



In My Wildest Dreams (Wild in Love #4)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: Its time to turn the tide!

Hollyn Oates has no control over her magical abilities, and if she's going to face her father, Grigori, the tear-stealing warlock, then she's got to get her hocus focused. Just as the moon controls the tides, the upcoming full moon controls her fate. Hollyn must face the ocean of emotion she's repressed and trust the salty but sassy Sea Witch, Yumia, to unlock the full force of her magic and defeat her father for good.

Above the waves, Kai Iona—Son of Poseidon, heir to power he never asked for—is beginning to see the cracks in his celestial family's golden armor. He travels to Atlantis with Poseidon, but once he's there, he must face the truth. Kai is a pawn in a game he never agreed to play. When Hollyn is sent away with a tempting bodyguard, he realizes love may be the only power worth wielding. His new goal: get to Hollyn and, together, cause a comm-ocean.

As fate drives them to the edge of the world—and into the molten heart of an active volcano—Hollyn and Kai must finally face her father. With the seas in turmoil, volcanoes awakening, and magic in the air, their love will be tested in fire, song, and sacrifice.

Because this time, the end isn't just near—it's erupting. And they never imagined it would end this way, not In Their Wildest

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Hollyn Oates stumbled slightly, her feet getting tangled up as she maintained eye contact. She swiped a hand across her forehead to push her hair out of her eyes and narrowed her focus on the grinning face across from her. As she circled her opponent, she noted that he was three times her size.

How the hell was she supposed to take him down?

Normally, she could use her siren's song to mesmerize a male attacker long enough to knock his feet out from under him, but this was no ordinary man.

This was General Mako, an underwater dweller, one of Poseidon's trusted warriors, and one of the few males resistant to her singing ability.

It was downright infuriating for someone like Hollyn who had developed a confidence in how to handle herself.

Now, she was literally and figuratively out of her element.

He waved a meaty set of fingers in a come here motion as he said, "Come on, little siren, let's see what you got."

He wanted to see her attack skills. Attack skills that consisted of a whole lot of nothing lately, but she had to try something. If she was going to take on her warlock father, Grigori, before he caught up to her and imprisoned her for the rest of her life, she needed to get something.

Every muscle in her body tensed as she gave a small cry and lunged for the General's

thigh.

She leaped and planted a foot on his upper leg as she wrapped an arm around his left shoulder and used it to swing around behind him, successfully launching herself onto his back.

His hands swiped at her, but she moved quickly enough to avoid being grabbed.

With speed she knew was her only advantage, she wrapped her legs around his torso and squeezed tightly to make herself almost impossible to remove.

Next, she wrapped her entire right arm around his neck and locked her other hand onto her wrist as she began to tighten her grip.

She was like a little monkey ready to bring him to the ground.

Yet, before he felt even a moment of lack of oxygen, she felt his arms reach overhead and grab her by her shirt.

With one, strong yank, he pulled her off of him, over his head, and slammed her to the ground.

Any and all air left her lungs in a rush.

Pain radiated through her back into her extremities as she regained her senses.

“That’s enough!” She heard Kai’s voice from a distance, but it didn’t take long for him to reach her as he hovered above her.

He knelt down and, in a whisper, asked, “Are you okay? Do we need to take you to the medic?”

Frustration and embarrassment began to replace the agony of hitting the ground, and she lashed out in misplaced anger.

“Let me up! I’m fine. I don’t need you to rush in every time I hit the ground.”

A look of confusion mixed with hurt covered Kai’s face, and Hollyn nearly caved to the guilt that began to hover at the back of her brain.

“Well, stop hitting the ground so hard, and I’ll stop worrying about you.”

“It’s not like I have control of that, now do I?”

General Mako called out, “Control? Now there’s an idea? Do you really think control is how you win a fight against a bigger, stronger opponent?” He laughed loudly. “I think you need to let go of the idea that you can control everything and that that’s the only way you’re going to come out on top.”

Kai reached out a hand, and Hollyn begrudgingly took it, letting him pull her to her feet.

“That makes no sense. Letting go of control? You might as well tell me to stop eating or to stop breathing. I need to gain control, especially over my magic.”

Hollyn held out her hand and a small wave of water formed and then dissipated almost as quickly as it came. She shook her head in disappointment. “I think I’m a lost cause.”

Kai wrapped his arms around Hollyn, pulling her against his chest. She let him hold her for a moment before stepping out of his hold. Again, a sad confusion crossed his features.

Poseidon's booming voice sounded behind all of them as he said, "You need to visit the Sea Witch. If anyone in my oceans knows about magic, it's her."

"I'm willing to try anything at this point. Where can I find her?"

"I can go with her," Kai volunteered.

Poseidon stood straight, pulling his shoulders back. "Actually, son, I was hoping to take you on a tour of the kingdom and introduce you to Triton, your half-brother."

Hollyn was sure Kai would want to meet a sibling, but he shook his head and said, "Wherever Hollyn goes, I go."

She turned to him and placed a hand on his chest. He moved to hold it in his own hand as their gazes met. Hollyn's heartbeat picked up. She struggled to breathe when he stared at her so directly.

She swallowed twice before she said, "It's okay. I think you should stay and meet your siblings. I will learn what I need to learn and be back in no time."

For a moment, he looked so unsure. Then, he leaned in and brushed his lips over hers, sending a sensation of tingles down her spine. "If you're sure?"

It took a second for his question to register, but once it did, she nodded her head and reassured him. "Of course. I'll be fine, and you would likely be bored out of your mind waiting around for me to move water around with my hands. I hope I can stay awake long enough to become a badass."

He chuckled. "You're already a badass."

"I'm glad you think so. Let's hope I can convince a certain warlock who wants to get

his hands on my tears for eternity that he should be scared of me. That would be quite the script flip.”

This time, when he pulled her flush against his body, Hollyn didn’t resist the contact, instead leaning into his strength. She wished she didn’t crave his touch so much. Surely, this dependence on Kai was not something she needed to cultivate long term. But right now, she couldn’t seem to care.

His chin barely rested on her head as he asked, “Are you certain you don’t want me to come with you? I promise I’ll make it worth your while.”

She smiled at his insinuation, and parts of her body began to come alive with need. Maybe they could slip away for a few minutes before she went to look for the sea witch.

She let go enough to look into his gorgeous brown eyes and said, “Do you want to find a quiet place to talk about it?”

A slow, sexy grin slid across his face as he caught on to her meaning. “I don’t know. I might want to talk all night.”

“I am feeling incredibly chatty.” Hollyn couldn’t stop the small laugh that seemed to flutter up from the butterflies frolicking in her mid-section.

Kai cupped her face and inched toward her lips as he said, “I’ll just have to find a way to distract you, I guess.”

Electricity sparked as barely a breath separated them. The rest of the world around them faded away and Hollyn waited, anticipating the soft touch of Kai’s lips on hers.

A voice behind them cleared loudly, breaking the spell of the moment. With sudden

awareness, Hollyn and Kai pulled apart and turned to face Poseidon, who had a knowing grin on his bearded face.

Beside him stood a tall, muscular warrior-type, armed with spears and knives. His blonde hair flowed down to his shoulders in beachy waves, and his green eyes glowed like two bright emeralds as he stared straight at Hollyn.

Poseidon's booming voice filled the space as he introduced the man beside him. "Let me introduce Thian Grand, my head bodyguard. I've chosen him to accompany Hollyn to speak with Yumia, the sea witch of Kalapua. He'll protect you all the way there and back."

Kai's tone was clipped as he said, "I am completely capable of escorting Hollyn. We don't need to take your bodyguard away from his duties."

Hollyn glanced at Kai and noted the redness of his tan face.

She'd never seen him like this. Hollyn knew jealousy when she saw it.

But he had nothing to be jealous about. Her mind was set on the mission, and nothing could turn her head away from Kai.

She knew she didn't want anyone else by her side as she faced her father.

Yet, it was Poseidon who said, "Hollyn will be in good hands. I need you here, son. It's important that you know where you came from."

Kai did not look convinced, so Hollyn whispered, "It's okay. I'll be okay. It's probably just going to be a few days."

He stared at her and then looked back at his father. Would he be able to let this go?

“Fine! But if she’s not back in a few days, I’m going after her.”

“Of course! I’ll take you there myself.”

In that moment, a guard rushed in and spoke in a low, urgent tone directly to Poseidon.

The god of the sea looked around at the gathered people, and said, “Thian, get Hollyn to Yumia. Kai, come with me. There’s been an attack.”

Before she could protest, Thian took her elbow and began leading her away.

She turned her head and met Kai’s gaze as the distance grew between them.

His stern look softened for just a moment and he gave her a nod.

She was sure he meant it as reassurance, but all she could think was that she didn’t want this to be the last time she ever saw him.

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Kai finally looked away from Hollyn and the newly introduced douchebag Thian.

Kai didn't trust the guy at all, especially not with Hollyn's safety.

But he had to let her go. She needed to find a way to control her magic.

It was the only way she was likely going to defeat Grigori, her warlock father.

That meant she would need the expertise of another magic wielder.

Kai just hoped he could trust his new-found family. They all seemed a little shifty.

Even now, as they swam toward an attack, Kai's biological father, Poseidon, kept looking back as if he needed to make sure Kai followed.

Even stranger, as they crested an underwater mountain formation, Kai saw his biological mother, Uma, standing next to the crumbling remains of an underwater cavelike structure.

As they drew closer, he could see the distress on her face.

She called out to them as they approached, "Whoever did this is no longer here, but they destroyed the entire warehouse."

Kai stopped swimming and entered the small bubble of air surrounding the warehouse that had once simply looked like an underwater cave.

He looked around before he asked, “This was a warehouse? What did it hold?”

His mother smiled at him, a sad, sweet smile that reminded him how little he knew of the underwater world to which he was born.

He still couldn’t believe that this was where he was from.

He’d grown up on the land with two, loving adoptive parents, Michael and Tessa Iona, but now, he was trying to connect with a world in which he didn’t feel like he belonged.

“I forget that everything is new to you down here.” She swept her hand toward the jumble of rocks that blocked any way inside the structure. “We kept food supplies here, but from the looks of things, whoever attacked took all the contents and destroyed the warehouse.”

“Why would they do that?”

Poseidon cleared his throat and said, “There are many in this ocean who want to cause anarchy. We can’t spend time trying to dissect their motives.”

Kai looked at his biological parents and shook his head back and forth between them. Something was off, but he couldn’t quite figure out what it was. They definitely weren’t telling him everything.

“Does this kind of thing happen often?”

Uma was quick to reassure him, “Don’t get the wrong idea. We aren’t fighting a rebellion or anything like that. There are just some roaming raiders that we have to reign in sometimes.”

“Why are they out there? Why don’t they live in a city somewhere? Why don’t they live in Hanupali or Atlantis with other underwater people?”

A look passed between them before Poseidon shrugged and explained, “Who can begin to understand the minds of someone who would do this?” He swept his hand toward the ruined structure.

Kai understood their thinking, but he couldn’t help but wonder what was really going on. Why would people be so desperate that they’d risk something like stealing Hanupali’s food stores? It just didn’t make sense.

“What will you do about it?”

With a shrug, Uma said, “We’ll send out a troupe of guards to search and see if there’s any sign of the raiders. We’ll also be hyper vigilant for a while, just in case they decide to return.”

Kai nodded his head, but something wouldn’t stop bothering him. “Why didn’t you already have guards posted here? That seems like a no-brainer for something so important.”

Both Poseidon and Uma seemed at a loss for words. They stared at him, seemingly without an answer.

Finally, Poseidon said, “That is definitely something we need to look into. Great suggestion, Kai.”

Uma laid a reassuring hand on Kai’s arm. “We’ll get some people here to clean everything up. I think you should go relax and get something to eat. There’s no reason for you to worry about this any longer. It’s a matter for your sister to take care of. After all, she is now the queen.”

Kai nodded even though he had more questions.

Maybe he would discuss his concerns with Oleen, his sister, and the rightful ruler of Hanupali since he abdicated the throne.

She had a brain for seeing solutions to the problems around them, which is the reason he knew she needed to be the leader of her people, not him.

It was an easy decision in the end. He knew where he belonged and it was fighting by Hollyn's side.

Poseidon put an arm around Kai's shoulders and said, "Why don't you come with me to Atlantis?"

I think it would be good for us to get to know each other, and you would be amazed at the extensiveness of the largest underwater civilization.

I think you might be fascinated by the technology we use to keep it hidden from the surface world. "

"Sounds good. I just want to speak with Oleen first. Do you think we could head to Atlantis tomorrow morning?"

With a booming laugh, Poseidon squeezed Kai in close and said, "Of course! That gives me another night with the most beautiful woman in all the worlds." He gave a pointed look at Uma who blushed and giggled with the flattering words.

"Can you send word to Hollyn that she should meet us at Atlantis when she's ready?"

Poseidon nodded. "That's an excellent suggestion. I'm sure Thian will be happy to bring her to Atlantis once she's learned all she can."

Thian! Kai still didn't like that Hollyn was with a man he didn't entirely trust, but with roaming raiders in the ocean attacking randomly, Kai wouldn't want Hollyn to be alone.

He just couldn't wait until Thian was no longer needed and hoped the asshole knew what was good for him—keeping his hands off of Hollyn.

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“How do you know we’re going in the right direction? It just looks like we’re swimming in the vast ocean with nothing but dark blue everywhere I look.”

Hollyn treaded water at the surface as Thian patiently waited for her to pull in another breath.

He seemed to think about her question for a moment before he said, “You probably don’t notice the ocean currents around you, but they often move at different speeds and can be a bit winding, kind of like one of your surface roads.

Although they change sometimes, they are fairly similar.

I know the area where the Sea Witch lives, so I just have to find the right current.

Occasionally, we’ve switched into others along the way. ”

“I noticed that.”

“Just like your surface roads lead to places on land, the currents lead to places under water. I know where we’re going and the currents are taking us there.”

Hollyn nodded, kind of understanding. “But how do you know when to switch?”

Thian gave her a little smile and said, “I don’t know. I just do.”

The answer was incredibly frustrating for Hollyn. But it was just one more irritant in a sea of them. She giggled a little out loud at her own pun, even if it was only in her

head.

“Something funny?”

“No. Just something I was thinking about. How long have you worked for Poseidon?”

Thian let the change in subject pass as he said, “For around five years now. I was in the armed forces for a long time before joining the Royal Guard.”

“Does it bother you that he sent you on such a lame mission with me?”

He shook his head slowly, a wolfish grin sliding onto his face. “I think even shopping for food items would be fun with you, Hollyn. You have an inviting personality.”

Despite her determination not to like Thian, she had to admit that his answer was smooth. “Ha! Do you really think flattery is needed? I’m not going to give you a hard time when you’re going out of your way to help me.”

His eyes widened. “Is that what you think? I’m a sweet talker? You really don’t know me at all. I’m rarely nice to anyone.”

Hollyn let his words sink in. With one look at him, she would never have described Thian as sweet, either when talking or in any other capacity, but right now, he wasn’t bad company at all.

She’d much rather be with Kai, had hardly been separated from him since the gift-giving ceremony, but this was something she had to do for herself.

“Well, I’ll keep that in mind. Shall we continue on?” Hollyn gave Thian a friendly smile and nodded toward the water.

Thian's lips tipped up at the corners as he gave a sharp nod. He dove back under the waves, and Hollyn took a deep breath before following him down into the current they were riding.

After what felt like another hour, some rocky formations appeared in the distance. Thian signaled in their direction, and Hollyn understood that was where they were going. Nervous energy filled her stomach. She really hoped this worked.

As they swam closer, Hollyn grew more and more anxious. What if the Sea Witch couldn't help her? What if she refused?

There really wasn't an alternative right now though. Hollyn needed to be persuasive. Otherwise, she would likely never get control of her magic.

The undersea mountain loomed in front of them, and as they entered an access cave, a bubble of air surrounded them. Thian held out his hand and said, "Stay behind me until I know we're safe. There's a good chance she has some magical defenses we won't see until it curses us."

"Doesn't she expect us?"

"Poseidon sent word through our underwater communication system. It's similar to your phones on the surface, but it works on a different connection system than cellular. Again, the currents play a part. And I'm sure she got the message. That doesn't mean we are going to be welcomed with open arms."

As they slowly made their way down a wide tunnel, Hollyn worked to make out shapes in the dark. She reached out a hand and brushed Thian's back. He reached for her, and their hands held as he pulled her along.

"I forget that you can't see down here."

“You can?”

“Yes. Pretty much all ocean dwellers can see in the dark. I would be interested to know whether Kai can or not, considering he has the genetics of Poseidon and Uma, but he was raised on the surface.”

“Oh, he can see well in the dark. He could do so many surprising things.”

“You two have really formed a strong bond in a short amount of time.” His voice seemed probing more than factual, and Hollyn wondered what was going through his mind.

“When you go through life-threatening situations over and over, you tend to get close to the one who helped you through it all.”

“That makes sense.”

Suddenly, Thian stopped, and Hollyn bumped into his back, placing her free hand on his waist.

“Someone is standing at the end of the tunnel. They just stepped out through a door.”

“Do you think it’s Yumia, the Sea Witch?”

Thian cleared his throat and called out, “Poseidon sent us. I have Hollyn Oates here. We’ve come to speak with Yumia.”

Silence filled the cavern.

“What’s happening?” Hollyn whispered to Thian’s back.

“I forget you can’t see anything. Honestly, I can’t even make out any more than a shadowy figure.”

“What do we do?”

Out of thin air, a disembodied, female voice commanded, “Hollyn Oates, step forward for my assessment.”

Hollyn startled and stood still for three pounding heartbeats before pushing around Thian and standing with her shoulders back and spine straightened.

Even the air stilled as Hollyn barely dared to breathe.

She waited for any sign that she was passing an unknown test of some sort.

She didn’t even know what she was supposed to do.

Should she throw her arms around, sing, pull up the baby wave she could produce in her hand?

As the time ticked on, she was ready to give up and begin the long swim back to Hanupali. Were they going to stand here forever?

Out of nowhere, the voice returned and said, “You’ll do.”

The lights flashed on and filled the cavern. Hollyn blinked several times as everything came into view. Instead of a person at the end of the cavern, a cardboard cut-out of a famous boy-band figure, Harry somebody, stood in front of a red door.

“Well, what are you waiting for? A red carpet? Get in here, you kooky kids!”

Hollyn took a deep breath and took the steps between the door and herself. There wasn't a knob, so she pushed it inward and walked into a scene that looked liked Willy Wonka had hired the patrons of the Mos Eisley Cantina to make his chocolate, and one thought went through Hollyn's brain.

“Cover me in icing and call me a cake because I've found my party.”

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Oleen directed the staff and advisors of her kingdom as if she had done it all her life.

Yet, she never gave a harsh word or a stern look.

Her way was a gentle respect for all that made people want to do everything in their power to please her.

Kai was so proud of her, and he knew without a doubt that he'd made the right decision when it came to who should rule Hanupali.

He approached her and raised his hand in greeting.

"How's my little sister, Queen Oleen, today?" He liked the idea of having a sibling. For his entire life until he'd learned of his origin, he'd been an only child. The thought of his new-found family, especially his sister, brought a smile to his face.

"Honestly, a little overwhelmed. How does one plan their own coronation party?"

"I don't know, but if anyone can do it, it's definitely you."

She laughed but nodded in agreement. With a glance around, she asked, "Where's Hollyn?"

Kai felt every muscle in his face tense, and he gave a slight shrug before he said, "She went to see Yumia, the Sea Witch. Before she can face her father, Grigori, she's got to hone her magic skills."

“Why didn’t you go with her?”

A deep sigh filled Kai’s chest. “Poseidon insisted I visit Atlantis with him and meet Triton and my other siblings there.” It hit Kai that he had multiple siblings. He just hoped he connected with them as well as he had Oleen.

“So, you let her go off on her own again. I mean, it worked out well the first time but only because Poseidon found her before the raiders could hurt her.”

“No, she wasn’t alone. Poseidon gave up his personal guard, Thian, to guide her and keep her safe.” Kai couldn’t keep the resentment out of his voice.

“Thian? Thian Grand? I hear he’s quite hot. Did you just send your girlfriend off with a starring member of the Thunder Down Under show?”

Kai’s head began to pound. “Please, don’t say that. I trust Hollyn completely, and I have no doubt he will keep her safe.” Yet, something occurred to him. Something he hoped Oleen could clarify about the raider attack.

“Have you ever known the roving raiders to attack one of the food storage warehouses before?”

“What? Has there been an attack?”

For a moment, Kai was concerned that she didn’t know about what had happened. Shouldn’t the queen be the first person to know when the kingdom is under threat?

“Uma and Poseidon called me to a warehouse. Well, to be honest, it looked more like a cave-in by the time I saw it. They said the raiders had taken everything inside and destroyed it.”

Oleen looked thoughtful for a moment. “Where was the warehouse?”

“On the outer rim, right before the drop-off. I thought it was strange that it wasn’t being guarded. That seems like something that would need to be locked up tight with security all around.”

Again, Oleen looked confused. “We didn’t have guards there for one very good reason. We haven’t stored anything in that cave for ages.”

Kai stared at his sister, processing her words, trying to make sure he’d heard her correctly. “Nothing?”

She shook her head back and forth slowly.

“Nothing at all?”

“Not a single thing.”

For several long minutes, Kai tried to make sense of what Oleen was telling him. Could Poseidon and Uma have gotten it wrong? Not likely. Had they been trying to manipulate him? Most likely. For what purpose?

“Alright, Oleen. I need you to be completely honest with me. Do you think they lied to me?”

Her mouth worked and she raised her hands in a shrug. “I can’t say. I would like to think they’d had the best intentions in mind, and I can’t imagine why they would lie.”

Kai had a slight idea. He wouldn’t put it past Uma to try to find some way to keep Kai here.

After all, she'd tried to force him to become the king of Hanupali and marry a princess from another kingdom.

He'd barely been in the underwater city for a day before she'd already pushed her agenda.

Could she have roped Poseidon into her mission to keep him under the water?

"I don't quite know what to think about it, but I would appreciate it if you didn't quite give them a heads up that I know the warehouse was a fake."

"I am so good at pretending. I've been doing it for years. What will you do now, though?"

What would he do? Would he go to Atlantis as planned? Would he wait until the time was right and confront Uma and Poseidon? In the end, he knew they wouldn't do anything to hurt him. But they clearly had an agenda, and he wanted answers.

"For now, I'm going to say goodbye to you and Hanupali City."

"But I don't want you to leave. And won't Hollyn come back here?"

"Oh, I'll be back, but I need some information first. There's only one way I can get that. I have to go to Atlantis with Poseidon."

"What do you hope to learn there?"

Kai pulled his sister into a hug and held her tightly in his arms before pulling back. "The limits of what I can do. I need to be ready to fight with Hollyn. I need to face who I am so that I can be who I need to become."

She squeezed his hands. “Then, go, but you are always welcome here, and I expect you to come back. You’re the only brother I’ve got, and I don’t want to lose my first, true ally.”

“Deal. I love that I have a sister, but especially one I click with as well as I do with you. I’ll return, and I’ll always have your back.”

“You really are the big brother I always wanted.”

“And you’re a better sister than I deserve.”

With one last hug, Kai turned to leave. He needed answers about what was going on, and the only way he could do that was to play along for now. For now.

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“Who’s your daddy?”

Hollyn stared, confused, at Yumia’s question. Surely, she knew who Hollyn’s father was. Why would she ask?

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“Well, when you can answer that question to my satisfaction, you’ll be ready.”

This did nothing to clear up Hollyn’s confusion.

As a matter of fact, it made her question the decision to come here in the first place.

Yumia and Hollyn were in a small, round chamber with an open circle in the middle and multiple, bubbling flasks on countertops against every wall except for where the door stood.

They’d left Thian in an antechamber that seemed to serve as Yumia’s living room.

This place looked more like a science lab, complete with strange, puppet-like characters moving from station to station.

Hollyn half-expected to hear a “mee-mee-mee-mee” at any moment.

But Yumia pulled her focus back to her as she said, “Let’s begin. Hold out your hands.”

Hollyn hesitated for a moment before lifting her hands, palms up. Yumia hovered her own hands over top of Hollyn's.

“Now, your job is to slap the tops of my hands before I can move them away.”

“What?”

“Don't hold back. Give me all you got.”

“You want me to...slap your hands?”

“We can switch if you want. But I'll warn you. I hit hard.”

Hollyn made a pitiful attempt by sliding her hands to the sides, but Yumia jerked her hands away and laughed.

“Come on! You can do better than that.”

They reset, and this time, Hollyn tried to move faster, but Yumia pulled her hands away in time once more.

“Better! Let's try again.”

For the next thirty minutes, Hollyn continued to try to move fast enough to make contact, but no matter how quickly she moved, Yumia always moved faster. At one point, Hollyn was sure Yumia's hands were merely a blur.

In frustration, Hollyn finally took a step back and lowered her hands. “What are we doing? I thought you were going to teach me to control my magic, not play games.”

“Do you think we're just playing games, little siren?”

“Obviously.”

A wicked smile slid onto Yumia’s mouth as she gleefully whispered, “Let’s switch.”

Hollyn slowly turned her hands over, palm facing the ground, and Yumia hovered her hands below.

Instantly, Hollyn felt a magnetic force begin to take hold.

Her hands felt like lead weights hanging from the ends of her arms. Energy built at their wrists and spiraled through the air around them.

Moisture began to gather between their hands.

Every sensation made Hollyn’s hair stand on end, up and down her skin, skimming over her like an electric current coursing along a wire.

Out of nowhere, water rushed up Hollyn’s arms and down her legs as she was blasted backward into a solid rock wall. She slid down to the ground until she was slumped over like a rag doll. Instantly, the water receded like a wave, leaving Hollyn soaked and limbless.

After a stunned moment, Hollyn looked up at a pensive Yumia. Her head was cocked, arms still extended, and all her focus waiting for a reaction from Hollyn.

“Teach me!” Hollyn began to peel herself off the floor. “I want to be able to do that!”

Yumia’s mouth broke into a knowing smile. “Don’t underestimate yourself. You can do much more than that.” She waved Hollyn toward herself. “Let’s go again.”

Hollyn tentatively walked forward and put her hands out. “I felt your power, but how

did you pull it so quickly, increase it to that degree, and use it in such a targeted way?"

Yumia laughed loudly. "Do you always want everything all at once?"

"When my life is on the line, yes! I need you to teach me everything you know."

"So, we're going to be here for twenty years? Do you have that kind of time?"

"Well, I'll take the quickest version of it you can give me. I've got days at the most."

Yumia looked thoughtful, tapping her long, curved, coral fingernail against her full lips. "Well, I've never had such a challenge, but teaching is what I do. Some are better students than others. I've had some students who...well, let's not go there. What kind of student are you?"

Hollyn perked up. "The best kind, of course. Bend me, shape me, any way you want me, Teach!"

"I do see potential in you." She put her hands out, palm down once again. "Give me your hands."

Hollyn tentatively put her hands underneath Yumia's. Her nerves were wreaking havoc in her stomach. She really didn't want to hit the wall again...literally. She stared at her hands, willing something to happen, but instead, a whole lot of nothing was the result.

As they stood there awkwardly, Hollyn began to grow frustrated. She squeezed her eyes shut and willed something...anything to happen. Yet again, no energy crackled. The lack was obvious.

“Ugh!” She pulled back and balled her hands into fists. “Maybe I’m just shit at magic.”

“Is that what you believe?”

“I don’t want to think that way.”

She shrugged. “Then, don’t.”

Hollyn stared. Oh! Okay! Thanks for that! I won’t! It’s just that easy. What did she think Hollyn was doing? Purposely not channeling her magic so that she wouldn’t have to face her father?

Wait! Was she?

“Just give me some kind of clue, some kind of hint, for how in the hell I tap into my magic. I thought this medallion...talisman...thingy was supposed to make things happen.”

Yumia hummed low in her throat, a tune that sounded familiar but Hollyn couldn’t place.

As she let the tune grow louder, Yumia’s hands began to glow.

Hollyn felt the magic building once more and braced herself for a ride toward the wall, but it never came.

Instead, Yumia steadied her tune and everything around them stilled.

It felt like a tight bubble surrounded them, making Hollyn feel safe and confused at the same time.

The only sound was Yumia's humming, echoing around the bubble.

Yumia paused and looked pointedly at Hollyn. "Where does your song come from?"

"My...voice?"

"Does it? Or does it come from somewhere deeper?"

"I suppose I pull it from deep inside me."

"And who taught you to sing?"

"My mother taught me to sing." Her image flashed before Hollyn in an instant, beautiful and sad green eyes, heart-shaped face, honey-blond hair.

"Your magic is tied to her song. When you pull it from deep inside, don't just sing it, feel it. Feel her love surrounding you, like you feel right now."

"I...I don't know how to do that."

Yumia smiled widely. "Well, I didn't create the protection around us, you did. I just hummed the song your mother used to sing you. Your magic came alive instantly."

The bubble around them instantly popped, but Hollyn didn't move an inch, not even daring to breathe as she listened to Yumia's tune once more in her head. She knew it as well as she knew she had breath in her lungs.

Could it be that easy?

She took a deep breath and began to sing the song aloud, feeling each note.

She raised her hands once more, palms up, resting just below Yumia's.

As she sang, moisture began to build between them, and an electric charge began to fill the air once more.

Hollyn could feel her hands growing lighter yet fuller, like they contained all the liquid of the ocean.

With a build toward the crescendo of the song, she began to pull the tune from deep inside.

It rose like a tsunami climbing higher into the air, growing closer to the shallow shelf of land, ready to surface and destroy everything in its path.

Hollyn could feel the strength of her magic.

She could feel the strength of her mother's love.

As the power released, a stream of water splashed over Yumia, causing her to back up a few steps.

She wiped the water out of her eyes and shouted, "That's it!"

Hollyn lowered her hands, devastated. "That's it? I'll never be able to face my father with that. He'll laugh in my face. How do I even use this thing around me neck?"

Yumia rested her hands on her hips and stared at Hollyn. "You'll know when the time is right to use the magic in the talisman. Besides, you've only begun to tap into your magic, darling. By the time I finish with you, your father won't stand a chance." She shrugged. "And I know all his weaknesses."

“How?”

“Because I’m the one who trained him.”

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“How do you keep all of this hidden from the land dwellers?”

Kai stared in awe at the numerous spires reaching into the dark blue of the ocean. All around, light glowed like neon signs surrounding each building of the city. The lights reminded him of the creatures of the deep who used bioluminescence to attract other animals and to communicate.

“We have a stealth system that keeps us well out of sight.”

“How do submarines not plow through your buildings?”

Poseidon laughed. “The technology of the land dwellers just sees this area as a large, underwater mountain range. They go around us.”

They swam into the city, pausing every few feet as Poseidon greeted the people and listened to their concerns.

He seemed to genuinely want to help them, and this surprised Kai.

He would have expected a god to see all the problems of the Atlanteans to be beneath him.

Instead, the minute they arrived at the palace, he began giving orders to see to the needs of the people with whom he’d spoken.

He didn’t seem like the manipulative person that Kai had suspected him of being earlier.

It just continued to add to the mystery.

“Come, Kai! It’s time you meet your older brother, Triton.”

Kai followed Poseidon through several chambers until they exited back into the water, only this time they were surrounded by an extensive wall, and Kai realized they were in some sort of courtyard.

As they approached a group of men standing in a circle, shouting loudly, and cheering, Kai heard the sounds of metal striking metal.

Poseidon pushed his way through the circle, and Kai walked behind him. Once they stood on the inner part of the gathering, Kai was in awe once more. Before him, two men, one the size of Poseidon and the other even bigger, crashed large, three-pronged tridents into the other’s again and again.

They were practically a blur as they fought each other without pausing, never appearing to hold back from any of their strikes. Yet, with one swipe of his trident, the smaller man had the larger one on his back, the trident at his throat.

Poseidon clapped loudly and laughed uproariously. “Polyphemus, I thought you almost had him that time. Well done, Triton!”

Moving forward, Poseidon slapped his hand on the one still standing’s shoulder.

The man looked at Poseidon and, unsmiling, nodded at him once.

He, then, tossed his weapon to the ground and reached a hand out.

The man on the ground took the offered hand and rose back to his feet.

He left his own trident lying behind him.

“I have a surprise for you two.” He gestured a hand back toward where Kai stood on the inner rim of the circle. “I want you to meet your long, lost brother, Kai.”

As the two turned toward him, Kai stepped forward but stumbled when he noticed the bigger of the two only had one eye. He recovered quickly and stuck out his hand. Neither man took the offered sign of greeting. Instead, they crossed their arms in unison and stared.

“Brother? I don’t see the resemblance. Are you sure this pipsqueak is a Son of Poseidon?”

” The one with two eyes spoke first. He had long, blonde hair that flowed out behind him.

His face was clean-shaven, but his features were so similar to Poseidon’s that if you put a white mustache and beard on him, they would have been twins.

Kai lifted to his full height and pulled his offered hand back, crossing his own arms and bracing his feet apart. “Who you calling pipsqueak?”

Poseidon laughed again, a booming sound that seemed to send waves of water flowing in all directions. “Yes, Triton. He is your brother. There is no doubt.”

Suddenly, the one Kai assumed was Polyphemus lurched forward, wrapped his beefy arms around Kai and lifted him off the ground. “Me love brother!” He hugged Kai until he had trouble breathing.

Just as he was about to take drastic action, Polyphemus put him down and released him. Kai sucked in a breath and gasped as he said, “Nice to meet you, too.”

“Well, I’m not so easy to win over like Poly here. He might want another brother, but I’m all good on siblings, thank you very much.”

“Oh, stop being such a baby, son. Kai is one of us, and we need to teach him how to be an Atlantean.”

Kai couldn’t disguise his surprise as he whipped his gaze toward Poseidon. Kai was under the impression he was just here to tour Atlantis and meet his siblings. Now, he suddenly was going to be an Atlantean? That sounded like a long-term plan if there ever was one.

Poseidon leaned in. “I want you to show him all the benefits of living here as a Demigod, if you know what I mean.” His eyebrows lifted a few times, clearly signaling an innuendo. Kai wanted to slap his hand over his face. Was he serious?

“Um...that’s okay. I really don’t need anything other than a short tour.

As soon as Hollyn returns, we’ll head back to the surface.

” Not to mention, he had to help save Willow.

The poor girl was probably going out of her mind after being kidnapped once more, this time by Grigori.

Kai felt a driving need to find the teenager before Hollyn’s father figured out how to use the Fate that she was to his benefit.

Triton looked back and forth between his father and Kai, clearly trying to logic out what exactly was going on between them. Did he know his father well enough to suspect there were more unspoken reasons why Kai had been brought to Atlantis?

“Nonsense! Your brothers know all the best spots, and they won’t rest until you’ve seen each one of them in full, illicit detail. Why don’t you all start at the Lotus Club. You two are regulars there, aren’t you?”

Triton’s eyes widened briefly before narrowing in understanding. What he understood, Kai didn’t know, but he had a feeling he would find out soon enough.

“Sure. We can start there.” He turned toward Kai and a wolfish grin slid across his mouth. “Let’s go, brother. I can’t wait to show you all of Atlantis.”

Kai was certain Triton was full of shit in his enthusiasm, but once again, he didn’t question.

Until he fully understood their plan, he would continue to go along like he didn’t suspect a thing.

Yet, his wariness grew as they swam toward one of the brightest buildings in the city.

One that had scantily clad women standing outside, beckoning men to come inside.

“Actually, could we start somewhere a little less...brightly lit?” Kai asked.

Triton looked irritated for a moment before he asked, “Who’s leading this tour? Poseidon said to start here, so we’ll start here. Come on, pussy! Let’s go.”

Kai sighed heavily and followed his two brothers inside.

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Hollyn wiped the sweat out of her eyes and rose to her feet, dropping her sponge in the soapy bucket next to her.

Her body ached from being on her hands and knees for a solid hour, scrubbing the floor of Yumia's grand ballroom, which looked an awful lot like a giant, underwater cave.

In fact, the whole dwelling was a series of caves.

The only good thing about the whole set-up was that they seemed to be in some sort of air pocket, so Hollyn never had to go to the surface to breathe.

Unfortunately, that also meant she never got a break from Yumia's long to-do list.

She still couldn't use her magic, and she needed to get back to the surface.

She had people counting on her to save them.

She didn't need to be wasting time lost at sea with a woman who might or might not have her best interest at heart.

After all, she had admitted to being the one to teach Grigori.

What if Yumia was working with him? What if she was keeping Hollyn down here with busy work until Grigori was ready to come and collect her?

Hollyn slammed her fists on her hips and stared toward the door behind which Yumia

hummed that familiar tune. Hollyn needed answers, and she needed them now.

With determination in every step, Hollyn marched toward the door and flung it open without even knocking. She stepped over the threshold and asked, “When are you going to teach me how to use my magic?”

Yumia, tip of her tongue poking out of the corner of her mouth, didn’t look up from the Sudoku puzzle she was working on. She continued to stare at the page as if Hollyn hadn’t even entered the room.

“Well? Are you going to answer my question?”

With a heavy sigh, Yumia lifted her gaze to meet Hollyn’s. “Yes.”

Hollyn stood in confusion. “Yes? Yes to what?”

“Yes, I’m going to answer your question. It’s yes.”

“What’s yes?”

“Whether or not I am going to answer your question. That’s what you asked, and I answered. Yes.”

Hollyn felt like her head was about to explode. She shook it to try to erase her confusion. Instead, she changed tactics. “You said you taught my father.”

Yumia nodded once. “One of the worst students I ever had. He couldn’t find his way out of a scrub bucket to save his life.”

Frustration with a tinge of fury began to build in Hollyn’s mind. “What the hell does a scrub bucket have to do with learning how to use magic?”

“If you don’t know, you haven’t scrubbed long enough yet.”

Hollyn was ready to explode. “Are you working with him? Is your plan to distract me long enough for him to show up and claim me?”

Now it was out there. Would Yumia admit to a plot in collaboration with Grigori?

Instead, she laughed, long and hard, until she held her belly as if she were in pain.

As she wiped the tears from her eyes and straightened, her giggles began to fade.

She pulled in a steadying breath and said, “I wouldn’t help that man if he were the last man in the ocean or on the face of the earth. He can kiss my ass...twice.”

Yumia shook her head as her laughter faded. “If you’re done in here, the guest bathroom needs a good once-over. Oh, and I would love a kelp salad for dinner tonight, thank you.”

Guest bathroom? Kelp salad? Who was this woman?

“Get a lot of guests, do you?”

“You’d be surprised.”

Hollyn held her tongue once more as she followed Yumia out of the large space where she’d spent one of the worst hours of her life, down a hallway, around a corner to a decently-sized bathroom.

It looked more like a master bathroom with a walk-in shower, double sink, and two doors, one of which Hollyn assumed the toilet was behind.

“Cleaning supplies are under the sink. Give everything a wipe down and a rinse. I’m expecting company tomorrow, so I need this place to shine.”

Who said that to their student? I need this place to shine. This was getting ridiculous, but again, Hollyn held back her response.

Yumia seemed to be waiting for something, but after a few silent moments, she shrugged and walked away, leaving Hollyn to complete another frustrating task.

After a few minutes, Hollyn sighed and headed toward the cabinet under the sink where Yumia had told her she’d find sprays and scrub brushes. Yet, when she looked at what was there, she saw a bottle of vinegar, some baking soda, and a tooth brush.

“What the fuck?”

“Something wrong?”

Hollyn spun around, surprised to see Thian Grand leaning against the door frame, arms crossed, looking like a muscular superhero with his blonde hair pulled back in a small bun at the back of his head and his green eyes glowing with amusement.

“I’m over this! I haven’t done anything more than chores for days. I’m here to learn. Why isn’t she teaching me what I came here to learn? And for fuck’s sake, who cleans a bathroom with these supplies?” Hollyn swept her hand toward the pitiful basic cleaning items.

“Have you spoken to Yumia?”

Hollyn shook her head. “Not really. I accused her of being underhanded.”

Thian’s eyes grew sharp. “Was she?”

Doubt crept in a little bit. Everything she asked Hollyn to do felt like a waste of time. Why was she wasting Hollyn's time?

"I'm not sure, but I know I'm over all the to-do list bullshit."

"That sounds like a conversation that needs to be had."

Hollyn dropped her gaze back to the bottle and box under the sink. "I will be having that conversation. After I finish the bathroom."

She reached for the cleaning items and turned to see Thian's reaction, but the doorway was empty. He was gone.

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Kai glanced around the large, dim room once more.

The music blared loudly, some raucous noise with a thumping beat.

People, mostly men with a few beautiful women mixed in, milled about from table to table and to the bar and back.

Everyone wore wide smiles and laughed at muffled words as they tipped back a purple liquid-filled glass, the drink of choice for the entire group.

At the back of his mind, Kai knew he was supposed to be doing something right now, something important, but he couldn't seem to remember what it was. A wave of frustration hit him but faded as a hand pushed his own drink toward his lips, and the cool liquid slipped down his throat.

"Aren't you having a good time?"

Kai swiveled his neck toward the female voice and noticed a beautiful woman snuggled up beside him.

He hadn't even known she was there, but he got the sense that they'd been like this for a while.

His arm was draped over the couch and behind her long, chocolate hair.

Her curvy body was leaning into his, pushing her breasts into his torso.

Her bright, purple eyes reminded him of something, and as he turned his focus back to the beverage she held in front of him, he noted the liquid was the same color as her eyes.

He nodded drunkenly as he fell into a stupor, once again looking around the busy room.

Where were his brothers? They had dropped him here at this VIP area and disappeared through a nearby door.

Poly had given him such a pitying look—at least he thought he had.

It was hard to say since the big guy only had the one eye.

He couldn't even remember how long ago that was.

He'd thought they'd get a drink or two here and continue the tour of Atlantis, but he wasn't sure when they would return.

She placed the drink on the table in front of them and grabbed his hand, pulling him to a standing position. She draped her arms over his shoulders and around his neck and began to move her hips to the music.

“Dance with me, Son of Poseidon!”

Son of Poseidon. Yes, he was that. He knew that now, but it didn't feel right hearing the words from this woman's mouth.

She said it like it was his entire identity, but he knew better.

He was Kai Iona, son of Michael and Tessa Iona, pilot, owner of Otis, his dog, and

boyfriend to...

partner of...special friend to...who? Why couldn't he remember the name of someone so important to him?

His frustration began to build again, and the female with her hands stroking his neck began to irritate him.

He set her away from himself, and she pouted as she dipped to retrieve the drink from the table. She lifted the glass toward his mouth, but he knocked it away and heard it shatter as it hit the ground.

"I need to get out of here!" Kai stepped toward the door where he'd seen Triton and Poly disappear, but as he jerked it open, confusion hit his brain. Instead of a portal to another room, it was completely closed off by a brick wall.

What the fuck? Kai turned and scanned the room, looking for an exit sign, but there wasn't a single sign hanging from the ceiling. He dropped his focus to the female picking up glass from the floor, and he reached for her, lifting her to her feet.

She gave him a dazzling smile. "Did you finally come to your senses?"

Kai sneered at her. "More than you know." He pulled her toward the brick wall behind the door and asked, "What the hell is this?"

She stared at him stupidly and shrugged. Infuriating!

Kai growled loudly, and the woman jumped next to him. "You are going to show me the exit out of here, and you're going to do it right now."

Her gaze darted nervously toward the ceiling, and Kai followed the direction of her

anxious looks. For the first time, he noticed the camera protruding from the ceiling. He felt like a fool. He'd been drugged and left to rot in a place where his father had known he'd be trapped.

He faced the camera and shouted, "The game's over! It's time to let me out of here!"

The people near him shied away, staring at him like he'd gone crazy. The woman who'd been drugging him slid up beside him and said, "Okay. Fine. Follow me, and I'll show you how to get out."

Kai gritted his teeth as he turned his gaze toward his captor. He didn't trust her to truly help him escape, but right now, he didn't have any other choice. "Lead the way, but if you don't take me to a way out of here, I'll make sure you regret ever meeting me."

She swallowed hard but nodded slowly. As she snaked her way through the crowd, Kai followed her, never taking his eyes off her slender shoulders.

He was so angry at his brothers and Poseidon for putting him in this position.

He couldn't believe they'd left him here, knowing he needed to get back to...

Dammit! He still couldn't remember who he was supposed to meet up with.

They had something they needed to do. Somehow he still knew she was important to him and that she was in danger, but he couldn't remember her.

As they cleared the crowd of people, the woman turned toward the right and took him toward a mirrored wall.

Once there, she searched the wall for a moment before she seemed to find something

she was looking for and knocked three times on a particular spot in the middle of the mirror.

Kai stared with contempt at her image as she met his gaze in the mirror.

He had never despised someone so completely.

Her entire job had been to keep him from his mission. How long had she been successful?

The mirrored wall made a rumbling sound and a piece of it hissed as it pushed open and slid to the right.

Kai didn't waste any time, shoving himself through the opening into a quiet hallway.

Just as the door began to close, he reached back through and grabbed the woman, pulling her through with him.

"What are you doing? I'm not allowed to leave." She shouted at him as she turned to go back into the bar. The door closed before she could make it back inside. She turned slowly toward him, her mouth open wide. "What have you done?"

"I need answers! And you're going to give them to me!"

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“ S it down here.”

Hollyn met the gaze of Thian, lounging on a large, horseshoe shaped couch in Yumia’s living room. Even though it was another room she’d had to clean in the labyrinthian caves that served as her home, it was a welcome sight after a long day of more menial chores.

She collapsed on the cushion about a seat away from Thian, who looked well-rested but bored.

Not for the first time, she wondered what he did all day.

For the past three days, Hollyn’s sense of urgency grew minute-by-minute as she realized how close the full moon was.

While Thian relaxed and Yumia got all of her to-do list done...

by Hollyn, of course...Grigori had Willow, and Hollyn needed to be able to use the amulet that hung around her neck now.

It was the way to freedom, and Hollyn couldn’t see how she was supposed to use it without her magic, which she still didn’t know how to use.

Hollyn let her head drop back onto the top of the couch and sighed heavily. This was not good. By her calculations, she needed to face her father in two days time, and as of now, all she’d gained in Yumia’s lair were calluses on her hands.

Thian patted his lap and said, "Give me your feet. I'm sure they're killing you."

With great effort, Hollyn rolled her neck until she met his gaze. "I'm fine."

"Come on! I'll rub them for you. No doubt you need it."

She did. Right now, she'd give anything for a hot bath and a deep-tissue massage. But she didn't think Kai would like someone else touching her, even if it was a much-needed foot rub.

For a few heartbeats, she stared at him before she asked, "What did you do all day?"

He shrugged and motioned for her feet once more. "I didn't do anything as taxing as you did. Put your feet up here. I promise, I will keep it innocent."

His eyes heated slightly, and Hollyn felt her cheeks go red. What had he meant by that? Was he insinuating that he wanted a foot rub to be something more than innocent? Now, she was even more wary.

But she had to admit that her feet were killing her.

With slow reluctance, she lifted one foot and placed it on his muscular thigh. Though it gave a little, she could feel the bunching of his muscles, reminding her of his masculinity. He was an attractive man, no doubt, but she really wasn't drawn to him the way she was pulled toward Kai.

Yet, when his hands wrapped around the arch of her foot and squeezed with a gentle twisting motion, she couldn't help the pleasure-filled groan that escaped her lips, and she knew it had sounded sexual.

The corners of his mouth tipped up in a sensual grin, and for just a moment, Hollyn

could see his appeal. Just as quickly, though, she shook that thought off. He still wasn't Kai.

There was no denying he had fucking great hands though.

Damn! She was in heaven right now. Hollyn closed her eyes and moaned in pleasure.

She really had been working non-stop for three days, only pausing to sleep for about six hours each night.

It was the most ridiculous arrangement, but the small taste of magic she'd experienced on the first day was enough to make her keep working.

Clearly, Yumia knew something Hollyn didn't.

Right? A wall of water slamming her to her backside was all the proof she needed.

She just needed to hold strong and make sure Yumia knew she needed to be ready in two days time.

A gust of panic fluttered in her chest, but the minute Thian switched to her other foot, it receded slightly.

He continued to move back and forth between her feet for a half an hour before lowering them to the floor and scooting closer to her, leaving only an inch or two between them.

Hollyn sat up straight and started to rise, but he pulled her back down with a hand to her shoulder.

"I'd say your back could use some attention as well." He splayed his large hand

across her lower back and pushed into her aching muscles there. Again, noises of pleasure tumbled from her lips as the tension of the day began to melt away.

“Maybe just a little bit.” She relaxed and rested her elbows on her knees, letting him knead her back until she was a pool of contentment.

As he rubbed, he asked, “Do you trust Kai?”

She jolted upright and met Thian’s gaze. He was at least a foot taller than Hollyn, so she looked up into his glowing eyes. “Where did that question come from?”

“I just know how Atlantis is. I believe you have a place you call ‘Sin City.’ Atlantis is a similar vibe. Do you think Kai can handle the temptation?”

Although she’d only known him for weeks, Hollyn didn’t doubt Kai’s character. He’d not only helped Hollyn time and time again, but he’d also helped Willow. He was devastated at the thought of Willow being in Grigori’s hands. He was a good guy.

“Yes, I trust him wholeheartedly.”

Thian bit his lip and his eyes dipped in concern. He knew something.

“What?”

“If I had something that might prove that you shouldn’t trust him, would you want to see it?”

“What do you mean?”

He pulled out a small screen that looked like a cell phone.

With a few taps on the touchscreen, music and conversation like you might hear at a party began to play.

As he turned the screen toward her, Hollyn began to make out shapes in the dim nightclub.

There, in a small shaft of light, she saw Kai with closed eyes and a drunken grin on his face.

His mouth moved as he continued to say one word over and over, but she couldn't make out what it was.

She watched as a beautiful woman tipped a glass of purple liquid into Kai's mouth.

He swallowed greedily, and his head lolled backward as the woman set the glass down and ran her hand over his button-down shirt.

She lifted her eyes to the camera and gave a knowing smile and a wink of her purple, glowing eyes.

Hollyn turned away, not wanting to see any more. "What the hell? Where did you get that video?"

Thian scooted even closer and wrapped his arm around Hollyn. "What matters is that Kai is out partying while you're preparing for the fight of your life. I hated to show that to you, but I thought you should see it."

Hollyn stood up, pulling out of Thian's embrace. How could he? It seemed so out of character for the Kai that she knew, and she couldn't understand how he could have betrayed her trust so completely and horribly.

“Hollyn, come here. You shouldn’t be alone right now.”

She did feel alone...so totally alone in that moment. The one person in the world she felt like she had on her side wasn’t who she thought he was. If she couldn’t trust Kai, who could she trust?

Thian was suddenly standing nearby, wrapping his arms around her from behind. But it wasn’t comforting in the least. It was invasive, and she didn’t like it. Something about his embrace felt...wrong.

She pulled away once more and moved toward the door. Over her shoulder she said, “I just need some time to process this. Don’t follow me.”

Thank the stars, he let her go.

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“How long have I been here?”

The woman looked around frantically, as if she expected an attack at any moment. Kai grabbed her upper arms and forced her to look at him. “How long?”

“Three days.”

He cursed loudly but let her go. “Three days? How is that possible?”

“The lotus wine. It makes you lose track of time.”

“I think I already know who set this whole thing up. What I want to know is why? Why was I drugged and kept here against my will?”

She chewed her bottom lip and shook her head hard. She was refusing to answer his questions. He wanted to shake her until she spilled everything, but he knew that wouldn't get him what he wanted. He decided to take a different approach.

“What's your name?”

“Katerina.”

“Well, Katerina, I'm Kai, which you probably already knew, but what you probably don't know is that I am actually trying to save a young girl who's been kidnapped by the father of my...

er...girlfriend. My girlfriend and I were planning to save Willow, the young girl, as

soon as my girlfriend was ready to face her father.

Now, I've lost three days, and for all I know, my girlfriend doesn't even know where I am.

She probably thinks I abandoned her." Kai took a deep breath.

"So, for goodness sake, tell me why I'm here instead of off finishing that fight. "

Her purple eyes softened, and she gave a short nod, put her finger to her lips, and motioned for him to follow her.

He didn't waste any time, just fell into step behind her as she headed down the long, dark hallway.

For all he knew she was leading him into another trap, but at this point, he didn't have any other choice but to trust her.

Fortunately for him, she led him toward a heavy door that, when opened, led to a back alleyway.

Once they were both outside, she moved quickly toward the end of the alley, waving for him to follow once more.

When they were back out onto the busy swim way that functioned the same as a street on the surface, she crossed to another door.

She produced a key and opened it, quickly ducking inside.

With only a little hesitation, he followed her.

The minute the door closed, a light flickered on, and Kai looked around a small apartment—hers he assumed.

Finally, she turned and said, “Poseidon sent you inside with Triton and Polyphemus. They paid me to keep you drugged, but you weren’t an easy one. It took three times as much of the lotus wine to make you stop saying her name.”

“Whose name?”

“Hollyn’s.”

Hollyn! How could he have forgotten her name? That must have been some potent wine.

“So underhanded! So manipulative! Why were they trying to keep me unconscious?”

She swallowed hard, and Kai understood that she was scared.

“Look, I’m not staying in Atlantis. If you’d like, I’ll take you with me when I leave. I can take you to Hanupali City or to the surface or anywhere else you want to go. I just need you to help me understand what’s going on here.”

She nodded. “I would love to go to Hanupali City. Do you really think you can take me there?”

“I was the king of the city for a day, but my sister Oleen is now the queen. I think I can pull some strings. Now, will you help me?”

“Poseidon wanted to keep you here until Thian Grand was able to seduce Hollyn. I don’t know any more than that. It was my job to keep you from leaving Atlantis to go to her until Thian had done his part.”

Kai shook his head. He'd never felt so manipulated. Suddenly, he was incredibly thankful that his parents, his true parents, Michael and Tessa Iona, had been the ones to raise him. He didn't think he'd like the person he would have become had he been raised by Poseidon and Uma.

But one thing was for sure. He wasn't going to get the answers he needed from Katerina. He needed to speak to Poseidon, and that conversation needed to happen sooner rather than later. He needed to get to Hollyn before something happened that they both would regret.

Kai stormed into the palace, guards chasing after him.

With a force that knocked them all to the floor as he passed, the water around him slammed into them like giant fists, clearing a path for Kai straight to the throne room.

He shoved a powerful wave of water at the thirty foot high doors, and they flew open wide, slamming against the wall with force.

Kai strode inside, angry steps taking him toward the gray-haired man looking amused as he sat on a golden throne.

Beside him, Triton stood in a fighting stance, his face showing his surprise.

Polyphemus was nowhere to be seen, but Kai was on alert to any attack that might come his way.

He was done being a passive bystander when others were playing with his life.

"Poseidon, what game are you playing?"

Poseidon stood up and began to approach Kai slowly. "Son, let me explain."

“What is there to explain? Oh, that’s right! You had me drugged and kept me imprisoned for three days while you sent Mr. Irresistible to seduce my girlfriend. What do you have to say about that?”

“Well, when you say it like that, I sound like a real douchenozzle.”

“If the nozzle fits…”

Triton seemed to wake from his stupor. “How the hell did you escape that quickly? You should have been there at least a month before you realized what was going on.”

Kai dismissed such a stupid notion with a wave of his hand. “Why was I there in the first place?”

With a heavy sigh, Poseidon said, “Pussy so good, that’s why.”

The whole room grew silent, and Kai wasn’t exactly sure what to say to that. He cleared his throat, and asked, “Pardon?”

“I would do anything for Uma, and she didn’t want her only son to leave.

I tried to explain to her that you would resent having the decision taken out of your hands, but she insisted that once you two were apart, you’d forget about each other and move on.

I had my doubts, and look at you proving me right, but that woman can make me do anything for her. ”

Uma had set him up? Had set Hollyn up? To try to manipulate him into staying under the water? What kind of messed up, dysfunctional world was this? Kai marveled that Oleen had turned out as normal as she had. He could only imagine that Oleen’s father

must have been the only decent person down here.

“Well, it didn’t work. I woke up from my drugged state, and now, you’re going to tell me where Hollyn is. I’m done with Atlantis and, other than visiting my sister Oleen, I’m done with Hanupali City. I’ve had enough of all this secretive bullshit.”

“Don’t hold it against her too much. Uma just got you back. She wasn’t quite sure how to let you go.”

This was getting ridiculous. “Well, her actions have certainly not made me want to stick around. That’s for sure. Now, tell me how to get to Hollyn.”

“I’ll tell you how to get there, but I have to warn you that it might be too late. Thian is, as you said, Mr. Irresistible.”

Kai’s stomach churned at the idea that Hollyn would move into another man’s arms so quickly. He couldn’t let himself think about it or he’d probably stir up a hurricane with the fury just the thought of her with another generated.

He had to get to Hollyn, and he had to get there now.

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Hollyn looked at today's to-do list and back up at Yumia. Was she joking? The list of chores had tripled, and it would take well into the night to complete all of it. And first on the list was to paint the white roses red. What the hell? That was just insane.

"Yumia, we need to talk."

"I don't have time to talk, and from the looks of this list, I don't think you do either."

Yumia turned away, and an incredulous laugh spilled from Hollyn's lips.

Once Yumia was out of the room, Hollyn mimed several screams at the door where Yumia had disappeared.

Hollyn was at the end of her rope. She was ready to leave.

Clearly, she wasn't going to learn how to use her magic.

The only thing she was doing was setting up Yumia's home to be a great place to live... for Yumia.

She needed to find Thian and convince him to take her back to Hanupali City. From there, she'd find someone...anyone...to take her back to the surface. Maybe she wasn't ready to face her father yet, but she didn't have a choice. Tomorrow was the deadline, and Hollyn had wasted enough time down here.

Hollyn searched the caves until she found Thian in the one that served as a kitchen. She looked around at the clean surfaces and organized cabinets. Hollyn was the

reason it looked as good as it did. She'd cleaned this space the first day. It infuriated her to be back in here.

Thian turned and greeted her with an obvious sensual smile, letting his gaze start at the floor and skim up to meet her eyes.

"Can I speak with you?"

"I'm open to anything with you."

Hollyn chose not to acknowledge the obvious innuendo in his words. This was not the time, and she was more focused on using him to get her the hell out of here than she was focused on using him in any other way.

"Are you open to helping me get out of here?"

Despite the words he'd uttered mere seconds before, he didn't immediately jump at her request.

"Is this because of the video of Kai?"

"What? No! I just need to get back to the surface. I'm over all the chores without any instruction, and I'm out of time." She crossed her arms. "Are you willing to help me or not?"

He maneuvered around the island countertop between them until he faced her and rested his hands on her upper arms. "I'm sure the video was shocking, but I want you to know that I'm here for you."

"Thanks? Look, maybe I'll deal with Kai and whatever that video shows happening once I break free from Grigori, my evil warlock father who wants to imprison me and

use my tears to enhance his magic for the rest of my life. That is priority one. Now, are you going to help me or not?"

Thian stared at her, eyes wide, shock covering his features. He seemed at a loss for words.

"Well, if you're not going to help me, then stay out of my way."

Hollyn turned to go out the door, but Thian grabbed her arm and spun her around, pulling her into his chest. He wrapped his arms around her, closed his eyes, and lowered his mouth as if he were going to kiss her.

Hollyn acted quickly and shoved her hand between them, facepalming Thian before he could do something she'd have to slam a fist into his face for.

"What the hell, Thian?"

He dropped his hands to his sides and stepped back, staring at her in shock once more. "I'm sorry. I thought I was picking up a vibe."

"No! No vibe. We are not vibing at all." Hollyn gave a frustrated groan and turned to leave once more. "Just leave me alone. I'm going to find Yumia."

Hollyn couldn't believe this was actually happening.

Not only had she been dragged into the ocean by a man whose loyalty she now questioned, not only had she been dropped into a Cinderella story without the talking rodents, but now she had to fend off the advances of the one person who could have helped her escape.

She'd had enough, and she was going to tell Yumia just that.

After about ten minutes, she located Yumia back in the room with the white roses, red paint bottle and paint brush sitting next to them. She sat in an armchair next to the roses and met Hollyn's gaze the minute she stepped into the room.

"These roses aren't going to paint themselves, Hollyn."

"You're right. They're not. And I'm also not painting them either.

I refuse to do anything else on your insane to-do list. That is not what I came here for, and I am fed up with waiting for you to give me even the first clue of how to use my magic to face Grigori.

Honestly, I'm starting to think you've been working for Grigori all this time.

I am pissed off, and I'm not taking this anymore. "

"Finally! That's the spirit! You do have a backbone."

"What?"

"It's about time you faced your resentment. Look at your hands."

Hollyn shook her head but dropped her gaze to her hands. They glowed blue with an energy she'd never produced before.

"What is this?"

"That is the magic you've repressed deep inside you for years.

I'm sure Grigori worked long and hard to make sure you never manifested the power inside you.

But just like your sadness can enhance his magic, your emotions can help you release all that you've suppressed deep inside you.

The trick now that it's free is to make sure you control the magic through thought not feeling. ”

Hollyn focused on Yumia again. “Are you saying you tortured me these past three days to get me to release my suppressed anger?”

“Something like that. Anytime you'd show even the slightest hint of anger or frustration or anything, I'm sure Grigori found a way to make you regret it.”

“Usually by punishing my mother.”

“As a result, you learned to push those feelings under the surface. He made you fear your own anger, but anger is a natural emotion. It's what you do with it that matters.

After he'd gotten you to repress any of your feelings, the only emotion he could still get you to generate was sadness because that served his purpose.

” She stood up and crossed the room until she stood in front of Hollyn.

“I had to push you to acknowledge that your feelings were valid. By doing that, you've taken your first step toward taking control of your power.

He'll have a hard time controlling you now. ”

Everything suddenly made sense, and relief filled her as she realized she was more powerful than she'd ever known. Grigori had controlled her for years, but he didn't anymore.

“You said you knew his biggest weakness, and that you’d show me how to exploit it.”

“His biggest weakness is that he really has no control over you. Yes, he has your mother and your aunt, and he’ll try to use them to get you to bend to his will, but in reality, they’re more powerful than he is.

He’s weak. The only way he feels strong is by hurting others.

But if no one plays along, he has no strength. You just have to remind him of that.”

“How do I drown him in a blast of water?”

“Hollyn, there are no limits on the energy you can send. It doesn’t have to manifest in water form. You can do so much more.”

Hollyn felt the magic flowing freely throughout her body.

A blue glow filled the room and the medallion with the heart-shaped jewel hanging around her neck began to pulse.

From across the room, she removed the lid of the bottle of paint and the paintbrush seemingly floated upright, dipped into the red paint, and began lightly stroking the nearest rose petal, turning the bright white into a deep red.

Power suffused her being, and for the first time ever, she understood her own strength and how right it felt to be able to control it.

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The minute Kai laid eyes on Hollyn, he heaved a huge sigh of relief.

From a distance, he watched as she threw blue magic blast after magic blast, hitting small objects that were perched on a nearby rock.

Obviously, the magic lessons had gone well.

He just had to wonder if Thian had been successful.

“Is that Hollyn?”

Kai had been so distracted by the sight of the woman he loved, he’d all but forgotten about Katerina behind him. Her watery question took a moment to process.

He didn’t take his gaze off of Hollyn as he answered, “Yes, and damn, she looks good.”

Excited to be with her once again, Kai motioned for Katerina to follow as he strode toward Hollyn.

As they grew nearer, Hollyn finally noticed them. She turned and looked at him, her eyebrows dipped tightly toward the middle, and he got the sense she wasn’t as happy to see him as he was to see her.

With a roll of her hand, she directed him to follow her inside. He didn’t hesitate, and Katerina came along, too.

Once they were inside, they walked into a pocket of air, and Hollyn sucked in a full breath. She gave him and Katerina a once over before she asked, “What are you doing here, Kai?”

“I needed to see you.”

She stared at him thoughtfully, then shifted her gaze to Katerina. “You have striking, purple eyes. I’ve believe I’ve seen them somewhere before.”

Kai was beginning to suspect she wasn’t telling him everything. He just hoped he’d made it in time to keep her from falling into Thian’s bed. He wasn’t sure how he would feel if Thian had been successful in his mission.

“This is Katerina. She helped me, so I’m helping her.”

“Hmm. I see. Helping is what we’re calling it. Got it.”

Something was definitely wrong with Hollyn. Did she think there was something between Katerina and him? Surely she knew he’d never do that to her.

“Are you okay?”

“Better than okay, actually. I’ve unlocked my magic with Yumia’s help, and I was just getting in a little bit more practice before she helped me get back to the surface.”

Confusion edged into Kai’s brain. “You were going to go without me?”

“It kind of looks like we were both ready to move on, doesn’t it?”

At that moment, Thian turned the corner, looking like a younger version of the sea god he was tasked to guard.

He strode forward and possessively draped his arm over Hollyn's shoulders.

For a moment, she seemed like she was ready to throw it off, but then, she glanced at Katerina and settled into Thian's side instead.

Kai felt a hard punch of betrayal hit him in that moment.

Everything inside of him seemed to cave in at that moment.

Poseidon and Uma had succeeded in their manipulative plan after all.

It was enough to make Kai want to hurt them as much as he was hurting in return, but he couldn't.

What could he do? He could flat-out ask Hollyn why she'd given in so easily.

That's what. He'd really thought they'd had something a little more special than this.

He needed to speak to Hollyn alone. He needed answers. He pulled Hollyn away from Thian and asked, "Is there somewhere that we could talk? Just the two of us?"

"I don't know that I have much to say to you."

Kai couldn't believe his ears. She wasn't even going to give him a chance. Well, he wouldn't let her throw everything away that easily. He grabbed her hand, pulled her down the hallway, and said, "Well, I still have plenty to say for the both of us."

Just a little way down the hall, Kai found a room with some red roses, a couple of chairs, and a grand piano. Yumia clearly had a flair for the dramatic.

Kai settled into a chair and motioned toward the one next to him. Hollyn sat down

with a reluctant groan. “What do you want, Kai? Choices have been made. Do you think I don’t know about you and Katerina?”

Dafuq? Kai could only stare at Hollyn in disbelief. She thought he’d choose Katerina over her? No wonder she was giving him such a cold reaction.

“Hollyn, there is no Katerina and me. We’re not together, never have been, never will be.”

“Kai, I’ve seen the video of you in the nightclub with her. You don’t have to pretend. I’ve seen the evidence that you strayed.”

“What video are you talking about?” Suddenly, Kai remembered seeing the camera in the ceiling. Clearly, Poseidon, Triton, and Poly had filmed him the entire time and sent an edited video to Hollyn.

“Thian showed it to me. You looked blissful with Katerina’s hands all over you and her giving you drinks from something clearly alcoholic. I don’t know what to tell you. You couldn’t wait three days before you fell into another woman’s arms.”

“Thian showed it to you? That makes sense! He was trying to seduce you, and from the looks of things, he succeeded, didn’t he?”

She gasped at his accusation. “If you must know, he came onto me, but I rejected him. Something, you clearly don’t know how to do.”

Kai couldn’t believe what he was hearing. He hadn’t cheated at all, but he’d been set up so well, and no matter what he said or did, she’d never believe otherwise of him. Unless, he could get Thian and Katerina to confess what was actually going on.

“Stay here,” Kai commanded as he rose from his chair and walked to the door. He

leaned out and shouted down the hallway, “Thian, come here and bring that infernal video.”

After a few seconds, Thian walked toward Kai, a smug look on his insanely handsome face. He pulled out the small screen and strode into the room, confidence in every step. Katerina followed behind him, a look of contrition on her face.

“Are you okay, Hollyn? Did he hurt you?” Thian’s words were like small daggers to Kai’s brain. As if he’d hurt Hollyn? If anyone would, Thian would. The man was a soldier following orders. He didn’t care that Hollyn would get hurt in the process.

“Let me see this video.”

Thian pushed play, and Kai watched himself, clearly drugged out of his mind, mouthing something, being force-fed more of that infernal lotus wine, and he watched as Katerina looked up at the camera with a smile on her face while she ran her hand over his shirt-clad chest.

“Isn’t it obvious that I’m not in my right mind?”

Hollyn stared, pure sadness filling her features.

Thian said, “Looks like you made the choice to enter the Lotus Club, a known bar where the patrons go to get blackout wasted. I’m sorry you had to see that again, Hollyn.

But I’m here for you now.” The man crossed to where she was sitting and knelt on the floor in front of her.

Kai wanted to punch the manipulator in his big head.

But he knew he needed to keep his wits about it if he was going to convince her that Thian was the real creep.

“Katerina, will you explain to Hollyn what was in that glass, and who told you to keep me drugged there for as long as you could?”

Katerina looked at Hollyn, her gaze fell to Thian, who was clearly trying to communicate something to her silently, and then she focused on Kai once more before turning back to Hollyn. “Poseidon planned the whole thing.”

Thian jumped to his feet. “Kat, that’s enough. Don’t say anymore.”

Yet, Katerina ignored him and continued, “I was supposed to keep Kai drugged for a month or more so that you would think he’d abandoned you. Thian was supposed to seduce you when you were feeling so alone and then take you to the surface. It was all a plot to keep you two apart.”

Hollyn stared at Kai. He could see in her gaze that she wanted to believe Katerina’s words, but he could also see the deep hurt there as well.

Thian turned toward Hollyn. “Don’t believe a word she says, Hollyn. She is obviously protecting him. She’d say anything for him.”

Then, Hollyn surprised them all. She stood up and walked out of the room without saying a word to any of them.

Kai felt defeated like he never had before. Had he lost the only woman he’d ever loved for good?

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“Now, why are you letting your emotions get the best of you again? I thought you’d moved past that?”

”Yumia’s words only served to make Hollyn feel more insecure.

How was she going to face her father and control herself if she couldn’t even express her anger in a situation where she clearly deserved to feel angry.

Instead, she held out her powerless hands and said, “I don’t know what to do.”

“Good!”

“How is that good?”

“Well, I don’t believe the first step to knowing what to do next, is admitting that you don’t know what to do next.”

Hollyn’s brain hurt with Yumia’s illogical logic.

“Let me ask you this. What are you most afraid of, Hollyn?”

Without hesitation, Hollyn said, “Failure.”

“And what happens if you fail?”

Hollyn gave a small, incredulous laugh. “I’m imprisoned for the rest of my life.”

Yumia shrugged, and Hollyn wanted to scream at her nonchalance.

“Maybe. Maybe not. After all, that could have already been your fate if your mother and your aunt hadn’t intervened. I’m just saying that failure isn’t the end. Failure is just a lesson to learn. What you do next determines whether you’ve learned anything or not.”

Hollyn knew Yumia was speaking truth, but it still didn’t help her understand who to trust.

“I feel so confused.”

“Ah, yes, the video, Thian, Katerina, and Kai. It is a muddled mess, isn’t it?”

“You know about all of that?”

Yumia smiled, showing her bright, white teeth. “Girl, there isn’t much I don’t know. Ha!”

“Then, if you know so much, who should I trust? Who’s telling me the truth?”

“Hmm. So, the question is, who is actually behaving loyally, and who has an agenda. That’s what you need to ask yourself? What is everyone’s agenda?”

“How do I figure that out?”

Yumia laughed. “You ask them. However, you have something that they don’t know about.” Yumia held out her hand. “Give me your hand.”

Hollyn laid her palm into Yumia’s, aware that she might just end up against the wall again. Instead, Yumia said, “Ask me something you want to know the answer to,

something you think I might lie about.”

“Did you really teach Grigori?”

“Yes.”

A cool, blue flame covered their joined hands and turned green instantly.

“Now, really test me.”

“Did you enjoy my cooking?”

The cool, blue flame flickered for a moment while Yumia deliberated. She finally said, “Yes!”

And the flame turned an instant scarlet.

Yumia laughed heartily. “Haha! You are one of the worst cooks I’ve ever encountered. Definitely, don’t quit your day job.”

Hollyn lifted her arms and embraced Yumia in a tight hug. “You really are an amazing teacher! I appreciate everything you’ve done for me.”

They pulled apart and Yumia smiled. “You’ve done it for yourself. I just gave you the push you needed to get there.” She gave Hollyn a cheeky grin, “Now, who’s your daddy?”

Hollyn finally understood the question and how to answer it.

“I’m my own daddy now!”

“Exactly! Always remember that you have control of you. You have power and strength. Use them!”

They hugged once more before Hollyn left Yumia with one last wave and headed back to the room where Thian and Kai were in a shouting match with each other.

“You’re a son of a bitch who tried to convince her I didn’t want her anymore!”

“Bastard! How dare you accuse me of doing anything other than exposing her to the truth!”

“I’ll show you the truth!”

“Not before I show you!”

Hollyn came into the room just as the two men, their hands gripping each other slammed into the vase of roses, sending them crashing to the floor and glass scattered everywhere.

They, then, went careening into the piano keys, making a loud discordant noise as they fell into the white and black keyboard.

They ignored Katerina and Hollyn’s cries to stop, but Hollyn was over it all, and with a zap of her blue magic, she separated them to opposite sides of the room, restraining them against the walls.

Thian growled, “He started it!”

Kai shouted, “And I’m going to finish it!”

“Both of you need to shut up and listen!” Hollyn commanded in a no nonsense voice.

Reluctantly, the two men took their gazes off of each other and looked at Hollyn. She released them slowly and walked to the center of the room.

“Now, I’m going to ask all of you some questions, and you’re going to answer honestly. Everybody agree?”

Hollyn focused on each person in turn and watched as each nodded. She held up her hands in a motion that suggested everyone stay where they are while she walked toward Katerina. Hollyn held out her hand, and Katerina laid hers on top.

“Katerina, did Poseidon set Kai up?”

“Yes. He sent Kai with Triton and Polyphemus who left him so that I could do my part.”

Their hands glowed green, and Katerina nearly pulled away, but Hollyn grabbed her hand and said, “It’s okay. No harm will come to you. I promise.”

Once Katerina relaxed once again, Hollyn asked her, “And what was your part?”

Katerina took a deep breath and glanced at both Kai and Thian for a moment before she focused back on Hollyn and explained, “I was supposed to give him lotus wine, which makes a person lose all sense of time and makes them forget anything other than the moment. But Kai was resistant to the lotus wine. It took three drinks to put him in a state of total unconsciousness and three more to stop him from saying your name over and over.”

Again, their hands glowed green.

Hollyn swallowed hard and asked, “Did anything...intimate...happen between you two.”

Instantly, Katerina said, “No! Nothing happened.”

Hollyn was never so happy to see the color green.

She nodded at Katerina and took a step back. With purpose, she turned toward Thian and held out her hand when she was standing in front of him.

“This is ridiculous! I wouldn’t lie to you, Hollyn.”

“Prove it.” He blew out a frustrated breath and laid his palm on top of hers. Almost instantly, their hands flamed red with energy.

“I haven’t even asked the first question, Thian.”

He pulled back. “Fuck! Okay! He’s going to kill me, but Poseidon sent me here with you with a plan to seduce you. I was supposed to show you the video and be the one to pick up the pieces when you fell apart. But, you didn’t fall apart. You’re too damn strong.”

“Let me see the video again,” Hollyn demanded.

Thian shook his head in disbelief, but he did as she commanded and pushed play on the screen once more.

The sound of people partying filled the small speakers, but Hollyn wasn’t focused on that.

Instead, she zeroed in on Kai’s lips. She swiped her finger across the screen, rewound it, and watched it again.

Clear as can be now, she saw what Kai was mouthing, with his eyes closed.

“Hollyn.” His voice was close enough that she felt his breath on the shell of her ear.

He’d come up behind her and was watching the video with her. She turned and faced him fully. He’d said her name in the video. Even drugged out of his mind, he’d been thinking only of her.

She met his gaze. “I knew I could trust you. I’m sorry I ever let anyone make me doubt it for a second.”

He took her hand in his and lifted it to his mouth for a gentle kiss. “I’ll always come for you, Hollyn. I love you.”

“I love you, too!”

The whole room turned a tinge of green as energy encompassed the pair. An invisible electric current seemed to pass between them as the world around Hollyn faded, and she focused on one thing and one thing only—Kai’s lips.

The kiss was magnetic, pulling them together in a slow touch that turned passionate in an instant.

Hollyn wrapped her arms around his neck and he pulled her tightly to his chest, sliding one hand up to cradle the nape of her neck.

Hollyn’s whole body sang with desire, and she moaned when he slid his tongue into her mouth, deepening the kiss.

For the first time in days, Hollyn felt that all was right with the world.

As she ran her fingers through his hair and felt the tendrils of sensation swirling in her mid-section and shooting lower, she knew that no matter what else was going on

in her world, one truth would never change—she loved Kai.

After a few more passionate moments, Kai and Hollyn pulled back and stared into each other's eyes.

Kai smiled a crooked smile. "I missed you, baby."

Hollyn nodded. "Let's never do that again."

With a laugh, Kai said, "Agreed. No matter what comes, we'll face it together."

With an assurance she wasn't entirely certain she could follow through with, Hollyn told him they'd face everything together, but deep down, she was afraid that in the end, she'd have to face her father...alone.

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Like a homing beacon had been built just for him, Kai could sense the way to Hanupali City without assistance from anyone.

It was nice to know he could always find his way back; however, after surviving not one, but two of Uma's plots for him, he wasn't sure he would ever return after this final time.

Nevertheless, as they swam into the city and entered the palace, he let Uma embrace him in a hug. She glanced at Hollyn and gave a slight smile, but when she noticed Katerina beside Hollyn, the smile fell from her face.

"Well, I see everyone has met everyone else. Where's Thian Grand?"

Kai pulled free from her hug and said, "We sent him back to Poseidon, tail between his legs."

"I know you probably hate me now, but let me explain."

Shaking his head, Kai said, "I don't need an explanation from you, Uma. I've already had one from Poseidon."

"Please, call me Mother."

"That's not a title you've ever earned. Tessa Iona was the only person who ever was a mother to me. She's the only one who gets that title. However, I do ask one thing."

Uma seemed desperate as she said, "Anything!"

“You need to give Katerina a home here where she’ll never be used to manipulate another soul. Promise me you will never force her to work at the Lotus Club again, and I’ll promise you that I will visit Queen Oleen at least once a year. If you happen to be there when I arrive, I’ll see you, too.”

It took Uma a moment to think over her response, but she obviously knew she didn’t have any leverage as she conceded to Kai’s requests.

“You have my word.” He didn’t think she was done trying to get her way, but for now, he would accept her vow.

Kai hoped she kept it. He wasn’t so sure her word was worth much, but he would also make sure Oleen was aware of the situation.

“Now, we need a place to rest for a little bit. Is there somewhere we can go for the evening?”

“Of course! But you have to have dinner with us first.” She focused on Hollyn once more. “Both of you!”

Kai agreed reluctantly once he learned that Oleen would be there as well. He needed to make sure he brought her up to speed on the entire situation. If there was one person he trusted to do the right thing, it was his sister.

Dinner was mostly quiet with Kai explaining everything that had happened, including that Hanupali City didn’t need to worry about raiders, to Oleen who gave him her assurance that Katerina would be given a place in Hanupali City.

After asking Katerina what she might like to do, Oleen found a position in the preschool where she could become the teacher she’d always dreamed of being.

After Makoa made passionate advances toward Oleen, and she gleefully flirted back a little, Kai asked, “Are you two really in love?”

“At first, it was only because of Hollyn’s spell, but before you two left, I asked her to remove it because I didn’t want him like that.

Since then, we’ve actually been dating, and as it turns out, we really do like each other.

I’ve gained a confidence I didn’t have before, and he has an understanding that I want a partner in my life.

Now that he doesn’t feel the pressure to be the king that my mother expected him to be, he and I have deep discussions about the kingdom and what’s best for everyone.

I think we’re actually compatible and rule well together. ”

Makoa hadn’t completely warmed to Kai, but he gave all signs of actually loving Oleen. Being the big brother he was though, Kai would make sure Makoa got the message later that any pain he cause Oleen would come back on him triple once Kai got a hold of him. It was what big brothers were for.

“Hollyn and I are leaving tomorrow, and I don’t know when we’ll be able to return. Just know that I am so thankful that I got to meet you and that I know you will handle ruling Hanupali City with grace and wisdom. If you ever need me, though, send Akamu. He’ll know how to find me.”

They embraced once more, and Kai and Hollyn made their way to the bedroom they’d been given.

Once inside, Kai met Hollyn’s gaze, feeling the heat of desire beginning to build now

that they were finally alone. “Tomorrow we’ll return to the surface. Do you feel ready?”

“I am ready, I think. Yumia knew exactly what to say to make me feel ready.”

“Maybe I could use a little pep talk. What did she tell you?”

Hollyn crossed to him and said, “She told me that I’m in control.”

“Did she now?”

She began to pull his white button down shirt from his jeans.

Oleen had provided the clothing for him, and he’d been grateful to wear something that felt familiar.

Now, he was even more grateful that Hollyn was undoing his buttons for him.

It was hot and sexy as hell, and he could feel his dick beginning to strain behind his zipper.

“Uh, huh. And she said that failure is just a lesson you learn from.”

Kai pulled in a sharp breath as she undid the button of his jeans and pulled his zipper down, freeing his shaft.

“Well, I can assure you, Hollyn, that you won’t fail tonight.

And I plan on successfully making you orgasm at least three times.

No lessons to be had, just you telling me when it feels good, baby. ”

They both began removing each other's clothing in record time, throwing their shirts and pants and underwear, without care, to the floor around them.

The minute he had her naked, Kai walked Hollyn back to the bed and set her on the edge.

He knelt before her and rested her thighs on his shoulders.

She laid down on the bed, and Kai licked his lips at her glistening pussy.

"Someone's been thinking about this, hasn't she?"

"Oh, Kai! I think about you all the time."

"Well, we've got all night to make each other feel good, but I can't wait to taste you first."

He leaned in and ran the flat of his tongue from the bottom of her pussy to the small nub beginning to emerge from her folds.

He flicked his tongue over her clit, causing her to buck her hips off the bed.

Kai wrapped his arms around her legs to keep her still while he continued to kiss and lick and suck until she was crying out in her first orgasm.

Hearing her moans and cries had him hard as steel and all he could think about was sinking so deep inside of her that he couldn't tell where he ended and she began.

But Hollyn had other ideas.

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Hollyn rose to her elbows and looked down at Kai, his mouth wet with her release.

She couldn't believe how good he was at that.

She motioned for him to stand as she slid off the bed to her knees.

He groaned loudly as she ran her tongue along the underside of the head of his cock, meeting his glazed-over gaze.

She wrapped her lips around him and began to suck slightly as she continued to lave her tongue along his length.

She pulled him deep inside her mouth until she couldn't take him any more, and Kai buried his hands in her hair as she continued to caress him with her mouth.

He had given her an incredible orgasm, and she wanted to do the same for him, but after a few agonizing moans, he pulled free of her mouth.

"If we keep doing that, you're going to make me a liar. I still owe you two more orgasms."

He lifted her from her knees, and they crawled onto the bed together, tangling limbs and lips and wildly touching each other everywhere in desperation.

Hollyn broke their kiss long enough to say, "Kai, I need you now!"

He reached and grabbed the condom on the table behind him. When he'd laid it there

earlier, he'd told her he didn't expect anything, but that he was planning ahead hopefully. Now, he ripped open the package and with shaking hands, slid it on.

He laid on his back and said, "How do you feel about being in control?"

Hollyn grinned and said, "Really? You want me on top?"

"Hell, yeah! I want you any way I can have you, but right now, I want to see your tits bounce and your O-face when you go over the edge again."

Feeling highly desirable, Hollyn straddled Kai and positioned him at her entrance.

With slow, deliberate motions, she eased herself down on his length, taking her time to get used to him.

She wasn't sure if she'd ever get used to his size, but she wasn't complaining.

Once she was completely seated with him all the way inside her, she sat up fully and met his gaze.

He stared at her with utter desire in his eyes, and she felt incredibly beautiful in that moment.

Wanting to feel every sensation, Hollyn began to move up slowly and pushed down quickly, then she repeated the motion again and again. Up and down, up and down, slow then quick until he grabbed her by the hips and began to piston himself in and out.

"Fuck, Hollyn! You're driving me crazy."

She put her hands on his and said, "I thought I was in control here?"

“I’m trying, baby, but I can’t take much more of this.”

She gave a throaty laugh and began to move with more hip motion, picking up the pace. But she got caught in her own trap, feeling her own orgasm beginning to build.

“Oh, that feels so fucking good,” she moaned, throwing her head back and gyrating her hips faster. All thought evacuated her head as Hollyn began to let go and feel the sensation building in her core. Little electric sparks began to fire with each roll of her hips.

“You’re so fucking sexy.” Kai’s words heightened her pleasure. And she cupped her own breasts with her hands, plucking at her nipples with her fingers. Kai’s fingers found their way to her clit, creating friction with each of her gyrations.

She raised her head and met Kai’s gaze. All around them, her magic flowed in a blue energy field, ratcheting up the pleasure until she felt everything tighten, and she tumbled over the edge into another release.

She cried out with the waves of pleasure that washed over her until she slowed her hips and collapsed onto Kai’s chest.

His voice sounded strained as Kai said, “That’s two. You got one more coming...pun intended.”

He flipped her to her back and traced his hand down her chest, lightly tracing each breast and her all-too sensitive nipples.

He continued down until he skimmed through her folds and put one finger inside her, beginning to slowly rub a spot inside.

He added another finger and used his thumb to add pressure to her clit.

Immediately, she began to feel her need building again.

“Oh, Kai! What are you doing?”

“Does that feel good?”

“So good! Don’t stop!”

He continued to use his fingers to drive her crazy until she couldn’t stand it anymore.

“Kai, I need you inside me right now!”

He pulled his hand free and replaced it with his cock, sliding inside once more.

This time, he set the pace, beginning a slow rocking rhythm in and out as he kissed her neck and chin and lips, but soon enough, he began to pump faster and harder until his thrusts were like a piston creating the most delicious friction.

The pleasure began to build with each motion of his hips.

“You take me so well, Hollyn. You feel incredible.”

His words, whispered in her ear, sent her over the edge, and she felt the walls of her pussy squeezing him again and again as the whole room glowed a cool blue energy.

He cried out and his thrusts grew erratic as he raised straight up on his arms and slammed his hips into her over and over again until he was spent. He fell to the bed beside her, rolling her with him and wrapping her in his arms.

“That was...amazing.”

The praise was exactly what she needed to hear. “Kai, I’ve never felt that with

anyone.”

“Then, it’s settled. You’re mine and I’m yours.”

She never knew words could be more powerful than magic, but his words freed her in a way that nothing else ever had. The loneliness that had haunted her at times in her life melted away. She had found her person.

Now, the question was whether or not Kai and she could face her father so that they had a shot at building a life together.

The reality was that, more than likely, Hollyn would have to face him alone, but she wasn’t afraid of that any longer.

She knew that no matter what happened, Kai would never give up on her.

And she’d never give up...period.

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As they breached the surface, Kai searched around them, looking for the boat that was supposed to pick them up to take them toward the mainland, but everywhere he looked, he only saw open water.

Hollyn asked, "What do we do now?"

Kai checked the coordinates again. The boat should've been right here. "I'm not sure."

"There's only one thing to do then."

Kai glanced over at Hollyn, surprised to see her calm demeanor. Gone was the fear of the ocean and of her own power. He could see that she felt in control, and it was a good look on her.

"What's that?"

"Catch a current and swim there ourselves."

Kai shrugged and said, "I'm game if you are."

Agreed on a plan, Kai checked the coordinates and got the general direction they needed to go. They both dove back into the water after Hollyn took a large breath, and they held hands as they were pulled into a fast-moving current in the right direction.

After a little time, they rose to the surface so that Hollyn could fill her lungs once

more before diving into the current again and traveling through what was essentially the ocean superhighway system.

On the next trip to the surface, though, the pair were surprised to see a large volcanic island that hadn't been on any map that Kai had ever seen.

He rechecked his coordinates and knew they were on the right path.

Then, where had this smoking volcano come from?

"Kai, do you see that?"

"Yeah, I see it. I'm not sure how it's here though."

"No, not the island. Do you see the figure way up on the mountainside closest to us."

Kai searched the landscape of the mountainous island, noting the pillar of worrying smoke rising from the center, until he spied the figure Hollyn had noticed. It looked like a lone figure waving frantically.

"I think we have to go check it out, Hollyn."

She agreed, and they swam toward the nearest shoreline that looked like they could actually access the beach.

Once they were standing on the rocky surface, they could no longer see the person that had seemed to be signaling them.

All they could do was climb, so they did.

They trekked upward, through a dense, rocky landscape, searching for any sign of

life.

Halfway up, Kai heard a female voice calling out. It sounded familiar, and Hollyn and he stopped to listen closer. They looked at each other, and began to push themselves quickly up the mountainous terrain.

Sure enough, when they crested a particular rocky formation, Willow stood on the cliff above them.

Hollyn cried out, “Willow! Thank goodness you’re okay!”

At that moment, the entire landscape rumbled, and Kai reached for the side of the mountain to try to brace himself. He held out a steadying arm and grabbed Hollyn around the waist, pulling her toward him. The shaking faded after ten seconds or so.

Kai stated the obvious, “We need to get Willow and get off this island as quickly as possible. I wish the boat had been where they said they’d be.”

Hollyn raised a hand and pointed down toward the water below. “I think I know why they didn’t arrive on time.”

Kai followed the direction she pointed and saw a boat, nearly broken in half, leaning against the rocky shoreline.

“How do you know that was supposed to be our boat?”

She shrugged. “Call it a hunch, but...” She pointed upward toward Willow. Fate had been at work once more.

Kai nodded. It was as good an explanation as any. He looked upward and shouted, “Willow, do you think you can climb down to us?”

The teen cried out, “I’m scared. I need you to come get me, Kai. Please, come get me!”

“Stay right there. I’m on my way.”

Kai turned toward Hollyn and said, “I’m going to climb straight up the rock ledge. I need you to stay here and be ready to help her down. Okay?”

Hollyn nodded in understanding, and Kai tested a few handholds until he found two he could use to pull himself up.

He lifted himself and used his feet to find purchase while he searched for the next place to grab with his hand.

Over and over, he repeated the process, scraping holes in his wetsuit.

After almost fifteen minutes of struggle, he finally pulled himself over the ledge and saw a cowering Willow, huddled against the cliff face.

The minute she saw him, she launched herself at him, wrapping her gangly limbs around his torso, nearly knocking him backwards over the cliff.

But he held his ground, stepped away from the edge, and hugged her tightly back.

He was so happy to see her, and she looked completely unharmed.

Had she found some way to escape? She was a resourceful little Fate if there ever was one.

Yet, as she pulled back, he didn’t like the look of contrition that covered her face.

“I’m so sorry, Kai. I’m so sorry.”

“What? You didn’t do any...” Suddenly, he heard Hollyn yell out at someone, and the volcano rumbled once more, shaking so violently, that Kai and Willow went down to the ground.

Once the shaking stopped again, Kai looked over at Willow who had her hands covering her ears and tears streaming down her face. She was staring toward Kai.

“He made me do it. I didn’t want to hurt her, but Grigori said he’d leave me here if I didn’t.”

Kai’s heart pounded like a hammer in his chest. “What’d you do, Willow?”

“I just had to get you away from Hollyn. I handed her to him.”

A heart crushing panic came over Kai, and he scrambled to look over the ledge on which Willow and he were lying. The space below was empty of any and all life.

Kai leaped to his feet and shouted, “Hollyn!”

But there was no answer. She was gone.

Willow sobbed behind him, and he turned toward her.

He dropped to his knees and lifted her to hers. “Where is she, Willow?”

“Inside...inside the volcano.” She ugly cried then, big wracking sobs that overtook her. “I let him take her!”

Kai smoothed her hair back and said, “I don’t blame you, Willow. And Hollyn won’t

either.”

“I was so scared!”

“I know. It’s okay. You’re safe now.”

He hugged her tightly to him. She was just a kid, and she had such a significant power. It was too much to imagine.

He pulled back as her cries began to ease.

“I want you to think hard, Willow. You’ve been inside the volcano, haven’t you?”

She nodded.

“How did you get inside and back out?”

She shook her head back and forth. “He has the place locked up tight with a whole bunch of guards stationed around the entrance. We wouldn’t be able to get inside easily.”

“First of all, you’re not going anywhere near Grigori again. Second, there has to be another way in. We just have to find it.”

“Oh, there is another way inside.” She pointed upward where the smoke continued to pour out of the cratered top of the volcano.

She was right. The way inside might be more dangerous than facing countless guards, but Kai would face any amount of danger to get back to Hollyn.

He looked at Willow and gave a hard nod. “You need to go down to the shore.”

“How?” The look of terror that crossed her face almost made Kai relent. “I’ve been trying to get down for the past two hours. That’s how I got stuck here.”

Kai couldn’t take her down and then climb back up. Who knew how long that might take. Yet, like the Fate she was, she brought the solution to her. Out of nowhere, a seagull with a beanie on her head landed beside Willow.

“Bertie! I’ve never been so glad to see your little stick legs and mouthy beak!”

“Good to see you too, you big jerk! But after this, you might want to get your eyes checked. These legs are gorgeous. You just have no appreciation for beauty.”

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Hollyn lifted her chin in defiance as she stared at the man who had made her life a living hell for many years.

Sweat rivulets ran down her face, but she didn't flinch.

The heat inside the massive volcano was almost intolerable, and with her arms tied behind her back, she couldn't even wipe away the perspiration.

Instead, she let the sting in her eyes build her resolve that this would be the last time she faced this wicked man.

The guards had swarmed her the minute Kai had gone over the ledge, and not even her voice could stop them.

Clearly, her father had found a way to make them as immune to her siren song as he was.

Yet, in the end, she'd ended her struggles and gone with them because to meet face-to-face with her father was her goal anyway.

Finally, she would put an end to this game of cat and mouse.

"The prodigal daughter has finally come home."

She didn't take the bait, refusing to react to his words. A younger version of her would have cowered, knowing that his cruelty started with his seemingly innocent words. He obviously wanted her to get emotional, but she reminded herself that she

was in control.

“You don’t have anything to say to your dear, old dad?”

Again, she refused to be goaded into saying something or doing something she would regret.

Instead, she met his gaze and stared right through him.

She watched as he visibly swallowed and his wicked grin faltered for just a second before he turned away and motioned to someone across the expansive cave deep inside the mountainous volcano.

A door opened, and for the first time in more years than she could remember, her mother’s figure appeared. Layla, Hollyn’s mother, looking just like she had so long ago, was dragged out through the door and pushed to her knees beside Grigori.

A hunk of her hair covered her face, but she glanced up and smiled as she said, “My baby! Hollyn!”

Hollyn couldn’t control her reaction at first, letting the tears slide down her face.

Just the sight of the woman she’d left behind sent a swirl of emotions through her body.

Joy and happiness, shame and guilt, regret and sadness, Hollyn couldn’t stop the feelings from taking over.

She was just so glad to see her mother alive.

“Mom!” Tears fell unchecked down her cheeks, and Grigori stepped up to catch them

in a glass vial.

“Ah, there’s my girl. That’s exactly what I needed.”

He corked the vial and held it out in front of himself, swirling her tears like a fine wine.

Hollyn cleared her throat and said, “Use those sparingly because they’re the last ones you’ll ever get from me.”

Grigori laughed. “Oh, oh! That’s terrific. That’s a spirit you’ve never had before. I do love a challenge. I can’t wait to make you eat those words.”

“You’ll be waiting a long, long time.”

Hollyn shifted her focus inwardly as she felt her magic begin to course through her.

She heard her mother’s gasp and knew the blue energy that surrounded her was beginning to become visible.

In an instant, the bindings on her wrists fell away and she raised her hands to send a wave of magic toward the guards who were beginning to step toward her.

Grigori’s smile fell from his face, and he took a step back from her. “I see you’ve learned some new skills.” A look of concern knitted his brow together, bringing Hollyn a renewed sense of confidence.

“Yumia taught me well. You remember Yumia, don’t you?”

“The Sea Witch? Well, you couldn’t have learned much. She’s a horrible teacher.”

“More like, you’re a horrible student.”

“So, she told you that she trained me, did she? Did she tell you what a wreck she was when I left her?”

Hollyn remained calm and in control, but she could tell Grigori was getting riled up at just the mention of Yumia.

“No, but she told me your weaknesses.”

“Then, she told you nothing because I have none.”

Chin raised, Hollyn said, “You have no control over me at all. I am the one in control.”

In that moment, he reached for Layla, but Hollyn knocked him back with a blast of magic, surprising them both.

He recovered quickly, though, scrambling to his feet and shouting for the guards to subdue her once more.

En masse, they attacked, and Hollyn stood next to her mother, sending blast after blast until not one guard remained standing.

Hollyn was winded, but she spun to look for Grigori, who was nowhere to be seen.

She pulled her mother to a standing position and wrapped her arms tightly around the woman who squeezed her back like her life depended on it.

They pulled back and stared at each other for a length of time before Layla said, “You’re absolutely beautiful and so powerful. How did I produce such an amazing

daughter?”

Hollyn inhaled the familiar, floral scent of her mother and never wanted this moment to end, but she wouldn't get another chance like this if she gave Grigori time to regroup.

“I can't wait to catch up with you, Mom, but the other half of my genetic makeup really needs a reckoning.”

“Of course! How can I help?”

Hollyn nodded and explained everything she could about Kai and Willow in thirty seconds. She directed Layla to go outside find them and get to safety.

Layla never hesitated for a moment except to give Hollyn one last hug as she said, “Now, go kick his ass!”

The two women gave one last look over their shoulders as Layla disappeared outside and Hollyn went deeper into the heat of the volcano.

She followed a darkened tunnel that made her wish she had Kai's ability to see in the dark until she turned a corner slowly and emerged into another cavernous space.

As if he'd been waiting for her, her father stood sweating next to a lava pit. He gestured upward.

The sight of Jesse, her aunt, swinging over the pit, her eyes wide and her mouth covered, made Hollyn's heart drop to her stomach.

Aunt Jesse shook her head and shouted muffled words, but Hollyn's gut reaction was to let her emotions take over. She wanted to rail and cry and beg Grigori to set Jesse

free, but Yumia's voice seemed to fill her thoughts. His biggest weakness is that he really has no control over you.

Hollyn was in control.

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Kai could barely pull enough air into his lungs as he climbed higher and higher toward the mouth of the volcano.

The sulfurous smell of rotten eggs filled the air, and he struggled to pull in each breath.

His legs burned with each stride, but he didn't slow down and he didn't stop for a moment's rest.

Could he really do this? Could he climb in from the top down? What if there weren't any paths to her from here? He knew that he'd do anything for Hollyn, but right now, he felt like he was following the stupidest plan he could have come up with. However, he had to get to Hollyn somehow.

Another tremor rocked the volcano, and Kai, not for the first time, grew concerned that the thing was actually about to blow. He steadied himself once more and waited for the shaking to stop. Thankfully it did, but there was a lingering noise.

A distant hum began to sound. The closer it got, the choppy it became until he recognized the rotary rhythm of helicopter blades. He looked up and saw the gray body of the aircraft in the distance. What if Grigori had noticed him and sent a battalion to keep him occupied and away from Hollyn?

Yet, as the chopper got near enough that he could feel the wind of the downdraft, he saw some familiar faces.

Alek and Natalia, Willow's parents, were being lowered on a ladder.

Behind them, Coral, Hollyn's mother's sister began to climb down as well.

The helicopter hovered until all three were on the ground and then flew it away.

As the noise lessened, Kai called out, "What are you doing here?"

Alek said, "Once she found you and Willow, Bertie gave us the coordinates."

Kai asked, "Is Willow safe?"

Natalia reached out a hand to grab Kai's. "Thanks to you!"

Relief filled Kai, and he looked toward Coral, whose face showed her concern in every ticking muscle. "My plan is shit! I thought I could go in through the top, but I think this volcano is about to blow its top."

Alek nodded and smiled. "Don't worry! I know this volcano. My brother has used it for his lair for a number of years. There's a second entrance just on the other side."

Kai wiped his brow. "Lead the way!"

Coral fell in step behind Kai, with Alek and Natalia bringing up the rear.

Her voice was appealing and soft as she said, "By the way, you have ground forces, too."

"Grigori's guards? Yeah, Willow warned me about them."

"No. They're here to help you. I was surprised to see Poseidon, Triton, and Polyphemus on the beach, but they're kicking ass down there with a few other faces I didn't recognize."

Kai couldn't hide his surprise. "They're actually here?"

She nodded. "I thought it was unusual, but I suspected you were a Son of Poseidon the moment I met you."

"It's a complicated situation."

"Family relationships always are."

They walked on for another ten minutes before Alek shouted for everyone to stop.

He approached an odd formation of rocks on the side of the volcano and tapped on the stone a few times until he seemed to find what he was looking for.

He pulled a small, flat tool from out of his back pocket and began to wedge it into a seam in the rocks.

Once it was fully embedded, he began to push it toward the right with all his strength.

"I could use some help here." Kai came up beside him, and together, they shoved the tool into the rock face as a chunk of rock shaped like a door popped out from the cliffside.

Once a space was formed, the two men pushed their fingers into the opening and yanked the door until there was enough of an opening for all four of them to fit through.

By the time they had made it to the hidden entrance, the sun had already started going down, and once they were inside, the loss of any light was immediate. Everything was bathed in darkness. Fortunately, Kai could see everything clearly.

“There’s a long passage to our left. It looks like our only option.”

Alek clapped Kai on the back and said, “Since you’re the only one with vision in the dark, lead the way. Ask questions if you need my guidance.”

Yet, the passage seemed to have a clear path. They continued down several sets of stairs and a few more hallways, traveling at a slow pace to accommodate everyone except Kai. He was growing impatient at the snail’s pace.

“Can we move any quicker?”

Natalia said, “We’re moving blindly here. Cut us some slack.”

Yet, Kai knew they were getting closer because the smell of sulfur and the blistering heat were both growing stronger. He was so close to finding Hollyn, and the pace was killing him.

He just hoped she was okay. She was such a badass, but he knew, sometimes, Grigori had a way of making her doubt herself. When this was all over, he was going to tell her every day how strong and smart and beautiful she was. He’d never let her forget it.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, and Coral’s soft voice said, “Listen!”

They all stopped, and Kai heard muffled voices nearby. One sounded so familiar. Hollyn!

He bounded down the remaining stairs and slipped quietly into a thickly hot, giant cave of a room with lava pools dotting the floor. Grigori and Hollyn were trading volleying shots back and forth at each other, both hiding behind rocky outcroppings scattered between the lava.

Alek, Natalia, and Coral finally caught up to him and took in the sight of the ongoing battle.

Coral whisper-shouted, “We have to help her!”

Kai said, “I’m open to ideas.”

In that moment, Alek stepped away from the others and slid around the room, along the outer wall, avoiding pools of lava as he went. Natalia gave a nervous squeak, but Alek waved her off.

Once he was well away from the others, he stepped along a small rocky bridge between two lava pools. He paused and raised his arms.

“Grigori! This has to end!”

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Hollyn paused her attack as Alek stepped out of the shadows. She was surprised to see him, but also horrified that she now had to worry about her uncle.

“It’s time to let Jasenya and Hollyn go and stop this insanity, brother.”

Hollyn registered what Alek had called Jesse.

Her Russian name was Jasenya, and the memory of that came back to Hollyn in that moment.

Grigori had called her Jasenya when he was upset with her, so Jesse had asked Hollyn to never use the name.

So much of her childhood was tainted by bad memories covered by the good people around her trying to protect her from the horrors.

Even now, as she caught sight of Kai, Natalia, and Coral, still hidden at the back of the room, Hollyn knew she needed to get a hold of her fear.

She was afraid of losing these people who meant something to her now, people who had become an integral part of her life.

How would she go on if anything happened to any of them?

Failure was just a lesson learned. If she gave herself up and agreed to give Grigori what he wanted, she might be able to bargain for the release of the people she cared about.

She stood up from behind the rocky outcropping where she'd stayed protected from Grigori's assault.

"Here I am, Grigori! I'm all yours, if you let the rest of them go."

Everyone turned their attention toward Hollyn, and she heard the protests.

Kai shouted, "No! Absolutely not!"

Coral's quiet voice carried to Hollyn, "You can't do that!"

"Don't be stupid!" Natalia screamed.

Jesse continued to rant through the covering over her mouth, her gaze locked onto Hollyn.

"You're willing to sacrifice your freedom for theirs?"

"Yes! I'll hand myself over to you, but only if you let all of them go free."

Grigori's face folded into a wicked grin as he moved around the lava pools and made his way toward Hollyn.

He stopped a few feet away from her. "If you take all my playthings, how will I get tears from you?"

Hollyn lowered her face to the ground for a few heartbeats, and when she lifted it once more, tears flowed down her cheeks. "I'm in control now." She wiped them away quickly. "So, what will it be? I come with you willingly or we continue to battle it out?"

From the look on his face, Grigori didn't quite know what to make of this new version of Hollyn, and she liked it that way.

He seemed to be contemplating her offer, turning it over and over in his mind.

He was right not to trust her, but she wasn't going to tell him that.

Instead, once everyone was safe, she'd show him what she could do now.

"Alright! Everyone, including the ones hiding in the shadows behind me must leave."

Kai and the other two emerged and began making their way toward where Alek stood.

"Get Jesse down first," Hollyn insisted.

With a wave of his hand, Grigori untied the rope secured on a hitch mounted to the cave wall. As she fell toward the bubbling lava, Hollyn shot blue energy to surround her and pulled her to safely land on solid ground. Hollyn threw an infuriated gaze toward Grigori.

He shrugged. "She betrayed me the most. It would have been a quicker death than she deserved, in my opinion."

"You are beyond foul." She couldn't wait to give him exactly what he deserved.

As her would-be rescuers ran to her side, Hollyn embraced Kai, kissing him with all the love and passion she felt for him. She didn't want this to be the last time she saw him, but if it was, she wanted him to know how much he meant to her.

"Thank you! You've given me a love I never thought I would have the fortune of

finding. You have been amazing from the first moment I walked into your airplane hangar weeks ago. I can't imagine this journey without you."

Kai put some distance between them as he straightened his arms and held her by her shoulders. "I'm not leaving you now. Don't get the wrong idea. I will be here by your side until this is all over."

Hollyn smiled at him. He really was the ride-or-die she never thought she'd find, but she knew he needed to leave. She needed to face her father by herself.

"You have to go. This is the only way to finish it all. Somehow, I always knew it would end like this."

Coral stepped up beside the couple. "You can't be serious. Layla wouldn't want this for you. She sacrificed her freedom for yours. You can't give it up this easily."

"Layla's outside waiting for you all. She understood that without leverage, it's just he and I, and I'm more powerful than he is. If you all stay, I'll be too focused on keeping you safe." Hollyn gave them all a confident smile. "Trust me, I got this."

At that moment, the entire mountain shook once more with the strongest tremor yet. The pools of lava splashed higher, and they all ran for the exit.

Rocks began to rain down around them, and in the chaos, Hollyn lost sight of Grigori.

She thought to find him but opted to get everyone out safely instead.

She pushed them all toward the wide open cave entrance that she knew led to the outside, and as they got closer, it stood completely, blessedly unblocked.

Through the opening, in the dim and dying sunlight, she spied the familiar large

figures of Poseidon, Triton, and Polyphemus motioning for them to run out.

She also saw her mother, Uma, Oleen, Makoa, and Akamu.

In the distance, she saw a fleet of helicopters, clearly there to take them all away from the impending eruption and to safety.

As everyone continued toward the dimmed light, no doubt hampered by the smoke now billowing out of the mouth of the volcano, Hollyn veered away and began to back toward the inner chambers of the mountain. She had to find Grigori and finish this for good.

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Hollyn wasted no more time, knowing that she didn't have much to waste anyway. This volcano was clearly going to erupt, and she was likely going to die today, but she wasn't going to go down until she was certain Grigori and his evil ways couldn't hurt anyone ever again.

She knew he likely had a way to escape the island, and she also knew he was likely using magic to avoid danger and find his way through the maze of tunnels down here.

What he didn't know was that Hollyn had discovered a new ability with her magic.

While they fought in the cave earlier, she'd began to pick up on the floating remnants of his magic use, glowing bright red in the air.

She could now see a trail of magic he'd used to guide himself through the crumbling tunnels that, now, she could follow like bread crumbs, and the trail would lead her right to Grigori.

Even now, she followed the deep red glow of his magic through darkened tunnels, climbing stairs and twisting around corners. Without the trail, she would be left in complete and utter darkness, but instead, she followed along, knowing that soon she'd turn a corner and face him one last time.

With her hands raised, ready for anything, Hollyn began to hum the song her mother sang to her all those years ago. It was like she couldn't help herself. The song just began to rise from somewhere deep inside her. She sang the words that came back to her.

‘Cause I’m just a girl, little old me

Well, don’t let me out of your sight

She hummed a few more bars before turning the corner and seeing Grigori staring at her in horror.

She ended with one last line:

Oh, I’ve had it up to here!

“Now, Hollyn, you know I don’t like that song.”

Hollyn lifted her shoulders in a shrug. “Well, there’s a lot that you’ve done that I don’t like.”

“But that’s all over now. Your friends are safe, including the one you have a romantic relationship with. Now, it’s time to hold up your end of the bargain.”

She cocked her head to the side, and gave him a knowing smile. “You know, living with Yumia was not easy. Did she give you the long list of chores to do?”

“Yumia? No, she never gave me anything to do. She often dropped me off in the middle of nowhere and told me to find my way back on my own. When I finally did, days later, starved and suffering from exposure to the wild, she’d laugh and curse, explaining that she hadn’t expected me to return.

One time, I didn’t. I’m sure she missed me. ”

Hollyn had to admit that the story tracked. It sounded just like something Yumia would do to one of her students.

“Yeah, I doubt she missed you. She didn’t have anything nice to say about you. But, to be fair, neither do I.”

He shrugged. “I’m not a bad guy, Hollyn. It’s just the nature of a warlock.”

“I don’t buy that excuse, and that’s all it is—an excuse. But, you know what? You get the energy you put out, so the time has come for your reckoning. Karma’s a bitch, and so am I.”

Hollyn raised her hands and began to fire blue energy toward Grigori.

He seemed taken by surprise and slammed backward into the helicopter he was standing in front of with a loud clanging sound.

She continued to fire at him, moving toward him one step at a time, lifting her voice with her song again.

He covered his ears for a moment before raising his own arms and blasting her with a red wave of magic. She skidded backward but kept her footing. His magic really was weaker than hers.

They paused in their attacks long enough for Hollyn to smile knowingly. She was strong. And she was in control.

Grigori’s eyes widened as he realized the truth at the same time.

He scrambled under the helicopter and over to the other side, where he hit a button that opened a pair of doors above them.

He climbed inside the cockpit and started the engine up.

Before he could get the rotors spinning, though, Hollyn ran toward the chopper, blasting her blue magic at it, leaving dents everywhere she hit.

She watched in horror as Grigori lifted the vile of her tears to his lips and swallowed them down, closing his eyes as her magic infused his body. When he opened his eyes once more, they glowed red, reminding her of terrifying moments of her childhood.

He started the rotors moving and climbed into the back until he could slide open the side door.

With blast after blast, he continued to throw his magic at her in rapid fire succession until she was on the ground, crawling for cover, each hit more painful than the last one.

Her skin was singed, and her whole body ached.

“I’ll leave you today, but I think I’ll pick up a certain lovestruck pilot who just happens to be a powerful Son of Poseidon. I think with his natural magnetism, if you survive, you’ll come right to papa. And if you don’t survive, I’ll have a new toy to play with.”

“No! Leave Kai alone! He has nothing to do with us.”

“Not yet, but when I get done with him, you’ll do anything I ask for the rest of your days.”

Just as the volcano began to shake a constant rumble that included explosive eruptions, Hollyn watched as he threw himself back into the cockpit and pushed the lever to make the helicopter rise once more, leaving her to escape on her own.

She’d never felt more alone in her entire life, never more defeated.

Failure? Where was the lesson in this? If the lesson was that she could never win, then she'd learned that long ago.

If the lesson was that Grigori would always be there to hurt the ones she loved, then she was the smartest student in the class.

If the lesson was that it was time to give up...

well, she had to admit, she'd really yet to learn that one. She hoped she never did.

As she struggled to rise, the ground shaking intensely around her, two hands reached out and pulled her up, cradling her in arms she never thought she'd feel the touch of again.

"Kai! I told you to go! This place is about to erupt!"

"I know. But I checked my calendar and didn't have anywhere else to be except by your side."

They watched as the helicopter continued to rise, but Kai shook his head. "We're not going to let him get away."

He carried her to a section of the chamber that served as a landing pad and leaped up the stairs along the side.

Once they breached the doors and stepped out onto the rocky surface that was wholly unstable now, Kai set Hollyn on her feet.

Hollyn was awed by the size of the full moon hanging low in the sky, a twin reflecting off the ocean water below.

Kai turned her toward him and shouted, “You are the most powerful person I’ve ever met, and we’ve met some interesting characters over the last couple of weeks.

There is no doubt in my mind that if you wanted to, you could give him such a blast of your magic, that he would never bother you or anyone else ever again.”

She nodded. He was right. She was in control.

Resolve firmly in place, Hollyn turned her focus toward the chopper, quickly turning to avoid the rising plume of toxic smoke billowing out of the volcano now.

She took one last look at Kai, and with everything in her, released a perfect high C, gripped the talisman tightly in one of her hands as she blasted the biggest wave of blue energy she’d ever let loose directly at the helicopter holding her father.

Every inch of her glowed with energy, and she felt the catalytic effect of the medallion amplifying her power beyond anything she could have imagined.

Like a titanium fist, the energy pounded the chopper, bending it in the middle and breaking one of the rotors.

It began to careen in circles, losing all ability to fly.

Like a perfect three-point shot, the chopper plopped right into the mouth of the volcano, falling out of sight.

The volcano gave a giant shake, and Hollyn embraced Kai for what she thought would likely be their last embrace.

“Thank you for coming back for me.”

“Always, love.”

Hollyn watched as a grin lifted the corners of Kai’s mouth. “Tell you what. If you’ll trust me one last time, I think I can save us.”

She nodded. Everything inside her said that Kai would always do the right thing by her. She could trust him.

“When I say, leap, let go and jump with me, okay?”

“What? I don’t think I can?”

“Are you kidding me? How many times have you done something you didn’t think you could do? I don’t know for sure, but I bet you wished for freedom, and if you did, this is what it looks like, taking the risks even when you’re scared.”

Be careful what you wish for. But if Hollyn were honest, she had gotten everything she’d wished for and more, and not because she’d played it safe. She’d taken multiple risks. What was one more?

She gave a decisive answer as she said, “Let’s do it!”

At the same moment that the volcano blew and began to spew bright red lava, along with barely recognizable pieces of metal that had once belonged to a helicopter, a giant wave rose out of the ocean toward the shore.

On it, was a sleek speedboat. As a cloud of ash began to pour toward them at a ridiculously high speed, Kai pulled her arm, and they began to run toward the edge of the cliff.

“Jump!” Kai shouted, and without hesitation, Hollyn took the leap with him.

They hit the speedboat, rolled, and quickly clambered inside. Like a getaway tsunami, the wave switched directions and began to push them out to sea. All around them, debris began raining down, hitting the water with a sizzle.

“If any of that hits this boat, we’re done for!” Hollyn shouted.

But Kai didn’t seem worried at all. He started the engine, and it revved a few times before the wave set them down gently, and Kai hit the gas. They sped away, dodging the rocks that were still being sent out to sea from the blast.

Hollyn looked back at the incredible sight of a volcano in full eruption, one they’d barely escaped. A sense of complete and utter relief washed over her. She was free. She was forever free from Grigori.

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Kai and Jesse hoisted the mainsail and the headsail, Bertie flying around and being her bossy self, as Hollyn steered the boat—her boat.

Otis laid contently at her feet, put to sleep by the gentle rocking of the massive sailboat.

She couldn't stop smiling lately at the thought that she owned her own sailboat— The Siren Witch .

Not only that, but she had her mother Layla again and her aunt Jesse.

She also had new family. Coral and her family had become an important part of Hollyn's life.

Alek, Natalia, Willow, and Nana Jo were now her people, too.

Most importantly, though, she had Kai.

Of course, in order to pay for all of this, Hollyn had finally sold off the gold coins she'd found in the Carolinas, including not just one, but two Tricentennial Royal coins she'd found in the mix.

It had been enough to buy the boat and the plane, but they weren't exactly retired yet.

Hollyn continued to dive for treasure in the ocean, knowing now that she no longer needed SCUBA equipment to do so, and Kai joined her when he wasn't flying passengers from place to place.

All in all, they were enjoying their life together, taking a few risks here and there to remind them that they were both free.

As the sails were tied off, Kai came up beside Hollyn and took her in his arms. Jesse took over the wheel and gave them a knowing smile.

“Kai, it’s the middle of the day.”

“And you look too good in that bikini to waste it. Come on, I have a treasure to show you in our cabin.”

She laughed knowingly. “That’s the corniest line ever, but you’re in luck. I happen to be in the mood for corny today.”

“Well, lucky me because I’m in the mood for you.”

Hollyn and Kai ran below, kissing and laughing the whole way. Love looked good on Hollyn, and she didn’t mind the look of love Kai gave her every time his gaze fell on her.

It had been a real wild one, but she wouldn’t have dreamed it any other way—not in her wildest dreams.

The End