts as much force into her strike as possible, slashing deeply across the mark, dissecting it completely. Vala continues to shriek as black blood pours from her wound and her appearance begins to change.

While Vala looked to be in her early twenties just minutes ago, the witch that stands now before me is a crone. It's like the youth seeped out of her skin stealing all her beauty along with it. She's barely recognizable.

She whirls on Kairi, throwing out a hand and causing an unseen force to fling Kairi across the cave and into the wall with a sickening crack.

“No!” I bellow, as Kairi lays crumpled on the floor. Unmoving. Fear floods my system and everything in me is pushing me to run to her aid, but Vala blocks my path.

“Now that wasn't nice, handsome boy. Look what you've done.” She glances down at her arm where the remains of the dark tattoo have faded to an almost imperceptible color. The sight provides me with the slightest glimpse of hope that maybe we can

overcome her. When Vala turns her gaze to me once more, and her face contorts into a frighteningly cruel expression, I know that any chance I had of continuing the charade of the naive pretty boy has well and truly gone.

I chance a fleeting look towards Kairi again and a sob escapes me when I see she still isn't moving. I can't tell if she is alive. All I can see is her contorted body and the mess of sunset hair. I can't even see her face. A red haze fills my vision at the thought that Vala may have killed Kairi. Rage and despair intertwine in a maelstrom of overwhelming emotions. All thoughts fade into the background while my emotions fully drive my movements.

"You fucking bitch!" I yell lunging towards Vala with my knife in hand. This time, she's expecting it and darts out of the way with ease. I throw everything I have into trying to kill Vala. I have to get to Kairi. She has to be alive. I can't lose her after we've fought so hard to find our way to each other.

Lunge, stab.

Whirl, stab.

Vala dances out of the way of each of my attacks, laughing as she does so like this is all a fucking game to her. She lets out a hiss as I manage to draw blood, my knife barely catching her side and causing only a shallow cut.

"You have to do better than that," Vala taunts, a short dagger appearing in her own hand. "I wonder how beautifully you bleed."

I don't know how I'm going to survive when she seems to be anticipating my every move but all I can do is keep trying. I have to do this for her. I have to get through Vala to make sure Kairi's okay.

### Chapter 49

I work hard to suppress the groan that threatens to escape when I regain consciousness. My head is pounding, and the wet feeling of my scalp tells me that I'm likely bleeding as well. It occurs to me that I might be in an advantageous position right now. Well not physically, as I'm pretty sure my head has sustained some damage. But Vala thinks that I have been disposed of. I can hear their voices. She's taunting him and not focusing on me at all. Not wanting to alert Vala to the fact that I'm awake, I tentatively open my eyes, trying not to move any other part of my body. If Vala believes that she has killed me or at least assumes I'm still unconscious, then I might be able to end this.

I can't believe that Eagan's impromptu plan played out as well as it did. At first, his flirtations confused me, and I questioned if he had fallen under her spell. As he continued though, I realized what he was doing. As much as it disgusted me to see his hands and lips on the witch, I recognized that he was playing on her own hubris. And it worked. Vala, so vain and desperate for attention, latched on to his attention and forgot about me completely. I only hope that severing the mark did what I had expected it to. There's no way to tell from my position.

I can see flashes of fighting between Vala and Eagan—well, it looks a bit more like Eagan is trying to fight, and Vala is just toying with him. Anguish pours from Eagan as he yells with rage, trying desperately to gain the upper hand. The urge to get up and help and to let him know that I'm okay is strong but I will my body to remain still, to save the advantage of surprise for when it's most important.

I mentally scan my body, pleased to find that apart from my head, there doesn't

appear to be any other damage. A yelp from Eagan has tears welling in my eyes. I don't know how much longer he can keep this up.

Vala doesn't seem to be using her magic, which strengthens my belief that she's just playing a game and, at any moment, she could choose to end it.

"Dance, handsome boy, dance. There's no escaping me. You're simply a human, the most pathetic of creatures. Even without pretty siren's song, you are no match for my power."

Eagan cries out again. She's hurting him. I can't just lay here and do nothing.

The sound of heavy footsteps reaches my ears, and I know, but can't see from my position, that Raidne and Sienna have arrived. I let out a small exhale in relief as the sounds of Eagan and Vala fighting come to a halt.

"Now what do we have here? Another human and a siren. Isn't this a nice surprise?"

"Kairi!" Raidne cries and I snap my eyes closed and hold my breath, hoping that to Vala I look dead even though it means the others probably think the same.

"What have you done to my ravens?" Vala's voice loses all humor, the coldness of her tone sending a deathly chill through the room.

"Your birdies are dead, bitch," Raidne says lightly, "and you won't be far behind." Vala screeches and my eyes peer open once more in time to see her send Raidne flying with her magic.

"Raidne!" Sienna screams.

"Shut up," Vala snarls, and I hear the sound of flesh hitting flesh and a cry from

Sienna.

Fortunately, it sounds like Raidne didn't hit her head like me and isn't badly injured from the attack. "Don't you dare lay a hand on her again," Raidne says, her voice deep and threatening. I know that despite her fear, if Raidne is going down, she is going down swinging.

"I had a thought," Raidne begins, walking back into my field of vision. "I don't know what you are. Are you a human with magic? Or are you something completely different? I don't really care but I know for sure you are not a siren. And if I'm correct, you no longer have siren abilities yourself. You look like an ugly old hag and that mark on your arm looks destroyed. Seems like my friends did what they set out to do. Do you want to know what that means?" I wonder where she is going with this or if she is aiming for distraction.

"Earplugs!" she yells before opening her mouth and beginning to sing. Sienna rushes to put hers in and I watch as Eagan dives to find his on the floor but he's too late. The song pours from her soul, wrapping around Vala and halting her movements. I find that my own body has slowed down, and Raidne's song also entrances me. I blink a number of times, and pull my gaze from Raidne, and the hold the song has on me lessens. With Vala firmly in her sights, Raidne seems to be pouring everything into holding her and only a trickle of the song is reaching me. I look to Eagan, who has a similar empty expression on his face, but like me, he seems to be able to shake off the effects. I've never seen one of us imbue this much power into a song. It's not directed at us, so it should have no effect at all. The fact that we can feel it means that she is using everything she has on Vala. Singing for sirens is like using a muscle, one that requires little effort. But this is like using that muscle to lift a weight far too heavy. It's taking all her concentration and energy to capture Vala in the song and hold it back from the rest of us. Who knows what might happen if she loses control.

Vala struggles against the hold it has on her, being stronger than a typical human, but



it is clear that the melody affects her more than it does us. Raidne sings and sings, not to consume Vala's soul—does she even have one? —but instead to immobilize her. And it's working. Oh, my goddess, it's working!

I jump up, acting before Raidne becomes too weak to hold Vala. A gasp escapes Eagan from his position on the floor with Sienna. I quickly take in my surroundings, my gaze catching on the gleam of metal on the ground between myself and Vala. I glance at Raidne and see her eyes completely focused on the witch, sweat drenching her forehead and her body shaking from the effort.

I throw myself to the ground, picking up the knife, and with no hesitation, I take three more steps and plunge it into Vala's heart. I feel the knife slide between her ribs and know that my aim is true. Black blood drenches her body, and my hand still grips the knife. Vala's eyes widen. "No," she whispers in horror. "You're just a human now." Confusion flashes across her face like she can't believe that someone would be able to defeat her— especially not a 'pathetic human' and then I feel her aged frail body collapse.

Raidne stops singing, sinking to her knees in exhaustion. The cave is silent once more. She's going to need a soul very soon. Her tired eyes take in our surroundings and the body that lays in front of me. I fall to the ground next to Vala as I'm hit with a bout of dizziness. I'm probably concussed.

"Is she dead?" Sienna whispers.

"Looks like it," Raidne replies.

Without saying a word, Eagan stands up from his position beside Sienna with his knife in hand. Fury marks his face as he makes his way to Vala. He looks down at her still body and then leans down, viciously using his knife to separate her head from her body. Sienna gasps in horror, but Raidne and I don't flinch.

“Well, now she’s dead dead, and no magic is going to be able to reattach her head to her body,” Eagan states and I can’t help the hysterical laughter that bursts out of me. It’s uncontrollable and the others simply stare at me as I howl.

Eagan comes straight to me, dropping down and pulling me to him.

“I thought you’d died. I swear to god, woman, the amount of stress you’ve caused me these last forty-eight hours is enough to give me a heart attack.” I stop laughing, turning a watery smile to the man I love.

“It’s over?” I question, still finding it hard to comprehend.

“It’s over,” he affirms before grasping me tighter and burying his face into my hair.

“Where do you think my song went when you severed her connection with it?” I ask.

“I don’t know. Did you think it would go back to you?”

I shake my head. The thought had crossed my mind that perhaps the song would return to its rightful owner. I’m relieved that it didn’t. I don’t want it back.

“Perhaps it just faded away?” Eagan suggests, and I have to agree that it seems likely.

I watch as Raidne walks over to Sienna and places a hand on her cheek. “Are you okay, Sienna?” she asks, and Sienna nods in response. “Then please, let’s get the hell out of here.”

We stumble back to the entrance of the cave. Eagan has an arm around my waist, supporting me as we walk but when it becomes clear that my dizziness isn’t immediately passing, he picks me up and carries me instead. I try to protest half-heartedly but give up, choosing instead to rest my head on his chest and focus on the

steady beat of his heart.

We made it.

On closer inspection, Sienna and Raidne appear to have similar injuries to my own from the ravens and like mine, most are shallow and will heal quickly. Vala had landed a few blows to Eagan's face and a shallow cut to his side but apart from a bleeding lip and a bruise starting to darken on his cheek, he managed to fare quite well. My head is the only semi-serious injury amongst us. and I'm pretty sure once I get through the concussion symptoms, I'll be perfectly fine as well.

I barely remember the journey back to the apartment but regain my awareness when Eagan places me on the sofa.

"Drinks!" Sienna calls out from the kitchen.

"None for Kairi with her head," Eagan replies. I pout and he chuckles. "Don't worry, vicious one, there will be plenty of time for us to celebrate later." Despite my pounding head, warmth pools in my core.

We spend the rest of the day laughing and drinking and enjoying each other's company. Eagan cleans the wound on my head and says it's not as bad as it originally looked and after a couple of hours my headache dissipates. Eagan still won't let me drink, but even without alcohol, I feel so incredibly happy. Sienna and Raidne are getting along far better than they did originally and I can't help but notice the way they glance at each other when they think the other isn't looking.

Eagan hasn't stopped touching me since we returned to the apartment. Whether it's playing with my hair, stroking my back, or just resting his hand on my belly, he makes sure I stay close as if to reassure himself that I'm safe.

Eventually, we all begin to fall asleep exactly where we are. Eagan and I lay on the sofa and Raidne rests on a pillow while Sienna sleeps with her head on Raidne's stomach. Everything feels completely and utterly perfect.

### Chapter 50

The next morning, I wake earlier than the others—probably because I’m the only one who didn’t get drunk last night. I smile at the sight of Sienna and Raidne curled up together on the floor and I wonder what life has in store for the two of them. Perhaps Raidne might be spending more time on land after all.

I sit up, intending to get myself a drink of water but Eagan reaches up to pull me back down, not even opening his eyes. “Where are you going, vicious one?” he murmurs into my neck.

“I’m getting some water,” I reply. I’m starting to learn that Eagan doesn’t like to wake up and if he had his choice, would lay in bed with me all day.

Our whispering stirs the others, and when they become aware of the position they ended up in while sleeping, they pull away from each other looking sheepish.

“Morning,” Raidne yawns.

“Sleep well?” I question, raising my eyebrows suggestively.

“Like the dead,” Raidne answers, not rising to the bait. “I have to get home.” Sadness laces her tone, and disappointment makes my insides churn. I know she has to go back; her twenty-four hours are almost up, but a piece of me will always be missing while I live on land, and she lives in the sea. I wish there were a way for her to become human like me, but we destroyed the only one capable of doing it and even if we hadn’t, I’ve learnt the dangers of making a bargain. I’m not even certain that

Raidne would want to be human if she were given the chance, but Sienna might certainly make the idea more appealing.

“I don’t want you to go back,” I say softly. She turns her warm brown eyes to me filled with sympathy.

“I don’t want to either. This is the most excitement I’ve had in my whole life. I’m going to be bored shitless when I’m back.” I laugh, appreciating the levity Raidne always brings to a tough moment.

“Let’s get ourselves freshened up, and we will walk Raidne back,” Eagan suggests, and we agree.

I stand with my feet in the ocean in the small cove where Eagan and I met for the first time. The small waves crash over my feet before pulling back as I sink. This is the first time I’ve touched the water since becoming human. I scrunch my toes in the sand and close my eyes, feeling the sea breeze tickling my face.

I’m holding back tears. Logically I know that Raidne isn’t leaving for good and that I will see her again, but this feels wrong. I don’t want her to leave me. A hand on my shoulder has me opening my eyes to see Eagan looking at me with concern.

“She’s just saying goodbye to Sienna and then it’s time,” he tells me gently. I sniffle and he wraps me in a hug. “You’ll see her again. I get the feeling she won’t be able to stay away from Sienna long.” He chuckles.

“You caught that, did you?”

He scoffs, “pretty hard not to notice the way they keep eye-fucking each other.” He’s not wrong.

We walk back over to them and Raidne pulls me to her in a hug. “Don’t worry Kai, I’ll be back soon. You won’t be able to keep me away.” I give her a little smile but know that even though she says that the realities of her life as a siren mean that she won’t be able to return as often as either one of us would like.

She gives Eagan an elbow jab to the ribs that leads to him pulling her into a head lock with one hand and tickling her with the other. A genuine, full smile lights up my face this time as I see the formation of bonds forming between us all.

Raidne quickly undresses and steps into the ocean. Although we have now all witnessed the transformation, we are still transfixed as Raidne’s legs fuse into her tail and her skin color changes.

“Love you, Kai. Oh, and Sienna, don’t miss me too much,” she calls out, shooting her a wink before diving into the waves and disappearing from view.

“Love you too,” I whisper as I finally let the tears fall.

One week later

I bound through the door, flinging myself into Eagan’s lap and planting a kiss straight on his mouth.

“What’s got you in such a good mood, vicious one?”

“Nothing, I just missed you and I’m happy to see you,” I say with a grin, kissing him again.

The past week has been like a dream. Eagan and I both took a couple of days off work to recover. While Eagan used the excuse of a stomach bug, I had to come up with something to explain the still present but fading marks from the ravens.

Fortunately, Kelsey rarely asks many questions, and she accepted my explanation of a bird attack with no suspicion.

We've both now returned to work, and we are developing a new routine for ourselves. Now that our relationship is official, we are thinking of ways to make my presence here more permanent. Ways for me to have a happy and fulfilling life without fear of discovery. There's a lot to organize but we are in no rush. Right now, we are simply enjoying being together.

I occasionally reflect on my life in the ocean, not with sadness or regret but like it's the end of the chapter but I have the rest of the story ahead of me. I'm happy to put that part of my life behind us and so is Eagan. He recognizes now that the biological needs of sirens don't make them any less deserving of love.

Eagan deepens the kiss and captures my moan with his mouth, his hands roaming beneath my shirt to grab a handful of my breast. I bounce up and pull him into our bedroom.

"Strip for me, vicious one," Eagan growls as he starts to undress himself.

I obey but take my time, teasing him with every item of clothing I remove.

"You destroy me," he rasps, his eyes blown with lust.

When I only have my thong to remove, Eagan pulls me by the thin strip of fabric on my hip. A tearing noise fills the air as he rips it off me. He lays down on his back and I wait for further instructions.

"Suck my cock," he demands, pushing my head down to his waiting erection. With pleasure.



I gently circle his tip with my tongue, lapping at the beads of precum greedily and then suck hard, taking him in all the way.

“Fuuuck,” Eagan groans, as I bob up and down on his cock, alternating between hard sucks and gentle licks. He reaches down and pulls me up to meet his mouth before rolling me over onto my back and pressing into me from above. Our lips crash together again, and he bites and nips in a trail down my neck. I gasp as his tongue circles my nipple and sucks it into his mouth.

He rocks back onto his heels and looks down at me. “Roll over and stick your ass in the air for me, my love.” With no hesitation, I do exactly as he asks, rolling to my hands and knees before arching my back to present my ass. Eagan reaches to the nightstand and pulls out a bottle of lube, popping the cap and using it to slicken my hole and his fingers.

“Relax,” he whispers into my ear as he gently inserts one finger. I take this easily, so he adds another. “That’s it, vicious one, take my fingers.” He works me with his fingers as I writhe and moan and beg for him. When he feels that I’m ready, I hear the wet sounds of him preparing himself. He drips more onto my hole and positions the head of his cock against me.

“Are you ready for me?”

“Yes. Please. Goddess please Eagan, I need you,” I cry, pushing my ass into him. His tip breaches my entrance slowly. But I don’t want slow. I want him to fuck me. With his next thrust I push myself back onto him, crying out in pleasure as I take him all the way.

“God, fuck! You’re so tight. I’m not going to last long,” he gasps as he pounds into me relentlessly. All I can do is grip the sheets tight in my hands and hold on as he bottoms out with each thrust. My orgasm crashes over me without warning and I

scream out his name as I almost black out, stars filling my vision.

Eagan cries out as he fills me with his release. He waits a moment before gently slipping out of me and rolling me into his embrace. “I love you, vicious one,” he tells me with a look of complete adoration on his face.

“And I love you,” I respond.

“You drive me completely and utterly mad with desire. But I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

### Epilogue

Rylan Thorn

I sit in front of my laptop and wait impatiently for the images to upload from my camera. I know what I saw. I don't know how it's possible, but I saw it with my own eyes and now I need to share it with the world.

I've known for a while that there is something odd happening in Witches Cove. The amount of people going missing at sea with no apparent explanation is something I just can't accept. I would understand if these people all disappeared in a storm or if the boats are all found damaged in some way. But that's not the case. Some victims have disappeared in clear skies and still waters and there are times when the boats have been found perfectly intact. It doesn't add up and it surprises me that the people of Witches Cove aren't asking more questions. My suspicions became stronger when people started to go missing from land as well. There's some shady shit going on here.

I've always wanted to be a journalist, but not the kind who writes fluff pieces. No. I want to be one who writes groundbreaking stories, the ones that change people's perception of the world. And I want to discover what happened to my friend Declan. Despite what the authorities have said, I know that he didn't drown himself. Something else was going on. He was haunted by something. Something made him drawn to the ocean over and over again. I've been determined ever since to avenge his death and expose the real story. And Witches Cove is the lead that I needed.

Once the photos have been uploaded, I start to flick through them one at a time, my

grin growing at the marvel that I had captured.

I don't know how it happened; I must have just been in the right place at the right time. I've been hanging around the beach recently, walking up and down, exploring hidden coves and looking for anything out of the ordinary. A few days ago, I went for a walk in a smaller cove that is rarely occupied. As I was about to leave some people arrived. I'm not sure why but something prompted me to hide behind a rock.

It looked like the four people were having some kind of tearful goodbye. I felt uncomfortable intruding on this private moment. But then... then one of the women undressed and walked into the ocean.

I watched in shock, stifling a gasp as she changed before my eyes, her legs becoming a tail and sharp spikes protruding from her back. I scrambled with my camera that I always have on me and took a few quick photos, not pausing to worry about settings or focus. In moments, the woman no longer resembled a human and she dove into the water and didn't return.

On the laptop in front of me is a clear photo of what I witnessed.

A mermaid.

This story is going to change the world, and I will keep investigating until there is no doubt in anyone's mind that the supernatural exists. I'm certain that this is the creature responsible for what happened to Declan and I'm going to make sure that they will never be able to do anything like this again. I close my computer and start formulating my plan.