



Ocean's Whisper (Royal Lupine Elementals #3)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: Isoldes marine research never prepared her for the massive wave literally obliterating her scientific center. On her thirtieth birthday, a mysterious tsunami destroys everything shes worked for with no logical explanation. Before she can make sense of her world being swept away, a devastatingly handsome stranger appears with an impossible claim: shes causing the destructive waves with some type of magic.

Prince Nereus, the steadfast alpha of the Seafang pack, has spent his life waiting for a wolf mate worthy of standing beside him as Luna. Instead, fate delivers him a brilliant human woman with ocean-commanding powers and a scientific mind that makes his wolf surge with desire for her fierce intelligence.

As Isolde struggles to control the raw tidal forces surging through her veins, an undeniable attraction builds between them—one as deep and powerful as the ocean itself. Isolde must embrace powers that defy everything she believes about science. Nereus must protect his mate, even if he has to sacrifice himself to keep her safe.

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ONE

ISOLDE

I solde Morgan brushed her blonde hair from her face and peered through the microscope one last time.

The plankton samples she had collected earlier that week were thriving.

She made a final note in her research journal after observing their tiny bodies for several minutes.

She scanned the meticulous handwriting before closing the leather-bound book with a satisfying thump.

"Heading out for once, Dr. Morgan?" Dr. Patel glanced up from his station across the lab.

"Just getting a head start on the weekend," Isolde muttered.

"That's right—big birthday tomorrow, isn't it? The big three-o!" He smiled. "Any plans with friends or family?"

The question stung like saltwater in a paper cut. She forced a bright smile. "Oh, you know, just keeping it low-key."

She tidied her workstation methodically, her heart sinking at the thought of her

original plans.

The girls' weekend had fallen apart. Lorelei had another family emergency—the third in as many months since she had gotten married, and her other best friends couldn't get time off work to make the trip to the East Coast either.

Isolde waved good-bye to her colleagues and headed down the corridor toward the breakroom.

The marine research station was quiet on Friday afternoons, most researchers already gone to start their weekends.

Her footsteps echoed on the polished floors as she passed the wall of windows overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.

She paused, drawn to the vast expanse of blue stretching to the horizon.

The ocean was serene today. The gentle waves lapped at the shore in a calming rhythm near the research station's edge.

Sunlight danced on the water's surface and created diamonds that sparkled.

Even after all these years, the sight still took her breath away.

"At least you'll never disappoint me," she whispered to the ocean.

Isolde pressed her palm against the cool glass. Through the elevated window, she could make out the marina a mile down the shoreline where her houseboat bobbed gently at the dock. Her sanctuary. Her home.

"Figures I'd be spending the most significant birthday of my adulthood with fish

instead of people." A rueful laugh escaped her lips. "Maybe I should adopt a cat. Complete the transformation into a lonely spinster."

She rested her forehead against the glass.

Later tonight, she'd walk the shoreline at sunset, toes in the sand, and try to convince herself this was exactly the life she wanted.

The life where her work consumed everything, where her friends were moving on without her, and where she had inadvertently traded human connection for career advancement.

Something inside her chest twisted. A yearning for... something. Someone. A hand to hold while watching the waves roll in. A shoulder to lean against while counting stars. A voice to answer when she spoke to the ocean.

"Thirty years old and what do I have to show for it?" Isolde sighed, her breath fogging the glass. "A PhD, three published papers, and a drawer full of takeout menus."

She pushed away from the window, squared her shoulders, and continued toward the breakroom to collect her things. The ocean would still be there tomorrow. It always was—constant, patient, and waiting.

As Isolde pushed open the door to the breakroom, a chorus of "Surprise!" jolted her from her melancholy thoughts.

Her boss, Dr. Thompson, the receptionist Mara, and several lab technicians clustered around the table. A small cake with deep blue frosting sat in the middle, complete with thirty tiny candles blazing atop it like miniature beacons.

"Oh!" Isolde's hand flew to her chest, genuine shock momentarily displacing her sadness. "You guys, you didn't have to?—"

"Of course, we did," Mara stepped forward, her practical bob swinging. "We couldn't let your big day go unacknowledged."

A spark of warmth kindled in Isolde's chest as they launched into an enthusiastically off-key rendition of "Happy Birthday." She hadn't expected this—workplace acquaintances remembering her birthday when even her best friends...

No. That wasn't fair. Lorelei had sent a heartfelt text earlier about some crisis with her new husband.

Helena was catering a celebrity wedding in New York.

Seraphina was stuck at the observatory for some rare celestial event.

Thea couldn't get time off from the control tower, and Everly was literally in the middle of an Egyptian desert excavating something "potentially revolutionary. "

They had lives. Important ones. Just like she did.

"Make a wish!" Dr. Thompson gestured to the candles.

Isolde closed her eyes. What did she want? Not to be alone. To feel connected to something. Someone. To matter to the universe.

She blew out the candles in one breath.

"So," Brad from the microbiology lab raised his eyebrows as he handed her a napkin, "hot date tonight to kick off the birthday celebrations?"

Isolde nearly choked on the bite of cake she had just taken. "Um?—"

"Come on," Mara teased, "gorgeous woman like you must have men fighting for your attention."

"The only males fighting for my attention are the specimens in tank four," Isolde laughed, attempting to deflect.

"Wait, is Isolde single?" One of the newer interns whispered too loudly to his colleague.

Heat crawled up Isolde's neck. "Actually, I do have plans tonight."

The words tumbled out before she could stop them. A blatant lie, but preferable to the pitying looks that would follow the admission that she'd be spending her birthday eve alone, watching documentaries in her pajamas.

"Ooh, mysterious." Brad wiggled his eyebrows. "Anyone we know?"

Isolde tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "Just someone from college." The lie expanded, taking shape. "He's in town for the weekend."

"Well, don't let us keep you then." Dr. Thompson checked his watch. "It's almost five anyway."

Isolde finished her cake quickly, thanked everyone with what she hoped were convincing smiles, and grabbed her purse from her locker.

"Have fun tonight!" Mara called after her.

"Don't do anything I wouldn't do!" Brad added with a wink.

Isolde waved, her smile fixed in place until the door swung shut behind her. In the corridor, she exhaled deeply, her shoulders slumping.

The parking lot beckoned—freedom just steps away. As she pushed through the exit doors, the late afternoon sun momentarily blinded her. Isolde fumbled in her purse for sunglasses, dropping her keys in the process.

She bent to retrieve them, her hair falling forward like a curtain.

A strange tingling sensation rippled through her fingertips as she touched the metal keys on the ground.

For a heartbeat, she felt a peculiar connection to the nearby ocean waves crashing against the shore as if they moved in time with her pulse.

Isolde straightened, shaking off the odd feeling.

Probably just the birthday blues playing tricks on her mind.

Isolde slid into her silver Lexus, tossing her purse onto the passenger seat. The car smelled faintly of sea salt and sunscreen that perpetually clung to her skin and hair. She gripped her steering wheel for a moment and took a deep breath.

"Happy almost birthday to me," she murmured.

She pressed the ignition switch, and the engine purred to life, reliable and steady like everything else she chose for her practical life.

The coastal highway stretched before her, the ocean a constant companion.

Isolde drove with the windows down, letting the salt-laden breeze whip her hair into

wild tangles she'd regret dealing with later.

Right now, she didn't care. The wind against her skin felt like freedom, the only gift she might receive on her thirtieth birthday.

Her houseboat came into view as she rounded the final bend—a modest but charming blue and white structure bobbing gently at the end of the dock.

Most people found it strange that a professional woman with her credentials chose to live on what was essentially a floating tiny house.

But the constant embrace of water beneath her feet made her feel secure in a way traditional foundations never had.

Isolde pulled into her designated parking space and killed the engine. The sudden silence felt oppressive. No chirping phone with birthday eve messages. No plans. Just the gentle lap of waves against wood and the distant cry of seagulls.

Inside her floating home, Isolde kicked off her shoes and padded barefoot across the polished wooden floors. The compact space was immaculate—everything in its place, minimalist but comfortable. She opened the freezer and pulled out a frozen dinner, staring at the unappetizing image on the box.

"Gourmet birthday feast," she snorted, peeling back the plastic film before shoving it into the microwave.

While her dinner rotated, she changed into worn jean shorts and her favorite threadbare Boston T-shirt from her undergraduate days. The microwave beeped as she finished braiding her hair to keep it from tangling further.

Isolde ate standing at her kitchen counter, gazing out the porthole windows at the

darkening sky. The sunset was beginning, painting the horizon in shades of amber and rose. The food tasted like nothing in her mouth.

"This is pathetic." She tossed the half-eaten meal into the trash. "I refuse to spend the last night of my twenties feeling sorry for myself."

Decision made, Isolde slipped on her sandals and grabbed a light jacket. The beach called to her—it always did when she felt lonely. Within minutes, she was walking along the shoreline where the sand stretched empty in both directions.

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The setting sun cast a golden pathway across the water's surface, beckoning her forward.

Isolde let her sandals dangle from her fingers as her toes sank into the cool, damp sand.

With each step, the day's frustration melted away, replaced by the familiar comfort of her oldest friend—the ocean itself.

"God, I've missed you," she whispered to the waves, feeling oddly less ridiculous talking to water than she perhaps should have. "Work's been all microscopes and data lately. Not enough of... this."

She swept her arm toward the horizon where the sun melted into the water. The waves surged forward suddenly, rushing to greet her ankles. Isolde laughed, delighted by the cool caress against her skin.

"Are you saying you missed me too?"

Another bigger wave rushed in, swirling playfully around her calves. A curious sensation tingled up her legs—almost like recognition.

"You know, I used to think I'd have it all figured out by thirty.

" Isolde walked deeper until the water kissed her knees.

"Career, relationship, purpose. The whole package.

" She dipped her fingers into the water, tracing patterns on its surface.

"Got one out of three, I guess. Not bad, statistically speaking. "

The ocean seemed to listen, its rhythm steady and consoling.

Here, alone with the vast Atlantic, Isolde never truly felt lonely.

Every drop contained multitudes—microscopic life forms, dissolved minerals, and ancient molecules that had once been dinosaur tears or pirate ship wood.

The water connected everyone and everything.

"Maybe turning thirty won't be so terrible after all," she said softly as the first stars appeared in the darkening sky above her. "As long as I have you."

Before long, the silvery glow of the full moon illuminated Isolde's path along the shoreline.

She had lost track of time and distance, her bare feet leaving a trail of fleeting impressions in the wet sand.

The ocean's rhythm had become her heartbeat.

Each wave rolled in like a tender caress against her calves as she waded through its shallow waters.

"You're showing off tonight, aren't you?" Isolde laughed, addressing the ocean as the moonlight created a shimmering highway across its surface.

Her fingertips trailed through the water beside her, creating tiny eddies that seemed to

sparkle with unusual brightness. Strange—the water felt warmer than it should in early autumn, almost as if it recognized her touch.

The cut-off jean shorts clung to her curvy hips, damp from occasional splashes. Her Boston T-shirt fluttered against her skin in the strengthening breeze, and she tugged her light jacket tighter as goose bumps rose on her arms—not from cold, but from an inexplicable electricity in the air.

She should head back. She glanced over her shoulder at the distant lights that marked the houseboat community. Only then did Isolde realize how far she had wandered—all the way to the island's northern point where the research station she worked at perched near the shoreline.

She stopped, her sandals dangling from her fingers, and gazed up at the full moon directly overhead. The perfect circle of light seemed to pulse, matching a sudden throbbing sensation in her veins.

"Well, happy birthday to me," Isolde whispered, suddenly figuring that it must be midnight. The strange energy coursing through her body intensified, and she gasped as her fingertips began to tingle, then burn with ice-cold fire.

The ocean, previously so gentle, withdrew rapidly from the shore. Water receded past normal tide lines, exposing sand that hadn't seen air in years. Fish flopped helplessly in suddenly shallow pools. Crabs scuttled sideways in confusion.

"What's happening?" Alarm shot through Isolde's body as she backed away from the water's edge.

Something deep within the ocean—something ancient and powerful—seemed to answer her. A distant rumbling grew beneath her feet, vibrating through the sand as if the seafloor itself was shifting.

On the horizon, darkness blotted out the stars. Not clouds—water. A wall of water rising impossibly high, silhouetted against the night sky.

"No," Isolde gasped, her eyes widening in disbelief. "That's not possible."

The tidal wave built higher, cresting at a height that defied natural laws. Thirty feet. Forty. More. Moonlight caught in its curl, transforming the massive wave into a glittering mountain of destruction bearing down on the shoreline.

Isolde spun around, instinct screaming at her to get to the station, to higher ground. Her feet dug into sand, but she knew—even as her powerful legs pushed forward—that no human could outrun what was coming.

"Help!" she screamed, though no one could possibly hear her over the deafening roar now filling the air.

The research station's lights flickered ahead. Would the elevated structure withstand what was coming? Doubtful.

A bizarre sensation of *déjà vu* washed over her. This felt simultaneously terrifying and... familiar? As if she had been waiting for this moment her entire life without even knowing it. The water sang to her. Called her name with voices no human ear should detect.

"I don't understand!" Isolde cried out, tears streaming down her face as she ran toward the dunes.

Too late. The wave struck land with apocalyptic force. The research station—her workplace, her second home—shattered like a child's sandcastle. Steel and concrete twisted and disappeared into the churning maelstrom.

Then the water found her. The initial impact knocked Isolde off her feet, sending her tumbling into the surge. Salt water filled her nose, then her mouth. Her lungs screamed for oxygen as the current wrapped around her body like possessive hands, dragging her deeper.

Strangely, the water seemed to pull her not with mindless destruction but with determined purpose as if it had waited thirty years for precisely this moment.

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TWO

NEREUS

N ereus cut through the Atlantic waters with powerful strokes.

His white-and-gray fur streamed behind him as he swam parallel to the shore in his wolf form.

The midnight ocean had called to him as it often did during the full moon—a primordial connection that ran deeper than blood.

His turquoise wolf eyes pierced the darkness, tracking the silvery path the moon laid across the water.

Then it hit him.

A sensation unlike anything he had felt in centuries of his existence. Not pain, not pleasure, but a sudden awareness that vibrated through every fiber of his being. The ocean around him shifted, the currents changing direction as water began to recede from the shore in an unnatural rhythm.

Nereus knew what this meant. He had felt a shadow of this once, centuries ago, when his father had described the awakening of his mother's powers. The Luna mate bond. But this seemed almost unreal—he had searched for his mate for over three hundred years to no avail.

He growled inwardly as he changed course, his powerful muscles propelling him toward the beach at supernatural speed.

The shore appeared eerily extended, water pulling back farther than it should.

Something was drawing it out—something very powerful.

The moonlight revealed wet sand where waves should be breaking.

He dragged himself onto the beach, shaking water from his massive wolf form before shifting.

His bones cracked and reformed, his fur receded into human skin, and within seconds, a tall, muscular man stood where the wolf had been.

Nereus strode to the pile of clothes he'd left on higher ground, pulling on his dark jeans and black T-shirt with efficient movements.

The vibration inside him intensified, a compass needle pointing toward danger and destiny simultaneously. About a mile down the beach, near the marine research station, darkness gathered on the horizon—a wall of water building, feeding on the retreating ocean.

"Son of a bitch," he muttered, raking a hand through his short black hair as his eyes narrowed. "Tonight of all nights."

His truck was parked at the beach access point. He sprinted across the sand, his bare feet finding purchase where others would slip. The F350's black frame gleamed under the moonlight like a waiting beast. He slid into the driver's seat, the engine roaring to life beneath his touch.

His hands tightened on the steering wheel as the tugging sensation pulsed stronger, more insistent by the second. This was no ordinary natural disaster. The ocean itself, the very element his pack had shared a bond with for millennia, was responding to something—someone.

A Luna. His Luna.

The realization slammed into him with a powerful force, much like the gathering tidal wave was surely about to do down the shore. After centuries of waiting, his mate's powers were finally awakening, and she was directly in harm's way.

"Not how I planned to meet you," he growled, throwing the truck into gear.

The massive tires bit into the sand as he turned the vehicle toward the research station instead of away from the danger. Every instinct in his human form told him to drive to safety, but the wolf—the alpha—knew better. Something more precious than his territory was at stake.

For the first time in decades, Nereus felt fear creep along his spine as he watched the monstrous wave gather height offshore, a dark silhouette against the starlit sky.

Nereus gunned the engine as he sped down the empty coastal road, his truck eating up the pavement toward the northern tip of the island. The pull in his chest intensified the closer he got to the tidal wave, a sensation both foreign and primal.

No lights from passing cars, no signs of evacuation—just as well. This remote stretch near the edge of his territory housed nothing but the marine research station, a fact that normally pleased him. Privacy from humans was a luxury he valued as alpha and Prince of the Seafang pack.

The road curved sharply ahead, offering the first unobstructed view of the shore.

Nereus's jaw clenched as he witnessed the tidal wave make landfall—a mountain of water that seemed to defy nature itself.

The massive wall crashed over the research station with terrifying precision as if the ocean had marked the building for execution.

"Fuck," he growled, hitting the steering wheel. Even with all his power as the alpha waterwolf, this destruction was beyond his ability to prevent. The ocean answered to no one, not even him.

His truck skidded to a halt at the beach access point nearest the research station, and he threw open his door before the engine had fully died. The tidal wave had already receded, dragging portions of the building back into its depths like a predator with its kill.

Nereus stood motionless for a moment, his eyes taking in the devastation.

Where the two-story research facility had stood now lay a jumble of twisted metal, shattered glass, and splintered wood.

Water still poured from the wreckage, seeking its way back to the ocean in rivulets that carved paths through the sand.

"This definitely wasn't natural," he muttered to himself, stalking forward across wet sand.

His bare feet registered the temperature drop—the water was unnaturally cold.

The scent of salt and destruction filled his nostrils, but underneath was something else.

Something that made his wolf stir with recognition.

Magic. Awakening water magic.

The pull in his chest yanked harder like an invisible hook lodged beneath his sternum. His mate was here, somewhere amidst this chaos, and she had somehow—perhaps unwittingly—summoned the wave that destroyed the building.

Nereus waded into the knee-deep water surrounding what remained of the structure. Concrete slabs tilted at precarious angles. A laboratory door, still intact with its window, floated past him. Scientific equipment worth millions lay ruined and scattered across what had once been a parking lot.

"Impressive first display of power," he said dryly, appreciating the sheer force of the destruction despite himself. "A bit dramatic for my taste, but I can't fault the execution."

The water lapped at his jeans as he moved deeper into the wreckage, his senses extending beyond human capacity.

He could feel the currents shifting, responding to his presence as Alpha of the Seafang pack.

The moon overhead illuminated the scene in silver light, casting long shadows across the devastation.

As Nereus scanned the area, uncertainty crept into his mind. His mate was powerful—dangerously so. And from the looks of this destruction, completely untrained. A lethal combination.

He suddenly froze as the moonlight revealed several dark shapes bobbing out in the

churning ocean water.

His enhanced vision pierced the darkness—five humans clinging desperately to what appeared to be parts of a lab table, a filing cabinet, and what might have once been a door.

Their panicked voices soon carried across the water.

"Dammit," he growled under his breath. Humans. The last creatures he wanted to deal with tonight when he should be searching for his Luna. But the pull in his body intensified sharply as if his wolf recognized that saving these people was somehow connected to finding his mate.

He shed his T-shirt with one fluid motion, tossing it onto a relatively dry section of debris.

The moonlight played across the defined muscles of his chest and abs—a body honed by centuries of swimming the Atlantic's depths.

Humans had their uses to his pack over the years.

They kept the areas near his territory clean, respected the ocean, and provided valuable research.

These particular humans might even know his mate.

"Hold on!" he shouted, his voice carrying across the water with commanding authority that seemingly calmed the panicking scientists. "Stay with your floating objects!"

Without hesitation, he dove into the swirling currents, his powerful body cutting

through the water with a grace no ordinary human could match.

The wolf in him wanted to shift, to harness his full power in the water, but he maintained his human form.

Centuries of keeping his pack secret in this area demanded discretion even in emergencies.

He reached the first victim in seconds—a middle-aged man clutching a piece of insulation foam. The human's eyes widened at Nereus's approach.

"Just let me—" Nereus began.

"I can't swim well! The current's too strong!" The scientist's voice cracked with panic.

Nereus resisted the urge to roll his eyes. "That's why I'm here. Hold onto my shoulder and keep calm."

He positioned the man across his back, feeling the human's fingers dig into his shoulder. The added weight meant nothing to him—he could have carried ten humans if needed. With powerful strokes, he swam through the water back to shore, depositing the shivering man on the beach.

"Stay there," he ordered, not waiting for acknowledgement before plunging back into the water.

The next victim was a young woman with a gash across her forehead, blood mixing with seawater. She clung weakly to a plastic equipment case.

"You're bleeding," Nereus observed, treading water beside her.

"Brilliant observation," she managed through chattering teeth. "Are you my rescue or just making conversation out here?"

Despite himself, Nereus's mouth twitched with amusement. "Both, apparently." He slipped an arm around her waist, noticing immediately how her breath hitched at his touch. Humans were so predictable. "Hold tight."

He swam her to shore with practiced efficiency, placing her beside the first survivor. "Apply pressure to that cut."

The third and fourth victims were clinging to the same piece of debris—a lab door that had somehow remained intact. The young man looked on the verge of hypothermia while the older woman seemed more collected.

"Thank god," the woman called as Nereus approached. "I was sure we would die."

"I've got you now," Nereus assured them, moving with efficient authority. "Ma'am, hold onto my right shoulder. You, on my left. Don't fight the water, let me do the work."

"Who are you?" the young man asked through chattering teeth as they made their way toward shore.

"The guy saving your asses right now," Nereus replied bluntly. "Questions later."

After depositing them on shore, he turned back to the water, scanning for the fifth victim. His enhanced senses detected a faint splashing nearly fifty yards farther out than the others had been. Someone was being pulled out by the retreating currents.

With a muttered curse, Nereus sprinted back into the surf, his powerful legs propelling him through the breaking waves. The pull tugged him in the same

direction—an interesting coincidence he filed away until he saved this last person.

He finally spotted the last survivor—a man in his sixties struggling to keep his head above water, having lost whatever makeshift flotation device he'd been clinging to. The man's strength was clearly flagging.

Nereus doubled his speed, his muscles burning pleasantly with the exertion. "Stop fighting!" he commanded as he approached. "Float on your back!"

The older scientist complied instantly, responding to the natural authority in Nereus's voice. Nereus reached him in moments, turning him into a rescue position.

"I thought... I was gone," the man gasped as Nereus began towing him toward shore.

"Not on my watch," Nereus replied firmly. "My territory, my responsibility."

The scientist gave him an odd look. "Your territory?"

"Figure of speech," Nereus corrected smoothly. "Hold still, we're almost there."

Nereus hauled the older scientist onto the shore, his muscles barely registering the weight.

The man collapsed onto the sand beside the other survivors, coughing up seawater and trembling.

Nereus stepped back, scanning the huddled group with critical eyes.

Five scientists, all looking shell-shocked but very much alive.

The emergency in front of him was handled, but the urgent pull within him remained

unsatisfied.

He clenched his jaw. The pulsation hadn't intensified in their presence. His Luna wasn't among them.

"Is there anyone else?" he demanded, his tone holding the natural command of centuries of leadership. "Anyone missing from your facility?"

A sudden dread flooded through him. Where was she?

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THREE

NEREUS

The silence seemed to stretch endlessly between them as Nereus's concern for his Luna grew exponentially.

Finally, the young woman with the head wound looked up at him. "No. This is everyone who was on shift tonight. Just the night crew."

The older scientist he'd just rescued nodded in agreement. "Everyone who signed in is accounted for. Though the building is—" he gestured weakly at the demolished research station.

Nereus turned and stared out at the now placid ocean.

The water had calmed again, mirroring the star-filled sky above as if nothing had happened.

No hint remained of the tidal wave's fury except for the completely demolished marine research station, broken trees, and debris scattered across what had once been a pristine beach.

But Nereus didn't care about the damage right now. Property could be replaced. What concerned him was the fact that his Luna was somewhere nearby—he could feel it in every cell of his being—yet nowhere to be seen.

"You're absolutely certain?" He turned back to the scientists, his eyes narrowing. "No visitors? No one walking the grounds?"

"Just us, sir," the middle-aged man answered. "It was a quiet night until..." He trailed off, gesturing at the destruction around them.

"The security logs would confirm it," added the young female scientist, "if they weren't now at the bottom of the ocean."

Nereus stared back at the water, that pull deep within his chest was stronger than before. The ocean itself seemed to be calling to him, an invisible tether tugging him toward the horizon.

"She's still out there," he muttered under his breath.

"What was that?" asked the older scientist.

Nereus ignored him and quickly headed for his truck to grab his phone. "I'm calling for help," he announced over his shoulder. Once at his truck, he called emergency services. The call was brief and precise—his centuries of alpha leadership made crisis management second nature.

"Ambulances are on their way," he informed the scientists once he made his way back to them. "Stay together and keep warm. Help will arrive soon."

The young woman frowned. "Where are you going?"

But Nereus had already turned away, striding back to the ocean's waters with purpose. The tugging sensation grew more insistent with each step.

"Hey!" called one of the men. "You can't go back out there. It could still be

dangerous!"

Nereus laughed darkly. He was the most dangerous predator these waters had seen in centuries. "I'll be fine."

Without another word, he dove into the surf, his powerful arms carving through the water with effortless precision. The ocean welcomed him like an old friend, the saltwater sliding against his skin with familiar comfort. With each stroke, the pull grew stronger, drawing him farther from shore.

He swam and swam, following nothing but the insistent tug in his chest and the ancient magic that bound him to his mate. The shoreline faded behind him, first becoming a thin line of lights, then disappearing altogether. Still, he pressed on.

"Where are you taking me?" he growled at the ocean around him.

Only the gentle lapping of waves against his shoulders answered. The moon above cast silver light across the endless expanse of water, marking a path that seemed to lead nowhere.

After so many centuries, Nereus felt something unfamiliar stir within him—uneasiness. The Alpha of the Seafang pack was swimming blindly into the Atlantic, following an instinct he couldn't explain to find a mate he had never met.

"This is madness," he muttered, treading water for a moment and scanning the empty horizon. Yet the pull remained, urging him onward.

In three hundred years of ruling his territory, Nereus had never felt so compelled by something he couldn't control. It chafed against his alpha nature to follow instead of lead, and to react instead of command.

The water around him shifted suddenly, currents swirling in unnatural patterns. His mate's magic—untrained but powerful—was still at work in these waters.

"Playing hard to get, are you?" he said to the empty ocean.

With renewed determination, he dove beneath the surface, his powerful legs propelling him deeper into the Atlantic's embrace. He would find her no matter what it took.

Before long, Nereus broke the water's surface, gasping for air. He had been swimming for miles, following that inexplicable magnetic tug that hummed beneath his skin. The moonlight gleamed across the water as he scanned the horizon again, and that's when he saw her.

A woman clung to what looked like a broken piece of wood, perhaps part of the research station's dock. Her blonde hair spread across the improvised raft like seaweed, her body limp but somehow maintaining a precarious hold on the floating debris.

"Finally," he growled, swimming toward her with renewed vigor.

As he approached, the pull inside his chest intensified to an almost painful degree. Even before he reached her, he knew—this was his Luna. The ocean's magic had found her before he could and had swept her away from land, testing them both.

"Hey," Nereus called, treading water beside her. "Can you hear me?"

No response. Her face was slack, peaceful almost, despite the dire circumstances.

Water lapped at her curves, her clothes clinging to her body in a way that momentarily distracted him.

She was striking—full breasts and generous hips that appealed to his wolf's ancient preferences.

But more pressing was the fact that she wasn't conscious.

"Wake up." He grasped her shoulder, giving it a firm shake. Nothing.

He tried to position her arms around his neck, planning to swim them both back to shore. "Work with me here," he muttered as her limbs refused to cooperate, sliding back into the water.

Each time he attempted to secure her, she slipped farther beneath the surface. His frustration mounted—he was the Alpha of the Seafangs, commanding hundreds of wolves across his Northeast territory. He wouldn't be defeated by something as simple as rescuing one unconscious woman.

"Come on," he snarled, watching her slide underwater again. The ocean seemed to be challenging him, testing whether he was worthy of his mate.

There was only one solution. With a grunt of resignation, Nereus released his grip on humanity.

His bones cracked and reshaped, muscles twisting and reforming as fur sprouted across his body.

His clothes tore away, carried off by the current as his wolf form emerged—larger than any natural wolf, with a thick coat of salt-and-pepper fur that repelled water efficiently.

The transformation complete, he dove beneath the surface.

His powerful jaws gently closed around the back of her shirt, and with his strong neck, he pulled her up onto the floating board.

His wolf form's swimming capabilities far exceeded his human limitations.

With her balanced on the board, he pushed it forward with his muzzle, swimming alongside.

The journey back to shore took nearly an hour, fighting currents that seemed determined to pull them back out to sea. By the time his paws touched sand, exhaustion weighed every limb. This stretch of beach was deserted, far from where he had left the scientists.

He dragged her fully onto the shore, careful not to scratch her with his claws. In the moonlight, he could see her chest rising and falling shallowly. She was alive, but still unconscious. He nudged her cheek with his muzzle, her skin cool against his fur. No response.

With a low growl, he shifted back to human form, his bones cracking and rearranging once more until he stood naked beside her, water droplets sliding down his muscled torso.

"Wake up," he demanded, kneeling beside her. Her face remained passive, her long blonde hair tangled around features that even in unconsciousness conveyed both strength and gentleness.

He placed a hand on her shoulder, feeling the faint pulse of magical energy beneath her skin. So this was his Luna—the one the ocean had delivered to him on the tide of her own awakening power. The connection between them hummed like an electric current, undeniable and ancient.

"You've caused quite a bit of trouble already," he said, brushing wet strands of hair from her face.

He then pressed his fingers to the woman's neck, finding a weak pulse that faltered beneath his touch. Her skin had started to take on the ghostly pallor that spoke of too much time in cold water, her lips tinged with blue.

She suddenly stopped breathing.

"Don't you dare die on me," he growled.

The primal pull of their mate bond still thrummed in his veins, impossible to ignore. A trio of centuries of waiting, and he had found her only to lose her? Unacceptable.

He tilted her head back, pinching her nose shut with one hand while the other lifted her chin. Without hesitation, he sealed his mouth over hers, breathing life into her still lungs. Her lips were cold, salty with ocean water, yet the contact sent a jolt of electricity surging through his body.

He pulled back, watching her chest rise with his breath, then fall without response. Again he breathed for her, counting the seconds, demanding that she live with each exhale.

"Breathe," he commanded between breaths, his voice rough with an unfamiliar emotion.

On the fifth breath, her body jerked beneath his hands. She convulsed, coughing violently as seawater spewed from her mouth. He quickly rolled her onto her side, supporting her as she purged the ocean from her lungs.

"That's it," he murmured, his hand steady on her back. "Get it all out."

Her coughing subsided to ragged gasps, and he finally got his first proper look at her face filled with color. The sight stole the breath from his own lungs.

She was exquisite. High cheekbones framed eyes currently shut in distress.

Her lips, no longer blue but a natural pink, were full and soft.

Golden hair, though tangled with sand and seaweed, cascaded around her shoulders.

Even soaked and half-drowned, she possessed an ethereal beauty that made his wolf stir restlessly beneath his skin.

But as her eyes fluttered open revealing irises the exact color of a stormy sea—he froze in shock.

Human. She was unmistakably, completely human.

The realization hit him like a speeding train.

How could his Luna be human? His entire life, he had avoided entanglements with humans.

Their fragile lives and limited understanding made them poor matches for wolf royalty.

Every Luna in Seafang history had been wolf-born, awakening to her power on her thirtieth birthday like clockwork.

Yet here she was, radiating Luna energy so potent, he could practically taste it on the air, wrapped in a completely human package.

"Impossible," he muttered, studying her with narrowed eyes.

She stared back at him, confusion evident in her expression, seemingly becoming aware of his nudity at the same moment he remembered it. Her eyes widened further, a flush warming her pale cheeks despite her obvious exhaustion.

The blush spread down her neck, and he couldn't help but track its progress with inappropriate interest. His wolf rumbled in satisfaction—human or not, their mate was responding to them.

"This complicates things," he said, mostly to himself. The Seafang territory operated entirely separate from human society. His people lived by ancient laws, their existence carefully hidden from the modern world. A human Luna was unprecedented to their kind.

She opened her mouth as if to speak, but another coughing fit overtook her, her body shaking with the effort. He instinctively pulled her closer, his bare chest warming her through the soaked clothing.

He had believed his Luna would be a she-wolf, raised in their traditions and ready to take her place beside him. Someone who understood pack hierarchy and the responsibilities of leadership.

Instead, the ocean had delivered him this fragile human woman who probably knew nothing of wolves or magic. The unfairness of it gnawed at him even as the mate bond solidified between them, impossible to deny with her in his arms.

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FOUR

ISOLDE

I solde's eyes finally fluttered open. Consciousness returned in disorienting fragments: wetness clinging to her skin, gritty sand beneath her, and the unmistakable taste of saltwater coating her tongue.

As her vision cleared, she found herself staring into the most intense blue-gray eyes she had ever seen, belonging to a man kneeling beside her in the sand.

His face hovered inches from hers, his chiseled features frozen in apparent shock.

Isolde blinked slowly, trying to make sense of the situation.

The man's broad shoulders blocked the moonlight, casting his face in shadow, but there was no mistaking the raw masculinity emanating from him.

Her confusion deepened as awareness spread through her body—and with it, the realization that her rescuer was completely, utterly naked.

Her eyes widened, a flush warming her cheeks despite her exhaustion and wooziness. The blush spread rapidly down her neck as her gaze inadvertently dipped lower for a split second before snapping back to his face.

"This complicates things," he muttered, the deep rumble of his voice seeming directed more at himself than at her.

Isolde opened her mouth to speak, but her body betrayed her as another violent coughing fit overtook her.

Her lungs burned as she expelled more seawater, her body convulsing with each racking cough.

The man's strong arms pulled her against his hard, warm chest, his skin radiating heat that penetrated her soaked clothes.

A man is holding me. A very naked, very muscular, very... well-endowed man is cradling me like I weigh nothing, her brain supplied unhelpfully as she continued to cough. When the fit finally subsided, Isolde twisted away, pointedly averting her eyes.

"What—" Her voice came out as a rasp. She cleared her throat and tried again. "What happened?"

Instead of answering, the stranger shifted his weight, his presence overwhelming even without looking directly at him.

The motion triggered a cascade of fragmented memories in Isolde's mind: the peaceful beach walk, the impossible wave rising out of nowhere, the terrifying sensation of being pulled into the depths.

Then... a man's voice in the darkness, trying to guide her.

And strangest of all, the warm nuzzle of what she could've sworn was a wolf's muzzle against her cheek after being deposited on the sand.

That can't be right. Wolves don't swim miles in the ocean to rescue people. I must have been dreaming.

"I was just taking a sunset walk," Isolde murmured, more to herself than to him. "The wave came out of nowhere."

She rubbed her temples, trying to make sense of the fragments. "Were you... swimming?" She glanced quickly at his naked form before fixing her gaze firmly on a piece of driftwood several feet away. "Skinny dipping, I guess?"

The man remained silent, his breathing steady and controlled beside her as if weighing his response carefully.

Isolde hugged her knees to her chest, suddenly realizing how cold she felt in her wet clothes. "The research station," she gasped, memories flooding back now. "Did the wave hit it? There could be people hurt!"

Isolde suddenly shot to her feet, swaying slightly as her head spun from the abrupt movement. "Oh my God, the research station—Dr. Thompson was staying late to finish a report on the dolphin migration patterns, and Marcos always works past midnight in the lab, and?—"

The naked stranger rose fluidly, towering over her with an authority that seemed almost primal. His muscular frame continued to block the moonlight, casting long shadows across the sand. He started speaking in a commanding baritone that rippled through the night air.

"The researchers are safe. I pulled everyone out myself. They're all accounted for, gathered a couple miles up the beach. They didn't know you were there, which is why no one was looking for you."

But Isolde barely registered his words. Her mind raced with images of her colleagues, her work, the years of research that might be destroyed.

What if someone had been in the storage room checking on samples?

Would emergency services arrive in time?

Her pulse thundered in her ears, drowning out whatever the stranger was saying.

"Are you even listening to me?" His voice cut through her spiral of anxious thoughts.

"What? I—no, sorry." Isolde shook her head, droplets of seawater flying from her tangled blonde hair. "I was thinking about the station and all our research and?—"

Without warning, his strong hands clamped onto her shoulders, spinning her around to face him directly.

Her breath caught in her throat as those intense blue eyes captured hers, demanding her full attention.

The moonlight carved shadows beneath his cheekbones, highlighting a face that could've been sculpted by a Renaissance master.

"Look at me," he commanded, and Isolde found herself obeying without question. "Everyone is safe. I've already called for help."

She fixed her gaze determinedly on his face, fighting the urge to let her eyes wander over the rest of him. Despite her best efforts to maintain eye contact, she was acutely aware of his nakedness—the broad shoulders, the defined muscles, the radiating heat of his skin even through her wet clothes.

Something electric passed between them. The air itself seemed charged as though the ocean had summoned a silent storm around just the two of them. His thumbs moved almost imperceptibly against her collarbone, and Isolde felt a shiver that had nothing

to do with her wet clothes or the night air.

It's my birthday, she thought absurdly. Thirty years old, and the ocean delivers this... this vision of a man straight to me.

Maybe it was the aftermath of nearly drowning and being saved by him. Maybe it was the surreal quality of the moonlight on the deserted beach. Or maybe it was simply that for once, she wanted to do something completely unexpected and completely for herself.

Isolde rose on her tiptoes, her hands finding his solid chest, and pressed her lips to his.

For one terrifying heartbeat, he remained motionless.

Then his arms encircled her waist, pulling her flush against him as he deepened the kiss with a hunger that stole her breath.

His mouth claimed hers with confidence, his tongue sweeping past her lips with assured possession.

One hand slid up her back to tangle in her wet hair, tilting her head to allow him better access.

Heat coiled low in Isolde's belly as his other hand splayed across her lower back, pressing her closer against his hard body. She could feel every inch of him, every solid plane of muscle, every inch of bare skin radiating delicious warmth that penetrated her wet clothes.

This is insane, her normally sensible mind protested weakly. You're making out with a complete stranger—a naked stranger—on a deserted beach in the middle of the

night after nearly drowning.

The thought was enough to break the spell. Isolde pulled back, breathless, her lips tingling and her heart pounding against her ribs. She stumbled back a step, putting distance between them, her mind reeling from what she had just done.

"I—I'm sorry," she stammered, pressing her fingertips to her lips. "I don't know what came over me. I never do things like this."

The stranger's intense gaze never left her face. His posture remained relaxed despite his nakedness as if being completely bare on a moonlit beach was the most natural thing in the world for him.

"It's fine," he said, his voice a deep rumble that seemed to vibrate through her core. His lips curved into a slight smile that transformed his hard features. "Are you okay?"

That simple question—offered without judgment—made something unravel inside her. Isolde hugged herself, suddenly aware of how ridiculous this all was. Here she stood, soaking wet, having just kissed a naked stranger who'd somehow pulled her from the ocean.

"I think I might have hit my head," she confessed, tugging at a strand of her wet blonde hair.

"I went for a walk along the beach to clear my head, and then I remember.

.." She frowned, trying to piece together the fragments of memory.

"A massive tidal wave. It was heading straight for me and the research station. "

She looked at him, doubt clouding her sea-blue eyes. "But that couldn't be possible,

could it? It had to be my imagination, right?"

The man crossed his arms over his broad chest, the movement drawing her attention to the defined muscles there before she forced her attention back to his face.

"There was a tidal wave," he stated matter-of-factly. "I saved everyone at the station like I mentioned a few minutes ago."

Isolde stared at him, her brain struggling to process his words.

"That's impossible," she blurted. "That kind of thing doesn't happen here. I work for the research station. If there was a storm predicted or any issues, I would have known about it earlier today. We would've been prepared."

She began pacing in a small circle in the sand, her scientific mind racing through possibilities. "I mean, a tsunami caused by an unpredictable earthquake could make sense to some degree, but still..."

Her voice trailed off as she looked back toward where the research station should be visible in the distance. Now that her eyes had adjusted to the darkness, she could see debris scattered across the beach. A sinking feeling settled in her stomach.

The stranger stepped closer, his presence commanding the space between them. The moonlight highlighted his face as he regarded her with an expression that was both intense and calculating.

"There will be no record of an earthquake," he said, his voice dropping to a lower register that sent an involuntary shiver down her spine. "Because the wave wasn't caused by that."

He took another step toward her, closing the distance she had created. Despite his

nakedness—or perhaps because of it—he radiated a primal authority that made Isolde's breath catch again.

“ You caused it.”

The words hung in the air between them as impossible as they were definitive.

She stood frozen, her mind rejecting the very concept.

She, a marine biologist who spent her days cataloguing dolphin behaviors and analyzing water samples, had somehow created a tidal wave powerful enough to destroy a research facility?

Her mouth opened and closed, but no sound emerged. The certainty in his voice was unnerving as if he were stating that water was wet, or the sky was blue. Not presenting a theory but declaring a fact.

By me? That's... that's...

For once in her life, Isolde Morgan, who could lecture for hours on cetacean migration patterns, who could name every species of coral in the North Atlantic, found herself completely speechless.

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FIVE

ISOLDE

I solde's initial shock and confusion at the stranger's claim that she somehow caused the tidal wave turned into irritation. She stared angrily at the naked man standing inches away from her. The sheer arrogance in his assertion made her jaw clench despite her earlier attraction to him.

"You're out of your mind," she finally managed, her voice stronger than she expected. "I'm a marine biologist, not some comic book character with magical water powers."

He stepped impossibly closer, the heat from his body warming her still-damp skin. "Deny it all you want. The ocean responds to you."

Isolde backed away from him, shaking her head in disbelief. Her scientific mind rebelled against his absurdity. She turned, her eyes scanning the distant shoreline again where the research station once stood.

"This is ridiculous. I didn't cause anything." She started walking north, the sand shifting beneath her bare feet. "I need to check on my colleagues."

The naked stranger followed, his footsteps nearly silent behind her.

Isolde glanced back, expecting him to have at least fashioned some makeshift covering, but he strode behind her with the confidence of someone fully clothed, completely unembarrassed by his nudity.

The moonlight caressed the planes of his muscular body, highlighting every perfect inch of him.

"Don't you think you should find some pants?" she called over her shoulder, trying not to admire how his powerful thighs flexed with each step.

"That isn't my priority right now." His voice carried easily over the sound of waves. "You understanding what happened is."

As they crested a small dune, Isolde's breath caught.

The research station—a modern two-story building that had stood proudly overlooking the ocean for over a decade—was gone.

Only the concrete foundation remained, surrounded by a sea of debris stretching across the beach.

Broken glass glittered in the moonlight.

Research equipment lay scattered and broken.

A partial wall stood like a lonely sentinel where her laboratory had once been.

"This is..." Isolde pressed her hand to her mouth, her scientific mind struggling to process the devastation.

"The result of your awakening powers." The man appeared beside her, those blue-gray eyes assessing her reaction.

Anger flared in her chest again. "That's just plain mean and completely irrational. There must have been an earthquake or something that triggered a tsunami. Do you

always blame random women for natural disasters?"

His lips quirked up at one corner. "Only when they're the one causing them."

Isolde was about to deliver a scathing response when movement caught her eye. Five figures huddled near what remained of the eastern wall, illuminated by the flashing lights of emergency vehicles that had arrived on scene. Relief flooded through her as she recognized her colleagues.

"Dr. Thompson! Marcos!" she called, running toward them, momentarily forgetting the frustrating man behind her.

Dr. Thompson—silver-haired and disheveled—looked up, his face brightening with relief. "Isolde!"

She embraced the older scientist, then moved to each of her other colleagues. Marcos with his salt-and-pepper beard, young Mara with a nasty gash on her forehead being tended by a paramedic, and the two other researchers, all wearing various expressions of shock and gratitude.

"We thought you'd gone home for the night," Mara said, wincing as the paramedic applied antiseptic.

"I was taking a walk on the beach," Isolde explained. "What happened?"

Dr. Thompson shook his head, gesturing at the wreckage. "A wave like nothing I've ever seen. No warning. It just... appeared."

"A man saved us," Marcos added, his accent thicker than usual with emotion. "Pulled us out one by one. Built like a Greek god, that one."

Mara nodded. "Tall, dark hair, and incredibly strong. Just started dragging people out of the water before the emergency crews arrived."

Isolde turned, suddenly remembering her naked companion, but the space behind her was empty. The mysterious stranger had vanished as if he had never existed, leaving only footprints in the wet sand that disappeared into the darkness beyond the flashing lights.

For a moment, Isolde felt an inexplicable sense of loss—a hollow feeling in her chest that made no logical sense. They had exchanged fewer than fifty words, shared one impulsive kiss, and yet her body hummed with the memory of his touch, his intensity, and his commanding presence.

She shook her head, sending droplets of water flying from her tangled blonde hair. There were more important matters at hand than a vanishing naked man, no matter how perfectly sculpted his body had been or how his blue eyes had seemed to see right through her.

"Everyone, I just got off the phone with the USGS," called Jason, the youngest of her colleagues, running from his car, phone in hand. His normally cheerful face was pale with confusion. "They confirmed there was no seismic activity tonight. None. Not even a tremor."

The group fell silent. Isolde's mind raced through the possibilities.

"That's impossible," Dr. Thompson said, voicing what they were all thinking. "A wave that size needs a trigger."

Marcos stepped closer. "Maybe military testing? Underwater explosions?"

"In a protected marine sanctuary?" Isolde countered, her scientific brain desperately

seeking rational explanations. "They'd never get clearance."

The mysterious stranger's accusation floated back to her: You caused it . She pushed the absurd thought away. That was ridiculous. People didn't cause tidal waves.

A sturdy paramedic with kind eyes approached Isolde, breaking through her thoughts. "Ma'am, we need to check you out."

"I'm fine," Isolde protested automatically, her hand brushing wet sand from her torn sleeve. "Others need help more than?—"

"You nearly drowned," the paramedic interrupted, guiding her firmly toward the ambulance with a gentle hand on her elbow. "Standard protocol."

Isolde relented, allowing herself to be led away. The paramedic draped a silver thermal blanket over her shoulders and sat her down at the back of the ambulance. As he checked her vitals, Isolde's gaze drifted back to the devastation where her workplace had stood just hours before.

"Your pulse is elevated," the paramedic noted, pressing his fingers to her wrist. "Any chest pain? Difficulty breathing?"

"No," Isolde answered, though her skin tingled with an unfamiliar energy that seemed to pulse in time with the waves breaking on shore. "Just... processing everything."

He handed her a bottle of water. "Drink this. You're dehydrated."

Isolde took a long sip, her mind returning to the naked man's claim. It was preposterous. And yet... she couldn't shake the feeling that something profound had shifted inside her when that wave rose from the ocean. Almost as if some dormant part of her had awakened.

"Everything looks okay, all things considered," the paramedic concluded after finishing his assessment. "Do you want transport to the hospital for observation?"

"No," Isolde said firmly, pulling the blanket tighter around her shoulders. "I just want to go home."

"Someone should keep an eye on you tonight," he cautioned. "Any family nearby?"

The question stung. Here it was, her thirtieth birthday, and she had no one. "I'll be fine on my own."

The paramedic frowned, clearly not satisfied with her answer, but he moved on to his next patient after giving her discharge instructions.

As Isolde sat watching emergency crews sorting through the wreckage, her thoughts kept returning to her mysterious rescuer's words, to the inexplicable wave that had no scientific explanation, and to the disturbing possibility that—just maybe—there were forces at work beyond what her scientist's mind could comprehend.

She soon slid down from the ambulance, the silver thermal blanket wrapped tightly around her shoulders.

Another paramedic had tried to convince her one more time to go to the hospital, but she had politely declined.

Her body felt different—energized yet exhausted like she had been plugged into some cosmic outlet and overloaded.

She wandered away from the flashing lights and the controlled chaos of emergency responders, her bare feet sinking into the cool, damp sand.

Debris from the research station littered the beach like fallen stars.

A microscope here, a filing cabinet there—the scattered remains of years of scientific inquiry.

" You caused it. "

The stranger's words echoed in her mind, sending an electric tingle down her spine. Isolde shook her head, trying to dislodge the ridiculous notion.

"That's completely impossible," she whispered to herself, picking her way through shattered glass and splintered wood. "I don't have the power to cause a natural disaster."

And yet—what other explanation was there? No earthquake. No underwater explosion. Just a massive wall of water appearing out of nowhere on her thirtieth birthday.

"I must be losing my mind to even consider this is somehow my fault," Isolde murmured, scanning the darkened beach for any sign of the naked stranger.

Despite his arrogance and bizarre claim, he had seemed so certain and something about his intensity had resonated with her on a level she couldn't explain.

She needed to find him. Needed answers.

Isolde moved farther down the beach away from the rescue teams and the shattered remains of her workplace. The silver blanket fluttered around her as the ocean breeze picked up, carrying with it the tang of salt and something else—something wild and untamed that made her heart race.

"Where are you?" she called out, her voice swallowed by the rhythmic crash of waves.

A piece of driftwood caught her eye—perfectly white and smooth, unlike the jagged debris from the research station. Isolde bent to pick it up, running her fingers along its polished surface.

The moment her skin made contact, the water at the shoreline pulsed, drawing back several feet before rushing forward again with unusual force. Isolde dropped the driftwood with a startled gasp, her eyes wide with shock.

"That didn't just happen," she told herself firmly, her scientific mind desperately searching for a rational explanation. "Correlation is not causation. Basic research principle."

But her hands trembled as she backed away from the water's edge. Suddenly, the ocean—her constant friend and companion—felt alien and dangerous. And somewhere out there, a man with storm-colored eyes held the explanations she needed.

"Come back," she whispered, not entirely sure if she was speaking to the ocean or to the mysterious stranger who had vanished like sea foam in the sun. "Please."

The waves continued their eternal dance, offering no answers while the moon cast silver light across the water's surface. As she stood there, she had a very bad feeling that she just received a birthday present she never asked for and couldn't ever return.

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SIX

NEREUS

N ereus strode away from the gathering crowd when the blonde woman rushed up to her distressed colleagues. The salt breeze chilled his naked skin, but he barely noticed. His senses remained locked on her—his Luna—even as he put distance between them.

"Centuries of waiting and I meet her as naked as the day I was born," he muttered, pulling on dark jeans and a fitted navy Henley that stretched across his broad shoulders.

He slammed the truck door and stalked back toward the scene, positioning himself at the perimeter where the emergency vehicles cast red and blue pulses across the devastation.

From this vantage point, he could observe without drawing attention.

The destruction was quite extensive—the research station reduced to splinters and twisted metal, debris scattered like confetti across the once-pristine beach.

But his focus remained fixed on her.

His Luna stood amidst the chaos, her hair still damp and clinging to her face, yet somehow managing to look breathtaking despite the ordeal. His wolf paced restlessly within him, furious at the separation between them.

One of the male scientists—a gangly man—was animatedly speaking to the group. "Everyone, I just got off the phone with the USGS. They confirmed there was no seismic activity tonight. None. Not even a tremor."

Nereus watched the blonde woman's face transform. First confusion, then a flash of something deeper—fear? Recognition? Her eyes darted around, and for a moment, he felt like she might be looking for him.

But then a paramedic soon guided her toward an ambulance with a gentle but insistent hand on her elbow. Nereus clenched his jaw, his wolf snarling at the stranger's touch.

"Mine," he growled under his breath.

He rolled his shoulders, forcing himself to think strategically. Years of leadership had taught him when to act and when to observe. Charging into the middle of emergency personnel would only complicate matters. He needed to approach this delicately—a concept his wolf found infuriating.

But how to explain to a human woman that she possessed ancient ocean magic? That she had triggered a tidal wave during her awakening? That she was destined to be his mate, his Luna, the other half of his soul?

"Not exactly first-date topics," he muttered, scanning the scene with narrowed eyes.

He crossed his arms over his chest, watching as the paramedic draped a blanket over her shoulders and checked her vitals. Even from this distance, he could hear her heartbeat, steady but elevated. The salt-and-citrus scent of her skin floated on the breeze, tormenting him.

Two emergency workers passed by, their conversation drifting to his sensitive ears.

"Never seen anything like it," the first said. "A wave that size with no warning?"

"Meteorological anomaly," the second replied. "That's what they'll call it. Freak weather event."

Nereus's mouth quirked into a humorless smile. If only they knew the truth—that the woman they were treating had enough power in her slight frame to command the entire ocean if she learned how to harness it properly. And he was the only one who could teach her.

Nereus had barely taken three strides away from his observation point when some of the scientists spotted him. They waved frantically, rushing toward him like eager recruits seeking the pack alpha's approval.

"It's him!" The gangly one pointed. "That's the guy who saved us!"

Nereus squared his broad shoulders, planting his feet as the group converged on him.

He had spent centuries interacting with humans when necessary but always kept those encounters brief.

Tonight complicated matters. The bond with his Luna demanded his attention while these mortals required pacification.

"Sir, we can't thank you enough," one of the female scientists praised. "You swam like nothing I've ever seen. How did you move so fast in those conditions?"

His wolf bristled at how they delayed him from tracking his mate. But Nereus kept his expression neutral, his voice steady and authoritative.

"Former Olympic training. Swimming's in my blood." The half-truth rolled smoothly

off his tongue.

The gangly scientist's eyes widened. "Olympic level? That explains it! But what brought you out here tonight of all nights?"

Nereus met the man's gaze directly, a subtle display of dominance that made the scientist step back instinctively. "I swim at night. Fewer distractions. Was doing my usual route when I saw the wave hit."

His nostrils flared subtly, catching his Luna's lingering scent even amid the chaos. The scent called to him like a beacon, but these humans required careful handling first.

A short man shook his head in amazement. "Well, thank God for your swimming habits, sir. But this wave—it's scientifically inexplicable. No seismic activity, no atmospheric pressure anomalies..."

"Complete demolition," another added, gesturing at the wreckage. "Our life's work..."

Nereus felt the subtle shift before the others noticed it. The ocean's energy pulsed—a reaction to his Luna's emotions, he suspected. The water stirred restlessly, foam gathering along the shoreline as the tide pulled back slightly.

"Your building can be rebuilt," Nereus cut in firmly. "Your lives cannot. Where's the blonde woman?" He couldn't delay any longer. His wolf prowled beneath his skin, demanding he find her.

"Oh, Isolde? The paramedics cleared her, but she wandered off that way." The woman pointed down the beach. "She seemed pretty shaken up."

Nereus nodded once, a dismissive gesture that brooked no argument. "I should go

check on her. Excuse me."

He walked away without waiting for their response, following both scent and instinct along the shore. The scientists might have found his abruptness rude, but he wasn't concerned at the moment. When an alpha moved with purpose, others simply adjusted.

He found her a quarter-mile down the beach, standing near the foaming water. Her blonde hair glinted in the moonlight, and her curves outlined perfectly against the silver-touched waves. The emergency blanket lay discarded on the sand behind her.

He stopped momentarily, his breath catching.

He had waited for so long, and the Moon Goddess had delivered him not just any Luna, but one who seemed physically formed to pull at every primal instinct he possessed.

Her delicious curves appealed particularly to his waterwolf nature.

His kind had always valued the softer, fuller female form that reflected the ocean's own swells and curves.

The bond between them vibrated incessantly. Even from this distance, he could feel her confusion, her fear, and beneath it all, a raw power she didn't yet understand.

The ocean crept slowly around her ankles, responding to her presence. He watched transfixed as tiny luminescent crests formed around her feet, glowing an otherworldly blue. She hadn't noticed yet that the water literally lit up at her touch.

His Luna. His mate. His equal in power.

But still completely unaware of who and what she truly was.

He felt the ocean's energy shift before he saw the water rise.

The tide surged forward around her ankles, frothing with unnatural intensity.

Small waves crashed against her calves as she stared out at the dark horizon.

The water around her began glowing brighter with a blue luminescence that no human would recognize as magical—but to Nereus, it was like watching a beacon ignite.

This was getting dangerous. His Luna's untrained power was responding to her emotional state, and if she didn't calm down soon, they might face another massive wave.

He moved swiftly, closing the distance between them with long, purposeful strides. The sand shifted beneath his feet, but his balance remained perfect—the natural grace of a predator who had mastered his territory.

"The ocean seems drawn to you," he said, stopping just behind her left shoulder.

She startled, whipping around. Her sea-blue eyes widened with recognition, then narrowed with suspicion. "You're dressed now."

"More appropriate for conversation," he replied, the corner of his mouth lifting slightly. "Though you didn't seem to mind earlier."

A blush colored her cheeks, visible even in the moonlight. "You said I caused this." Her voice trembled slightly as she gestured toward the destroyed research station.

The water swelled higher around their feet, responding to her distress. He placed a steady hand on her shoulder, the contact sending a jolt through the mate bond.

"We need to get you away from here," he said, his tone brooking no argument. "There's nothing more to be done tonight. Your workplace is gone, and you standing here in the dark won't bring it back."

Her eyes flashed with indignation. "You don't understand. That building contained years of research."

"None of that will matter if another wave hits us." He tightened his grip slightly, leaning closer. "Look down."

She followed his gaze to the water swirling around them, now glowing fiercely with that telltale blue light. She gasped.

"What—how is it?—"

"I'll explain everything, but not here." He dropped his voice to a more intimate tone. "Let me drive you home. So you can get some rest and process what's happened."

She bit her lower lip, indecision clear on her face. "I don't even know you."

"Nereus Varon," he stated simply as if his name alone should carry sufficient weight. To his pack, it did. "And you're Isolde, the marine biologist who kisses strangers on beaches."

A flash of embarrassment crossed her features, but she straightened her spine, meeting his gaze directly. "I have questions."

"I have answers," he replied, pleased by her spirit. The Luna in her was already

showing itself, challenging him even in her confusion. "But not here."

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Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 1:59 am

Before she could respond, three of her colleagues approached, their faces etched with exhaustion and shock. The gangly scientist led the group, his eyes darting between Nereus and Isolde with obvious curiosity.

"Isolde, are you all right?" The man glanced at Nereus with thinly veiled suspicion. "We're setting up at the university's backup facility tomorrow. Everyone's coordinating transport for what equipment survived."

Isolde nodded absently, her attention still partially fixed on the glowing water. "Mr. Varon was just offering to drive me home," she said.

The female scientist—a middle-aged woman with a practical ponytail—gave Nereus an approving once-over. "That's very kind of you. Isolde lives on that little houseboat, you know. Hard to navigate in the dark if you don't know the area."

"I know the area," Nereus replied with absolute confidence. Every inch of the coastline had been part of his territory for centuries.

The woman smiled encouragingly at Isolde. "Go on, dear. You've had quite a shock. Let this nice man take you home."

Nereus suppressed a smile at being described as "nice." His pack would have found that description laughable. He was respected, feared even, but "nice" was never a word associated with the Alpha of the Seafang.

Isolde hesitated, then nodded slowly. "I guess there's not much I can do here tonight."

Nereus watched the crowd dispersing from the destruction site, emergency personnel coordinating their departure with practiced efficiency.

His truck loomed large in the darkness, its black finish gleaming under the full moon.

He opened the passenger door for Isolde, his wolf silently approving as she slid her curves onto the leather seat.

He caught her scent again—salt water and citrus—as he closed her door and rounded the hood. The ocean churned behind them, waves crashing with increasing intensity as Isolde's emotions roiled beneath her composed exterior.

"Your houseboat?" he asked, sliding behind the wheel, his large frame making the spacious cab feel suddenly intimate.

She nodded, wrapping her arms around herself. "Just follow the coast south. There's a small marina."

As he pulled away from the beach, Nereus felt the weight of centuries bearing down on him. How many alpha water wolves had found themselves in this position—trying to explain their ancient supernatural heritage to their newly awakened Luna? None had faced explaining it to a human.

"I need to tell you something that will sound crazy," he began, his voice deep and commanding. "But I need you to listen completely before you dismiss it."

She turned toward him, moonlight catching those blue eyes. "Is this about what you said earlier? That I somehow caused that wave?"

"You did." He kept his eyes on the road, his hands gripping the wheel with controlled strength. "You're connected to the ocean in ways you can't begin to understand yet."

Today, when you turned thirty, your Luna powers awakened."

"Luna powers?" Her voice held the precise edge of skepticism he had expected.

"I am alpha and prince of the Seafang pack." He delivered the words with absolute authority, the same tone that commanded wolves across his territory. "I am a waterwolf shifter, and you are my Luna—my destined mate."

The ocean surged violently beside them, waves battering the shoreline as Isolde processed his words.

"You think you're a werewolf," she said flatly. "A water... werewolf."

"Waterwolf," he corrected, his patience wearing thin. He had spent centuries commanding respect, not explaining himself to skeptics. "Look at the ocean, Isolde. Look how it responds to your emotions."

She glanced at the water, now whipping into white-capped frenzy that mirrored her internal state.

"Today is my birthday," she admitted reluctantly. "My thirtieth. But the rest is?—"

"Truth," he cut her off. "Luna females come into their powers on their thirtieth birthdays. The tidal wave, the glowing water around your feet—that was all you."

The truck hugged the coastal road as Nereus made a sharp turn, revealing the marina ahead. Isolde's houseboat bobbed precariously as the water churned with increasing violence.

"Stop the car. I want out." Her voice shook with anger. "I've had enough crazy for one night."

He pulled to a stop at the marina entrance, but kept the doors locked. The ocean was rising dangerously now, waves crashing against the docks with enough force to splinter wood. His wolf snarled at the thought of leaving her here alone and untrained with power that could drown the entire coastline.

"If you believe anything I've told you, you'll come with me," he growled, leaning toward her. "To my home, and my pack. Where you can learn to control this before someone dies."

"Let me out!" She reached for the door handle, her panic rising.

In one fluid motion, he reached across the cab, capturing her face between his powerful hands.

He gently pulled her toward him, claiming her mouth with a kiss that left no room for argument.

Their lips connected with electric intensity, and he felt her initial resistance melt away as the mate bond buzzed between them.

He poured centuries of longing into the kiss, letting his calming alpha pheromones envelop her. It wasn't manipulation—it was instinct and protection. Her body softened against his, her tension draining as his tongue traced the seam of her lips.

Outside, the violent waves began to recede, the water gradually calming as Isolde surrendered to the sensation of their connection.

When he finally broke the kiss, her eyes remained closed for several heartbeats, lips parted and flushed. The ocean had returned to gentle lapping against the shore.

"Now," he whispered against her lips, "look at the water."

SEVEN

ISOLDE

I solde's eyelids fluttered open. Through the windshield, she saw the ocean had returned to its usual gentle rhythm—not the turbulent churning that had matched her chaotic emotions minutes ago. Moonlight danced across the surface in silver ripples, peaceful as a lullaby.

"That's..." Her voice caught in her throat.

"You," Nereus finished, his blue-gray eyes holding hers with an intensity that sent heat spiraling through her body. "Your emotions. Your power."

She pressed her fingertips to her lips, still tingling from his kiss. "I need to grab some things. If what you're saying is true—" she held up her hand when he started to interrupt, "—which I'm not saying I believe yet, but if it's even remotely possible, I can't risk another... incident."

He nodded, the chiseled lines of his face softening slightly. "Five minutes."

"Ten," she countered, surprising herself with the boldness.

One corner of his mouth quirked up. "Seven. And I'm coming with you."

She pulled the handle of her door, aware of his commanding presence behind her.

Her houseboat rocked gently beneath their feet, the familiar creak of wood against water usually a comfort. Tonight, it felt like a taunt.

"I've always loved that sound," she murmured more to herself than to him.

"What sound?" he asked, ducking his head to enter the cozy living space.

"The way water slaps against the hull. Like the ocean's saying hello." Isolde moved quickly to her bedroom, pulling a duffel bag from her closet. "I used to think the ocean loved me back."

Nereus leaned against her doorframe, arms crossed over his broad chest. "It still does. More than you know."

She stuffed clothes into her bag without really seeing them. "I destroyed my workplace tonight. People could have died."

"But they didn't."

"Because of you." She paused, a sudden memory flashing—fur instead of skin, piercing eyes that seemed to glow. "It wasn't a dog that saved me, was it?"

Nereus held her gaze, saying nothing. He didn't need to.

She zipped her bag with more force than necessary. "This is truly crazy."

"Yet here you are packing."

"Because I'm a scientist. I need data and observations." She brushed past him toward her bathroom, gathering toiletries. "And because something happened tonight that science can't explain."

Seven minutes later, they were back in his truck, driving along the coastal road. She stared out the window as moonlight illuminated the ocean's surface, its vast expanse stretching beyond the horizon.

"I've studied these waters for years," she said softly. "Cataloged species, analyzed currents, tracked migration patterns. I thought I knew it. Understood it."

"And now?"

"Now I'm wondering if it's been studying me too." She turned to find his eyes already on her. "If what you're saying is true—that I somehow caused that wave—then everything I thought I knew about my relationship with the ocean just changed."

He reached across the console, his hand enveloping hers. "Not changed. Deepened."

His touch sent another jolt through her system like electricity seeking ground. The ocean beside them seemed to pulse in response, a small wave crashing higher on the shore than its neighbors.

"You felt that too," he said. Not a question.

She pulled her hand back, curling her fingers into her palm to preserve the warmth of his touch. "I don't know what I feel anymore."

"That's normal. But you will."

"How?" She shot him a sideways glance. "How am I supposed to control something I don't understand?"

"The same way you learned to swim." His voice rumbled through the cab of the truck. "One stroke at a time and instinct."

The truck turned off the coastal road, onto a narrower lane.

The road wound around, through a small forest, and then Isolde let out a small gasp.

There, rising against the starlit sky like something from a fantasy novel, stood a massive stone castle.

The moonlight washed over its granite walls and towers, giving them an ethereal glow against the backdrop of the dark ocean behind it.

"That can't be your house," she whispered, pressing her face closer to the window.

"Home," Nereus corrected, a hint of pride in his deep voice.

He drove through an ornate iron gate and up a winding driveway. As they approached, Isolde noticed smaller homes nearby—still impressive by normal standards—dotting the expansive property.

"Your... pack lives here?" The word felt strange on her tongue like speaking a language she had never learned.

"The inner circle does. The rest live throughout the territory." Nereus parked the truck but made no move to exit. "You still don't believe me."

She started playing with her hair, still damp from the ocean. "I believe something extraordinary happened tonight. I believe you saved my life." She turned to face him fully. "But a man who turns into a wolf? Powers connected to the ocean? It sounds?—"

"Preposterous?" His mouth quirked into that half-smile that made her stomach flip.

"I was going to say 'impossible,' but, yeah." She glanced at the castle again. "Maybe I hit my head. Maybe I'm still unconscious, floating in the ocean, hallucinating all of this."

"Would you like some proof?" His voice had dropped lower, a challenge in his tone.

She hesitated for a moment, then nodded. "Yes."

He stepped out of the truck, circled around to her side, and opened her door. He extended his hand, and she took it, trying to ignore the electric current that shot up her arm at his touch. He led her to an open area beside the driveway bathed in moonlight.

"Don't be afraid," he said, stepping back.

"I'm not afraid," she replied, surprised to find it was true. Despite everything, she felt strangely safe with him.

Nereus held her gaze for one intense moment, then began to change.

It happened quickly—his body shimmering, bones shifting, skin giving way to fur.

Where the imposing man had stood moments before, a massive wolf now watched her with startlingly bright turquoise eyes.

His coat was primarily white with gray markings, gleaming silver in the moonlight.

A gasp escaped her lips, but it wasn't from fear. The wolf—Nereus—was breathtaking. Powerful muscles rippled beneath his thick fur as he took a step toward her. He was easily twice the size of any wolf she had studied in her biology courses.

"It was you," she breathed, recognition dawning. "On the beach. Those eyes..."

The wolf inclined his head in affirmation.

Without thinking, she reached out, her fingers hovering just above his head. "May I?"

The wolf dipped his muzzle in what could only be permission.

Her fingertips sank into his thick fur, warm and soft despite having been in the ocean hours earlier.

As she touched him, something stirred within her—a connection that seemed to resonate with the gentle lapping of waves against the nearby shore.

"You're magnificent," she whispered.

She couldn't tear her eyes away as Nereus's magnificent wolf form began to shimmer and shift.

Fur receded, paws elongated into hands and feet, and the powerful canine frame stretched and reformed into the sculpted male physique she had admired earlier.

Where the wolf had stood moments before, Nereus now straightened to his full height, completely naked under the full moon.

Her throat went dry. Every inch of him was perfectly proportioned—broad shoulders tapering to narrow hips, powerful thighs, and everything in between.

Heat flooded her cheeks, but she couldn't look away.

The moonlight cast dramatic shadows across the planes of his muscles, highlighting

the raw power contained within his human form.

"See something you like?" His voice carried a teasing rumble.

"I—" Isolde swallowed hard, her body temperature rising despite the cool night air.
"You're very... confident."

Nereus chuckled, making no move to cover himself as he strode toward his truck.
"When you've lived as long as I have, modesty becomes pointless."

He reached into the truck bed and retrieved the same bag as earlier. With efficient movements, he pulled on a pair of jeans and a white cotton shirt. Even clothed, he looked like something carved from marble—too perfect to be real.

"Come with me," he said, not a question but a command. He extended his hand to her, and she found herself taking it before she could overthink the gesture.

As they approached the massive oak doors of the castle, they swung open seemingly of their own accord. Two uniformed staff members stood at attention in the grand foyer.

"Your Royal Highness," they murmured in unison, bowing their heads deferentially.

Isolde blinked. Royal Highness. This wasn't some elaborate story—he truly was royalty among his kind.

"Prepare the azure suite for my guest," Nereus instructed, his voice shifting into something more formal and commanding. "And bring up a late meal."

"Right away, Your Highness." The taller attendant moved swiftly up the sweeping marble staircase.

Isolde felt suddenly small in the cavernous entryway with its vaulted ceilings and ancient tapestries.

The events of the night crashed over her like another wave—the tsunami, nearly drowning, being rescued by a wolf that was actually a man, discovering she somehow controlled water, and now standing in a literal castle with someone who was apparently wolf royalty.

"This isn't really happening," she whispered, swaying slightly on her feet.

Nereus's arm slid around her waist, steady and grounding. "You're exhausted. Tomorrow will be soon enough for more explanations."

She nodded numbly as he guided her up the stairs. The physical contact sent that now-familiar current racing through her body, making her simultaneously drowsy and hyperaware of his proximity.

"Here we are." He paused outside ornate double doors. "The suite has everything you might need. If not, simply ask."

"Thank you," she managed, her voice sounding foreign to her own ears.

She stepped into the doorway, then turned back to face him. Nereus was studying her with an intensity that made her pulse quicken. Without warning, he closed the distance between them, one hand cupping her cheek while the other settled possessively at the small of her back.

"Sleep well, Luna," he murmured, his breath warm against her lips. Then he kissed her, not with the desperate heat of their earlier kisses but with something deeper and more claiming.

Her body responded instantly, melting against him as if it had found its natural resting place. The kiss was over too soon, leaving her breathless and staring up at him with wide eyes.

He stepped back, his expression unreadable. "Until tomorrow."

As he strode away down the corridor, her body hummed with an unfamiliar longing. She watched him disappear around a corner before stumbling into her suite and closing the door.

"What is happening to me?" she whispered to the empty room, pressing her fingers to her tingling lips.

Every cell in her body seemed to be calling for him, pulling her in his direction like the moon pulled the tides. She had never felt anything remotely like this—this instant, overwhelming connection that defied all logic and reason.

She sank onto the edge of the enormous, canopied bed, her fingers clutching the silken coverlet. Nothing about this night made sense, yet somehow, the most confusing part wasn't the tidal wave or his wolf transformation.

It was how desperately she wanted to run after him.

The scientist in her brain struggled to make sense of it, cataloging her symptoms: elevated heart rate, flushed skin, and heightened awareness.

But no clinical assessment could explain the bone-deep certainty that had settled within her—a feeling that somehow, against all logic, she belonged with him.

"This is utterly insane," she whispered, pressing her palm against her chest where her heart hammered. "I've known him for what—three hours? And half that time he was

either naked or a wolf."

Yet the connection felt ancient, as familiar as the ocean she had devoted her life to studying. Every time Nereus touched her, it felt like coming home to a place she didn't know she had been homesick for.

A sharp knock at the door sent her pulse racing. Nereus. He had come back.

She smoothed her still-damp hair and straightened her rumpled clothes before crossing to the door. She pulled it open with more eagerness than she intended, only to find herself face-to-face with a young woman in uniform carrying a silver tray.

"Your evening meal, miss," the attendant said with a polite smile.

Disappointment crashed through Isolde with embarrassing intensity. "Oh. Thank you."

The woman placed the covered tray on a small table by the window. "His Highness suggested you might prefer seafood. I hope seared scallops and lobster risotto are to your liking?"

Isolde nodded, battling the ridiculous wave of longing that followed the mere mention of him. "That's very thoughtful."

"His Highness is always attentive to his guests' needs," the woman replied, a hint of curiosity in her eyes as she studied Isolde. "Especially important ones."

"I'm not—" Isolde began, then stopped. What exactly was she to him? Luna he had called her. Whatever that meant.

After the attendant left, Isolde lifted the silver dome from the tray.

The aroma of perfectly seasoned seafood filled the room, reminding her that she hadn't eaten since coming home after work which now felt like it had happened in another lifetime.

Despite her exhaustion, she managed a few bites, savoring the buttery scallops that melted on her tongue.

"He even knows what I like to eat," she murmured, wondering if it was coincidence or if he had somehow sensed her preferences. Nothing would surprise her anymore.

As she ate, her eyelids grew heavier. The events of the night had drained her completely. She barely managed to get to the bed before collapsing fully clothed onto the plush mattress.

As sleep claimed her, piercing eyes haunted the edges of her consciousness. That half-smile that always caused her heart to race. The commanding way he moved through space as if the world reshaped itself to accommodate him. The possessive heat of his hand on her lower back when he had kissed her.

"Nereus," she whispered as dreams took her, waves of sleep washing over her mind like the tide coming in—gentle but unstoppable, pulling her under into deep waters where a wolf with turquoise eyes waited, patient and hungry, ready to claim what was his.

EIGHT

NEREUS

As Nereus stalked down the corridor away from Isolde's room, his muscles were coiled tight with restraint.

The taste of her lips lingered on his—a heady mixture of salt and sweetness that threatened to pull him back to her door.

When she had looked at him wide-eyed with those sea-blue eyes, something primitive had awakened in him, something far more ancient than even his centuries-old wolf.

"Damn it all," he muttered, running a hand through his hair as he entered his study.

The large room reflected his dual nature—part refined royal, part untamed predator.

Floor-to-ceiling windows faced the ocean.

Bookcases lined the walls, filled with ancient texts on shifter lore and territory management.

His massive oak desk dominated the center, carved with intricate patterns of wolves and waves.

Nereus rolled up his sleeves as he began pacing the length of the room.

The tall windows revealed his domain—miles of private beach with the ocean now placid and gleaming under moonlight.

No hint remained of the chaos from earlier.

The contradiction of the ocean mirrored his own state—outwardly composed yet inwardly turbulent.

"Three hundred years waiting for her, and now I can barely keep my hands to myself for three minutes," he growled to himself.

He grabbed his phone and fired off texts to Xavier and Damien.

His beta and his royal advisor would be grumpy about the pre-dawn summons, but this couldn't wait.

His Luna had arrived—a human Luna with untapped water powers that had already destroyed a public building.

The implications were staggering to say the least.

Nereus moved to the sidebar and poured himself a glass of whiskey.

He knocked it back in one swallow, the burn nothing compared to the fire Isolde had ignited within him.

The mating pull was stronger than he had expected—not just desire, but a bone-deep need to claim her, protect her, and teach her.

"She has no idea what she's capable of," he murmured, pouring another drink and carrying it to the window. The ocean reflected the full moon, its surface rippling

slightly. Was that Isolde's influence even in sleep? The connection between them was already forming, stronger than he had anticipated.

He pressed his forehead against the cool glass, wrestling with the wolf inside him that wanted to return to her room, wake her with kisses, and complete the mate bond. The rational prince won out—barely. She needed time. Understanding. Patience.

Patience had never been his strong suit.

"Your Highness?"

He turned to see Mrs. Carlisle, his housekeeper, standing in the doorway in her robe, her gray hair in a neat bun despite the hour.

"Is everything all right? I saw the lights on."

"Fine, Edith. Just expecting Damien and Xavier shortly. And our guest?"

"The guest suite was prepared with everything a young lady might need. Fresh clothes in the closet and toiletries in the bathroom."

Nereus nodded. "Thank you. Make sure she has a new phone waiting for her when she wakes."

"Of course." The housekeeper hesitated. "May I ask—is she..."

"She's my Luna." The words sent a thrill through him, possessive and primal.

Mrs. Carlisle's eyes widened. "After all this time..."

"After all this time," he echoed. "And I have to move carefully, or I'll frighten her

away."

"The ocean responded somewhat to her arrival."

Nereus's laugh was sharp. "That's putting it mildly. She demolished the marine research station with her first surge of power. She's stronger than any Luna I've encountered."

The wolf in him preened with pride at his mate's strength, even as the prince calculated the challenges ahead. Training her. Protecting her. Integrating her into pack life. And all while battling the mating heat that threatened to consume them both.

Several minutes after Edith left him with his thoughts, he heard the familiar cadence of footsteps approaching his study. The heavy oak door swung open without a knock—the only two men in the territory who dared enter his space without announcement.

"This better be apocalyptically important," Xavier growled, his dark hair disheveled, eyes alert despite being pulled from sleep. As beta, he was accustomed to crises, but rarely at this hour.

Damien followed, immaculately dressed despite the ungodly hour, his silver-streaked beard neatly trimmed. As Royal Advisor, he maintained appearances no matter the circumstance.

"I found my Luna," Nereus announced without preamble, watching their reactions with hawkish intensity.

Xavier's eyes widened while Damien raised a single eyebrow. They waited for more—they knew him well enough to sense there was a complication.

"She awakened tonight. Created a tidal wave that destroyed the marine research station on the north point," Nereus continued, tapping his fingers on his desk. "I had to save five human scientists from drowning."

Xavier whistled low. "That's quite an entrance."

"She must be powerful," Damien mused, settling into a leather armchair. "Our pack hasn't seen water control that strong since?—"

"She's human," Nereus cut in, the words hanging in the pre-dawn air like a challenge.

Both men froze. Xavier recovered first, his laugh sharp. "You're joking, right?"

"Do I look like I'm in a fucking joking mood?" Nereus's voice dropped dangerously low, his wolf pressing against his skin.

Damien leaned forward, fingers steepled. "Not impossible, Your Highness, but definitely not traditional."

"How is this possible then?" Nereus demanded, slamming his fist on his desk. The ancient wood trembled but held firm. "Three centuries I've waited, preparing for a Luna from one of the six territories, and the Moon Goddess sends me a human marine biologist?"

"Marine biologist," Damien repeated thoughtfully. "Interesting choice. She already devoted her life to the ocean before knowing her connection to it."

Xavier paced the room, his energy too feral to be contained. "We need her, that's non-negotiable. Without a Luna?—"

"I know what happens without a Luna," Nereus growled. The pack's power would

fade without her balancing influence. His power would diminish. The Seafang sovereignty would weaken, leaving them vulnerable to rivals. "But how do I integrate a human who thought shifters were fairy tales until tonight?"

"Perhaps..." Xavier hesitated, then plunged ahead. "What if you ignored this particular call? Waited for a proper waterwolf shifter Luna to awaken?"

The suggestion sent a bolt of white-hot rage through Nereus's body.

His eyes flashed turquoise, a warning growl building in his chest. The mere thought of rejecting Isolde, of sending her away, ignited primal panic within him.

His wolf clawed at his insides, desperate to race to her room, to guard her door and ensure no one took her from him.

"I'd sooner cut out my own heart," Nereus snarled, surprised by the raw emotion in his voice. "She's mine. I've barely known her for hours, and already I can't imagine existence without her."

Xavier raised his hands in surrender. "Just testing the mate bond. You clearly passed."

"The Moon Goddess doesn't make mistakes," Damien said quietly. "If she chose a human for our alpha, there's purpose behind it. We are all pawns of fate, Your Highness. Sometimes we must wait to understand why things are as they are."

Nereus stilled, his gaze drawn to the ocean visible through his windows. Out there somewhere was the answer to why Isolde had been chosen for him—why after centuries of waiting, his mate was a woman who had no knowledge of his world.

"Leave me," he commanded.

His men nodded, recognizing the tone. Xavier squeezed his shoulder briefly before departing—a rare gesture of affection between alpha and beta. Damien bowed slightly, then followed.

Alone again, Nereus stared at the lightening horizon. His wolf paced restlessly within, drawn to the woman sleeping across the castle—the woman who held his future, his pack's future in her delicate human hands.

He prowled his study like a caged predator for several more minutes. His heart thundered in his chest, and he grunted in frustration. The wolf inside him would not be denied.

"Fine, you win," he muttered, running his hand along the intricate molding of the eastern bookcase until his fingers found the hidden latch.

The secret panel slid open without a sound—the work of craftsmen long dead who had built his castle centuries ago. Nereus had commissioned the network of tunnels when Viking blood still ran hot in his veins, when the need for escape routes was a matter of survival rather than convenience.

Now they served a different purpose. The dim light of wall-mounted sconces illuminated the narrow passage as he navigated the familiar route. His footsteps were silent despite his size—the predator in him had never forgotten how to hunt.

"This is ridiculous," he whispered to himself even as his feet carried him forward. "She's safe. She's asleep. She'll be there in the morning."

His wolf didn't care about reason. It needed to see their mate, to confirm her safety, and to breathe in her scent. All this time waiting, and now, his Luna slept under his roof. The pull was too irresistible.

The passageway curved toward the guest wing, and Nereus slowed his pace as he approached the hidden entrance to Isolde's room. He eased the panel open, slipping into her darkened chamber like a shadow.

His breath hitched at the sight of her. She lay sprawled across the four-poster bed, her blonde hair fanned out across the pillow like strands of gold.

The moonlight streaming through the balcony windows bathed her in ethereal light, highlighting the curves of her body beneath the silk sheets.

She had kicked off half the covers, one toned leg exposed to his hungry gaze.

He moved closer, drawn by an invisible thread that connected him to this woman. His Luna. The fact that she was human seemed inconsequential in this moment—she was perfect.

"I'll protect you," he whispered, his voice barely audible.

Her scent enveloped him—ocean spray and something uniquely hers that made his wolf howl silently in recognition. He could detect no fear and no distress in her sleep. Just exhaustion from the day's events.

Unable to help himself, he reached out, brushing a finger down the soft curve of her cheek. Her skin was warm silk beneath his touch. She stirred slightly, a small smile curving her lips, but didn't wake.

He bent down, inhaling deeply as he nuzzled against her hair. The intimate gesture sent a shock of possessiveness through him so intense, it nearly buckled his knees.

"Mine," his wolf growled internally while the man in him stepped back, forcing control.

The ocean outside crashed more forcefully against the shore, responding to his emotions. Nereus froze, suddenly aware that his own lack of control might trigger her dormant powers.

"Sleep well, little one," he murmured. "Tomorrow you'll learn what you truly are."

She shifted in her sleep, her lips parting slightly. "Ocean," she murmured, clearly dreaming.

Nereus smiled, a rare, genuine expression that transformed his usually stern features. Even in sleep, she was connected to her element. She would be magnificent once trained.

With tremendous effort, he backed away, slipping silently into the passage and closing the panel behind him. The separation was physical pain, but his rational mind knew it was necessary.

Back in the safety of the tunnels, Nereus leaned against the cool stone wall, his heart hammering. "Get a grip," he growled to himself. "You've commanded armies, ruled this territory, and negotiated treaties. You can handle one human woman."

But as he made his way to his own chambers, he knew that was a lie. Isolde was not just any woman. She was his destiny, his future—and possibly, if he couldn't guide her properly, his destruction.

In his own bed, Nereus tossed and turned, haunted by sea-blue eyes and golden hair. The scent of her lingered in his nostrils, teasing him with what he couldn't yet claim. How would he teach her? How would he convince a woman of science to believe in ancient magic?

"Tomorrow," he promised himself as sleep finally claimed him. "Tomorrow, I'll make

her understand what we are to each other."

NINE

ISOLDE

I solde awoke to sunlight streaming through unfamiliar windows. For a moment, she floated in peaceful confusion, her mind blissfully blank. Then reality crashed over her like another tidal wave—the research station destroyed, the impossible rescue, and the even more impossible explanation.

She sat up in the luxurious four-poster bed, noticing more clearly the opulent surroundings.

The room was easily three times the size of her bedroom on the houseboat, with high vaulted ceilings, ornate moldings, and furniture that belonged in a museum.

Her eyes caught on a sleek smartphone resting on the nightstand that definitely wasn't hers.

"Considerate," she murmured, picking it up. Her own phone was floating somewhere in the Atlantic.

The device unlocked without a passcode, revealing a clean home screen with only essential apps. She immediately opened the news app, her heart pounding. The headline made her stomach drop:

Mysterious Tidal Wave Destroys Marine Research Station - No Casualties

She scanned the article quickly, finding confirmation of everything she remembered—except the part about her causing it. There were quotes from meteorologists baffled by the lack of seismic activity and the impossibly localized nature of the wave.

"I need to help them," she said, throwing back the covers and grabbing her duffel bag. Her colleagues would be sorting through the wreckage, salvaging what equipment and research they could. It was her responsibility to be there.

After dressing in the jeans and light blue blouse she had packed, she stepped into the hallway, immediately realizing she had no idea how to navigate this castle. The corridor stretched in both directions, lined with intricate tapestries depicting ocean scenes and doors that all looked identical.

"Left it is," she decided, setting off down the hallway.

Her footsteps echoed on marble floors as she passed room after room, each more elaborate than the last. A library with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves.

A sitting room with antique furniture. An empty ballroom with chandeliers that caught the morning light and fractured it into thousands of rainbows.

"This place is ridiculous," she muttered, trailing her fingers along a wall inlaid with mother-of-pearl. "Who actually lives like this?"

A prince of waterwolf shifters, apparently.

As she rounded another corner, she nearly collided with a young woman carrying fresh linens.

"Oh! I'm sorry, I didn't see you coming," Isolde apologized.

The young woman's eyes widened. "You must be Miss Morgan." She gave a small curtsy that made Isolde instantly uncomfortable.

"Please don't do that. I'm just Isolde." She gestured vaguely around her. "I'm afraid I'm a bit lost. I need to find my way out. My colleagues need help with the cleanup from last night's wave."

"His Highness left explicit instructions that you were to be brought to him when you woke." The young woman's tone was polite but firm. "He's on the east terrace. I can show you the way."

Isolde hesitated. She needed to get to the research station site, but she also had questions only Nereus could answer. And beneath it all, she still felt that strange magnetic pull toward him that she couldn't explain.

"That's okay. I can find it myself. Besides, I would like to get more familiar with the castle since I'll be here for a while," Isolde replied, hoping the half-lie would convince the young woman to leave her alone.

The young woman stared at her for a long moment and then nodded, continuing down the corridor with her fresh linens.

Isolde wandered deeper into the castle's maze of corridors. The thought of breakfast with Nereus sent a flutter through her stomach that wasn't because of her hunger. She turned a corner and spotted an ornate wooden door left slightly ajar, golden morning light spilling from within.

Her curiosity piqued, she pushed the door open and stepped inside to what appeared to be a study.

Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves lining one wall were filled with leather-bound volumes

in varying states of age.

A massive oak desk dominated the center of the room, its surface scattered with papers bearing elegant script.

"Definitely not the east terrace," she murmured to herself.

The room smelled of parchment, ink, and something distinctly masculine. Nereus's scent. Her cheeks warmed at the memory of his kisses, how natural they had felt despite the bizarre circumstances.

Her eyes soon darted around his space, searching for anything that might help her make sense of this unusual situation.

Suddenly, a particular section of books caught her eye on the wall of bookshelves.

The book spines were a deep azure blue with silver lettering.

Drawn to them like the tide to shore, she approached and ran her finger along them until she found one titled "The Seafang Legacy. "

"This might explain a few things," she whispered, carefully pulling the book from its place.

She settled into a plush leather armchair and opened the heavy volume. The pages were filled with illustrations of wolves, oceans, and what appeared to be rituals. She flipped through until a chapter heading caught her attention: "The Luna's Ascension."

The Luna is the sacred counterpart to the alpha, guardian of the pack's spiritual equilibrium and wielder of elemental magic.

When a female wolf reaches her thirtieth year, her powers awaken, often manifesting dramatically through her connected element.

The alpha must then claim his Luna, or the pack's very foundation will begin to crumble. ..

Isolde's breath caught. Thirtieth year. Elemental magic. The tidal wave. It aligned too perfectly with what Nereus had told her.

"What do you think you're doing in here?"

The sharp voice startled Isolde so badly, she nearly dropped the book. An older woman stood in the doorway, her steel-gray hair pulled into a severe bun, wearing a formal black dress with a ring of keys at her waist.

"I'm sorry, I was just?—"

"This is His Highness's private study. These materials are not for casual perusal." The woman's eyes narrowed as she took in the book in Isolde's hands. "You're Miss Morgan, I presume. I'm Edith Carlisle, head housekeeper of this estate."

Edith stepped closer, her gaze falling to the open page. Her expression shifted from stern disapproval to something more complex.

"You're reading about the Luna?" Edith asked, her voice now carefully neutral.

Isolde nodded. "I found it interesting."

"And why would someone like yourself find that particular topic interesting?" Edith's tone was probing, her eyes shrewd.

"Because apparently I am one." Isolde closed the book and stood, suddenly feeling defensive. "According to Nereus, anyway."

Edith's eyes widened, her composure momentarily faltering. "Surely someone like yourself knows that people don't turn into animals."

Isolde lifted her chin. "That's not what Nereus demonstrated last night. I saw him shift with my own eyes." The memory of his magnificent wolf form still left her breathless. "He also told me that I am the Luna."

"But you're human," Edith sputtered, the keys at her waist jangling as she took a step back.

Isolde shrugged, replacing the book on the shelf. "I guess that doesn't matter."

The woman's shock meant nothing to her—how could it, when all of this was still so new? Just yesterday, her biggest concern had been spending her birthday alone. Now she was supposedly some kind of magical wolf queen.

"I need to find Nereus," Isolde said, moving toward the door. "He's expecting me for breakfast on the east terrace."

Edith stood frozen, her face pale as she stared at Isolde like she was examining a particularly troubling scientific anomaly. After a few long moments, she finally blinked, her trance of disbelief broken. She smoothed her immaculate black dress with trembling hands and cleared her throat.

"This way, Miss Morgan." The housekeeper's voice had regained its formal authority, but her eyes kept darting to Isolde with a mixture of suspicion and awe.

Isolde followed her through a maze of opulent hallways, mentally mapping each turn.

The castle seemed designed to disorient visitors, its corridors flowing like ocean currents rather than in straight, predictable lines.

Sunlight streamed through tall windows, catching on gold accents and crystal fixtures.

The east terrace, when they finally reached it, took Isolde's breath away.

It extended from the castle like the bow of a ship, overlooking a private stretch of beach where waves lapped gently at pristine sand.

A glass-topped table had been set with fine china and silver, fresh flowers bursting from crystal vases.

Beyond the railing, the ocean stretched blue and limitless—the same ocean that had nearly killed her yesterday, the same ocean she had somehow, impossibly, commanded.

Nereus stood at the terrace's edge, his broad back to her, hands clasped behind him as he surveyed his domain. His posture screamed authority and confidence, an arrogance that Isolde found both infuriating and magnetically attractive.

"Your Highness," Edith announced with a curtsy. "Miss Morgan has arrived."

Nereus turned, his blue eyes capturing Isolde with a hunger that made her breath hitch. He was dressed casually in dark jeans and a fitted black Henley that hugged his muscular frame, looking more like a model than royalty.

"Thank you, Edith." His deep voice rolled over Isolde like a wave. "That will be all."

The housekeeper hesitated, her gaze flicking between them before she retreated,

closing the terrace doors behind her.

"I hope you slept well." Nereus gestured to the table. "I've arranged something special for your birthday breakfast."

Isolde approached but didn't sit. The beautiful spread—fresh fruit, pastries, and what looked like smoked salmon benedict, her absolute favorite—would normally have delighted her. Today, it felt like a gilded cage.

"I need to get back to the research station site. My colleagues will need help with the cleanup." She twisted her fingers together, fighting the instinct to acquiesce to his plans.

His expression hardened slightly. "Your special birthday breakfast is more important right now. Besides, there's probably nothing salvageable left of that station."

"You don't get to decide what's important to me.

" The words sprang from Isolde's lips before she could second-guess herself.

The devastation flashed in her mind—years of research, equipment, specimens, all gone.

Because of her. "Those people are my friends, my colleagues.

If I caused that destruction, I need to help fix it. "

"You need to learn control first." Nereus pulled out a chair for her, his gesture more command than courtesy. "Sit. Eat. Today is the first day of your new life."

Something in his presumption ignited a spark in Isolde. She had spent years deferring

to others, putting their needs before her own. Something about this man made her want to push back.

"As the Luna, wouldn't I get to do whatever I wanted every day? Not just what you decide for me." She crossed her arms, noticing how his eyes briefly tracked the movement across her chest. "You made it seem like the Luna is an important role in your pack. Basically, like a queen, am I right?"

Nereus went still, his eyes narrowing. "Queen? Where did you hear that term?"

"I found a very interesting book in your study. 'The Seafang Legacy.' Quite illuminating." She tilted her head, studying his reaction. "Why would you keep that information from me if I'm supposedly this important Luna figure?"

The muscle in his jaw twitched. Behind him, two staff members who had entered quietly to assist with the breakfast service paused, their eyes widening at her words. One nearly dropped a pitcher of tea on the ground.

"Leave us," Nereus commanded without turning around. The staff scurried away, the terrace doors closing with a soft click behind them.

He stepped closer, towering over her, his presence filling the space between them with crackling tension. "Do you have any idea what you've just done?"

Isolde stood her ground, even as her heart raced. "Enlighten me."

"The identity of a Luna is considered sacred information until the formal announcement. There are protocols, traditions—" He ran a hand through his dark hair in frustration. "And the fact that you are human makes this situation exceptionally delicate."

"Why is it such a big deal that I'm human?" she pressed. "And why the secrecy and confusion all of a sudden in the castle? If your staff know about Lunas and water wolves, why hide me now?"

His eyes flashed with something primal and unsettling. "Because a human Luna has never existed in the history of the Seafang pack. It changes everything."

TEN

NEREUS

N ereus's jaw tightened until it felt like his teeth might shatter. The wolf inside him paced restlessly, torn between pride that his mate was asserting herself and frustration at the complexity of their situation.

"A human Luna changes everything for whom?" She stepped closer, seemingly unaffected by his dominating presence. "For you? Your precious pack politics?"

Nereus inhaled sharply, catching her scent—ocean spray and something uniquely her—that caused his wolf to howl with need. "For all of us. The council will question it. Some will reject you outright."

"Because I'm human?"

"Because they fear what they don't understand." He moved impossibly closer until mere inches separated their bodies. "Those who accept the truth will worry that you lack the strength needed to protect our territory."

"I destroyed a research station with my mind," she countered, tilting her chin up. "How's that for strength?"

A smile tugged on his lips despite his frustration. "Uncontrolled power isn't the same as strength."

"So teach me."

The simplicity of her demand struck him. Centuries of life, and he had never encountered someone who challenged him so effortlessly. His wolf reveled in it.

"We will discuss your training." He brushed a strand of hair away from her face, his fingers lingering against her soft skin. "But first, it's your birthday. I had the chef prepare something special."

"I'm not hungry." The stubborn set of her mouth told him otherwise.

"I'm sure your stomach disagrees." He placed his palm against her back, guiding her toward the table. "Salmon benedict. Your favorite, I believe."

Her eyes widened. "How did you?—"

"I just knew." He pulled out her chair. "The mate bond has its advantages."

She hesitated before sitting, her gaze sweeping over the elaborate spread.

"Eat," he commanded, then softened his tone. "Please."

She picked up her fork, eyeing him suspiciously. "You can't just order me around because of some mystical wolf connection."

"I don't order." He sat across from her, pouring fresh orange juice into crystal glasses. "I lead. There's a difference."

She took a bite, a small moan of appreciation escaping her lips that sent heat flooding through his veins.

"Fine. It's delicious," she admitted.

"Happy birthday, Luna." He raised his glass to her, satisfaction coursing through him as she reluctantly clinked her glass against his.

His wolf settled, momentarily content to see her eating, accepting his provision even while her questions remained. The council's reaction could wait. The implications of a human Luna could wait.

He watched her from across the terrace table, sunlight bathing her blonde hair in golden hues that reminded him of treasures lost to the sea centuries ago.

Her curves were outlined perfectly in her simple blue blouse that enhanced the color of her eyes and made his wolf growl with possessive hunger.

"I really need to go back now," she insisted, setting down her fork with the stubborn determination he was quickly coming to recognize. "My colleagues will expect me to help with the cleanup. It's my research station too."

"And risk causing another tsunami when someone inevitably upsets you?" he challenged, one eyebrow raised. He leaned forward, his voice lowering to a rumble. "You haven't controlled your powers for even an hour yet."

The slight flush that crept up her neck signaled both irritation and awareness of his proximity. His wolf preened at the effect he had on her.

"They'll wonder where I am," she countered, her eyes flashing with defiance that made his blood surge. "They'll think I don't care."

He considered her for a moment, admiring the loyalty she showed to her human colleagues. He had rarely encountered such fierce dedication among those not bound

by pack oaths.

"I have a better solution." He pulled his phone from his pocket, his thumb sliding across the screen with practiced efficiency. "One that keeps you safe and preserves your standing with your colleagues."

Her eyes narrowed skeptically. "Which is?"

"Watch." He pressed a number on speed dial, activating the speaker function and setting the phone between them on the white linen tablecloth. The ocean breeze carried the scent of her curiosity to him as the call connected.

"Mayor Stevens," came the formal response after two rings.

"Craig, it's Nereus Varon." He kept his eyes fixed on Isolde's face, watching her reaction. "I'm calling about last night's disaster at the marine research station."

"Mr. Varon! What a surprise. We were just discussing emergency funding options."

Nereus straightened, his posture commanding even through the phone call. "No need. I'm announcing full financial backing for both cleanup and complete rebuilding of the facility."

Isolde's eyes widened, her lips parting in surprise. The reaction satisfied something deep within him. Providing for his mate was encoded in his DNA.

"That's incredibly generous, sir, but?—"

"I'm not finished," Nereus cut in smoothly. "My sovereign territory values scientific research, especially concerning our shared waters. These scientists are our neighbors, and their work deserves our respect and full support."

He caught Isolde's soft intake of breath, her sea-blue eyes now studying him with newfound intensity. His wolf preened under her scrutiny.

"I'll be sending my construction and environmental teams today. I want the scientists consulted on the redesign—whatever equipment upgrades they need, whatever facilities would enhance their research—it's theirs."

The mayor sputtered grateful acknowledgments while Nereus maintained unwavering eye contact with Isolde. Her expression had softened into something that made his chest tighten unexpectedly.

"One more thing," Nereus continued, his voice lowering to a timbre that brooked no argument. "The scientists should stay away from the site for now. My team needs unimpeded access for salvage operations, and there are safety concerns. Please ensure they understand this is for their protection."

The subtle emphasis on the word "protection" was meant for Isolde. His Luna needed to understand that every decision, every command he issued, was ultimately to keep her—and by extension, others—safe from harm. The sudden wave of possessiveness that swept through him was almost overwhelming.

Her fingers reached across the table, not quite touching his hand but close enough that he could feel the heat of her skin. The implicit acknowledgment of his efforts made his wolf rumble with satisfaction.

"I'll make sure everyone knows," the mayor assured him. "The research staff will be thrilled by your generosity."

Nereus ended the call and pocketed his phone with a satisfied nod. The wolf inside him prided itself on having provided for his mate and removing obstacles from her path.

"Wow," Isolde leaned back in her chair, folding her arms across her chest. "That sounded incredibly suspicious, you know. 'Keep the scientists away' and all that talk about sovereign territory. If I didn't know better, I'd think you were doing something shady."

Her teasing smile unleashed a warmth in his chest that surprised him. His wolf responded to her playfulness, seeking more of it despite the serious circumstances.

"Humans always look for conspiracy where there's merely efficiency," he replied, his lips quirking upward.

"Speaking of humans, why doesn't everyone know you can transform into a giant wolf? The mayor just called you 'Mr. Varon' like you're some normal billionaire businessman."

Nereus stiffened, his spine straightening automatically. This was dangerous territory—the question of secrecy that had protected his kind for millennia.

"That's... complicated." He shifted, reaching for his coffee cup and taking a deliberate sip to avoid her penetrating gaze. "The relationship between shifters and humans has a long, often bloody history."

"You're avoiding the question," she pointed out, leaning forward with those piercing blue eyes that seemed to see right through his defenses.

"With good reason." His voice dropped an octave, suddenly all alpha. "What matters now is your immediate situation. The organized cleanup is standard procedure for disasters—humans do it all the time. And frankly, I don't give a damn what rumors circulate about my motives."

He stood, walking around the table until he loomed over her chair. His shadow fell

across her upturned face as he placed both hands on the armrests, caging her in without touching.

"My top priority is you, Isolde. Getting those powers under control before you accidentally kill someone. Helping you understand what being Luna to the Seafang pack means."

Her scent filled his lungs, and it took every ounce of his centuries-old control not to bury his face in the curve of her neck.

Her shoulders squared beneath her blue blouse. "Well, since I apparently don't have a job to go to anymore, I guess I have some free time."

"You'll have plenty to do," he said firmly. "Meeting the pack. Learning your responsibilities. Most importantly, mastering those water powers before another wave destroys more than just buildings."

Her eyes suddenly flashed dangerously. "You know, you're extremely bossy for someone I just met yesterday. Do you always dictate every moment of a woman's day, or am I getting special treatment?"

"I'm alpha," he growled as if that explained everything—which to him, it did.

"No, you're controlling," she fired back. "And honestly? It's a little creepy."

The words hit him hard. His wolf reared back, howling in outrage. In three hundred years, no one had dared speak to him with such disrespect—such a fundamental misunderstanding of his nature and position.

He stepped away from her so quickly that her hair fluttered from the movement. His jaw clenched so tightly, he felt a muscle jump in his cheek.

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"Henderson!" His voice thundered through the terrace, bringing his estate manager rushing through the French doors. "Miss Morgan is to have unrestricted access to every part of this estate. Whatever she needs, whenever she needs it."

The manager nodded, clearly startled by the rare display of visible anger from his boss.

Nereus reached into his pocket and retrieved a set of keys, tossing them onto the table where they slid to a stop in front of Isolde.

"The silver Aston Martin in the east garage," he said, his voice deceptively calm while rage boiled beneath the surface. "Go wherever you want, whenever you want. You are no prisoner here. And I am no creep."

His eyes—now glinting with flecks of turquoise as his wolf pushed against his control—locked with hers.

"But know this, Isolde Morgan. When that power inside you surges again—and it will—when the ocean responds to your fear or anger or whatever emotion you can't control, you'll wish I had been more 'controlling.' "

With that, he turned on his heel and strode from the terrace, his footsteps echoing against the marble flooring. The wolf inside him howled for him to return, to claim his mate, to make her understand—but his pride wouldn't allow it.

Creepy? The word scorched his mind like acid. Three centuries of leadership, of sacrifice, of waiting for his Luna—only for her to label him a predator for trying to

protect her. And after he'd arranged her favorite breakfast. After he'd committed millions to rebuilding her workplace.

He stalked through the east wing, past startled staff members who quickly flattened themselves against walls to avoid his path. The scent of their fear only fueled his rage. They knew better than to approach an alpha in this state.

He punched in the code to his private training room with such force that the keypad screen nearly cracked.

The massive oak doors swung open to reveal a state-of-the-art combat facility that blended ancient tradition with modern technology.

Weapons that had belonged to his ancestors—swords, axes, and staffs dating back to Viking times—lined one wall.

The polished hardwood floor gleamed beneath recessed lighting.

"Computer, combat simulation level nine," he growled, yanking his shirt over his head and tossing it aside. His muscles rippled beneath his bronze skin as he rolled his shoulders.

"Warning: Level nine requires protective gear," the AI system responded.

"Override." His voice cut through the air like a blade. "Authorization Alpha-1."

He selected a wooden staff from the wall, testing its balance with a quick spin that blurred through the air.

The familiar weight centered him as holographic opponents materialized around him—fighters programmed with the combat techniques of every martial discipline

known to mankind. And a few known only to shifters.

The first opponent lunged. Nereus pivoted and struck, the staff connecting with bone-breaking force. Three centuries of anger from waiting for a Luna, who clearly despised him, channeled through his strike.

"You want to see controlling?" he snarled as he whirled and caught another attacker with a sweeping blow that would have shattered a real human's ribcage. "I could have ordered you confined to this castle. Could have forced the mate bond."

A holographic blade sliced across his shoulder, drawing blood. Nereus barely felt it, his wolf healing already initiating as he spun and struck back with savage precision.

"Instead, I give you freedom. I give you fucking car keys and rebuild your workplace."

Four attackers converged simultaneously. Nereus launched into the air, staff whistling as he took them all down in a whirlwind of controlled violence. Sweat gleamed on his chest and back, highlighting the sculpted muscles honed through centuries of combat.

Xavier's voice cut through his concentration. "Trying to destroy the training room again?"

Nereus didn't pause his assault as his beta leaned against the doorframe, arms crossed over his chest. "Computer, pause simulation."

The holograms froze mid-attack. Nereus stood in their midst, chest heaving, blood trickling from the few lucky strikes they'd landed.

"She called me creepy ." The words burned his throat. "My Luna."

Xavier's eyebrows shot upward. "The human?"

"Her name is Isolde." Even furious, Nereus couldn't tolerate disrespect toward his Luna. "And she thinks I'm controlling her."

"Aren't you?" Xavier's lips curved into a knowing smirk. "That's what alphas do."

Nereus hurled the staff across the room where it embedded itself into the wall. "Not like that. She thinks I'm some human predator."

"Maybe that's because she is human ." Xavier pushed away from the doorframe, approaching cautiously. "They don't understand our ways. Their women are taught to fear powerful men."

Nereus ran his fingers through his sweat-dampened hair. "She caused a tsunami, X. She could kill everyone on this island without even trying. What am I supposed to do? Let her walk away?"

"The Luna chooses the alpha as much as he chooses her," Xavier reminded him. "You can't force this, no matter how much your wolf demands it."

Nereus closed his eyes, inhaling deeply. The scent of the ocean—of Isolde—still clung to him despite the workout. His wolf whined, already missing her presence.

ELEVEN

ISOLDE

I solde watched Nereus storm off the terrace, his broad shoulders tight with tension, and his footsteps heavy enough that she swore the marble beneath her vibrated.

The car keys he had thrown at her glinted in the morning sunlight, scattered across the breakfast table like discarded treasure.

She stared at them without reaching out, feeling the weight of his anger lingering in the air.

Henderson, the estate manager, stood at attention nearby, his thin lips pressed into a disapproving line. The older man's salt-and-pepper hair was as perfectly styled as his immaculate suit, but his eyes held something Isolde couldn't quite place—disdain, perhaps? Or fear?

"I don't need his cars," Isolde said, pushing her chair back from the table. The legs scraped against the stone terrace with an unpleasant screech. "Could someone please just drive me back to my houseboat? I have my own car there."

Henderson cleared his throat. "That won't be possible, Miss Morgan."

"Excuse me?" Isolde blinked, genuinely surprised by the blunt refusal.

Henderson turned away, already dismissing her as he prepared to follow after his

master.

"Wait." The word burst from her before she could stop herself. Something shifted inside her at his casual dismissal—a flicker of irritation where normally she would have swallowed her discomfort. "That seems a little disrespectful to your Luna, doesn't it?"

Henderson froze mid-step. When he pivoted back toward her, his expression had hardened into something cold and calculating.

"Luna?" His gaze raked over her, from her practical clothing to her sleep-tousled blonde hair. "You are not the pack Luna until the alpha claims you properly, Miss Morgan. Until then, you're just a mere human who knows more than she really should at this point about our pack."

The words stung like salt water on an open wound. Henderson offered a perfunctory bow before rushing off, leaving Isolde alone on the vast terrace.

"Well, happy birthday to me," Isolde muttered, slumping back into her chair.

The ocean stretched beyond the terrace in an endless expanse of blue, matching her eyes but not her mood.

She traced a finger along the glass tabletop, digesting Henderson's words.

The dismissal struck a familiar chord—how many times had she taken a step back to accommodate others' needs while neglecting her own?

Yet something about this felt different. The way he'd said "mere human" scratched at something new inside her, something that had awakened at midnight along with whatever power had called the wave.

She glanced at the keys on the table. The silver Seafang emblem winked back at her, bearing the image of a wolf with waves cresting behind it.

"Claimed properly?" she whispered, feeling heat rise in her cheeks as she remembered the electric sensations of Nereus's kisses—how her body had responded instantly, almost desperately. "What does that even mean?"

The breeze suddenly picked up. In the distance, waves began to crest higher, whitecaps forming where moments before the water had been calm. Isolde took a deep breath, willing herself to relax, and to her amazement, the waves seemed to settle.

"So it is true," she murmured, staring at her hands as if they might suddenly reveal the secret of her connection to the water.

What did it mean to be Luna to a pack of wolf-people she had just learned existed? What did it mean that she, a human, could suddenly control water? And what exactly did "claiming" entail?

A shiver ran through her that had nothing to do with the ocean breeze and everything to do with the memory of Nereus's intense gaze, the way his muscled body had moved with predatory grace, and the commanding rumble of his voice.

She stood and snatched the keys from the breakfast table, curling her fingers around the cold metal until it bit into her palm.

If Nereus thought giving her a car meant she'd play docile little Luna, he had another thing coming.

The car keys jingled as she strode through the castle, her sneakers squeaking against the polished marble floors.

After several wrong turns and one embarrassing encounter with a young housekeeper who looked at her like she'd crawled out from under a rock, Isolde found the east garage. She pressed the key fob, following the responsive beep to a sleek, silver Aston Martin that gleamed under the garage lights.

"Holy crap," she whispered, running her fingers along the smooth hood. "That's one way to apologize for overstepping."

The leather seat hugged her curves as she slid behind the wheel. The engine purred to life, sending a vibration through her body that felt almost intimate. For a moment, she sat there, gripping the steering wheel and absorbing the luxury that surrounded her.

"This car probably costs more than my entire education," she muttered, pressing buttons until the GPS screen illuminated.

As she navigated through the castle's winding driveway, she was struck by the sheer size of Nereus's territory. In the daylight, the sovereign land sprawled before her like something from a fairy tale—acres of manicured lawns giving way to pristine beaches on one side and dense forest on the other.

The GPS directed her onto a main road that cut through a small, self-contained town.

Quaint storefronts with names like "Seafang Supplies" and "Lunar Bistro" lined the streets.

Children—potential wolf children?—played in a park outside a school building whose architecture mirrored the castle's Gothic elements.

"It's like he's running his own little country," Isolde marveled, slowing to observe a group of impossibly fit men and women jogging in perfect synchronization. "Wolf boot camp? Or just morning exercise?"

The town gave way to a security checkpoint where, to her surprise, the guards simply waved her through after a glance at the car. The atmosphere changed immediately as she crossed the border between Nereus's territory and the rest of the island—less pristine, more lived-in, and more human.

Her hands tightened on the steering wheel as she directed the car toward the northern tip of the island where the research station—her workplace, her second home—had stood.

The ocean came into view on her right, sunlight dancing across its surface.

Was it her imagination, or did the waves reach a little higher as she drove past as if greeting her?

About a mile from the site, orange cones blocked the road. Men in hard hats and safety vests directed traffic away from the area. A sign proclaimed: "PRIVATE RESTORATION WORK IN PROGRESS—AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY."

Isolde pulled to the shoulder, killing the engine. Through the windshield, she could see heavy equipment already at work in the distance, clearing debris. The efficiency was impressive—Nereus certainly hadn't wasted any time.

Part of her wanted to march up to the barricade and demand access. After all, that was her lab and her research. But another part—a new part that had awakened when the wave crashed down—whispered caution.

After several minutes of sitting in the car on the shoulder, Isolde's patience evaporated. Her fingers drummed against the steering wheel, each tap punctuated by a fresh wave of frustration.

"I caused this," she whispered, eyeing the distant cranes and bulldozers. "I should be

helping fix it."

With sudden resolve, she pushed open the car door and marched toward the barricade. The ocean breeze caught her hair, whipping it across her face as she approached the two men in hard hats guarding the entrance.

"Excuse me," she called, summoning her most professional voice—the same one she used when addressing skeptical academic panels. "I need access to the site."

The taller of the two men gave her a cursory glance. "Sorry, ma'am. Area's restricted."

"I understand that, but I'm Dr. Isolde Morgan. I'm a marine biologist with the research station." She gestured toward the devastation beyond. "That's my workplace."

The second man shook his head. "Orders are orders. Nobody gets through except personnel from Varon Industries."

"Look, I'm the Luna of the Seafang pack," she blurted out, immediately regretting the words as they fell from her lips.

The men exchanged confused glances.

"The what now?" the taller one asked, his bushy eyebrows furrowing.

"The Luna," she repeated, heat rising in her cheeks. "I'm... I'm Prince Nereus's mate."

The shorter man snorted. "Lady, I don't know what you're talking about, but unless you've got credentials from Varon Industries, you're not getting past this point."

Irritation flared inside Isolde, sharp and hot like a sudden fever. Who was Nereus to deny her access to her own workplace? What right did he have to swoop in and take control when it was her research at stake?

"This is ridiculous," she snapped. "I have a right to be here!"

As her anger mounted, the rhythm of the waves behind them changed. What had been gentle laps against the shore now crashed with increasing force. The workers further down the beach turned to look at the suddenly choppy water.

"What the hell?" the taller guard muttered, shielding his eyes against the sun as he stared out at the growing swells.

Isolde felt it then—the pull in her chest, the strange synchronicity between her rising temper and the agitated ocean.

Nereus's warning echoed in her mind: When that power inside you surges again—and it will—when the ocean responds to your fear or anger or whatever emotion you can't control, you'll wish I had been more controlling.

She swallowed hard, forcing herself to take a deep breath. The last thing they needed was another tsunami.

"I... I'm sorry for the confusion," she managed, backing away. "I'll come back with proper authorization."

Retreating to the Aston Martin, she slumped into the driver's seat. Through the windshield, she watched the waves gradually settle as she calmed herself. The connection was undeniable now.

"I need to learn how to control this," she whispered to her reflection in the rearview

mirror.

The drive back to the castle passed in a blur of self-recrimination. By the time she pulled into the garage, her determination had solidified into resolution. She needed help, and the only person who could provide it was somewhere inside this labyrinthine fortress.

After asking a surprisingly helpful maid for directions, Isolde found herself standing outside what seemed to be a state-of-the-art combat facility. The door was slightly open, and the sound of exertion filtered through the gap.

She peered inside, her breath catching at the sight that greeted her.

The space was a perfect blend of ancient tradition and cutting-edge technology—wood-paneled walls adorned with traditional weapons alongside digital training interfaces and high-tech equipment.

But it wasn't the room that captured her attention.

It was Nereus.

Shirtless, with sweat glistening on his sculpted torso, he moved through a series of combat forms with predatory grace.

His muscles flexed and rippled beneath his tanned skin as he wielded a wooden staff against three digital opponents—all of whom appeared to be struggling despite their numerical advantage.

His face bore an expression of intense concentration, his jaw set in a hard line that somehow made him even more devastatingly handsome.

Isolde felt her mouth go dry. The raw power and controlled aggression in his movements stirred something primal within her—something that resonated with the newly awakened energy coursing through her veins.

One by one, his opponents' digital forms faltered. Nereus stood victorious, barely winded, the staff held loosely in one hand while the other pushed back his damp black hair. His commanding presence filled the room, an alpha male in his element.

He turned suddenly as if sensing her presence, and their eyes locked through the doorway. The blue-gray depths of his gaze pinned her in place, making her heart flutter and her legs feel weak.

Isolde knew she should speak, should explain what had happened at the research site, but the words stuck in her throat. All she could think about was how his warning had proven true, how the ocean had responded to her emotions exactly as he had predicted.

And how desperately she needed him to teach her control.

TWELVE

NEREUS

Sweat trickled down Nereus's bare torso as he centered himself.

The combat facility's polished floors reflected the morning light streaming through high windows, illuminating the array of weapons lining the walls.

His muscles ached pleasantly from exertion—a welcome distraction from the hurricane of emotions Isolde had stirred in him.

"I'm trying to protect her. She has no idea what she's capable of."

"Speaking of your temperamental mate," Xavier's lips quirked. "She's just returned to the castle."

Nereus's head snapped up, his wolf instantly alert. "She left?"

"In the Aston Martin. Seems she took a drive after your... disagreement."

Relief flooded through him so intensely, it nearly buckled his knees. She hadn't left him. Not yet. "Where is she now?"

"Asking directions to find you," Xavier smirked. "Try not to scare this one away. Luna candidates don't exactly grow on trees."

After Xavier departed, Nereus activated the combat simulation program again. Three holographic warriors materialized, circling him with weapons drawn. He needed to burn off this restless energy before facing her again.

The first attacker lunged. Nereus parried, his muscles flowing with well-practiced precision. The second came from behind—he dropped and swept his leg in a wide arc, disrupting the hologram's balance. The third received a direct thrust to the chest.

His wolf senses prickled just as he dispatched the final opponent. Her scent—ocean spray mixed with something uniquely Isolde—reached him before she did. His body responded instantly, every cell attuned to her presence.

He didn't turn immediately. Let her watch. Let her see exactly what kind of male fate had bound her to.

He pushed his damp hair back from his forehead, standing to his full height as the simulation ended. Sweat glistened on his shoulders and chest, highlighting centuries of disciplined training. The wooden staff hung loosely from one hand as he finally turned, meeting her gaze across the room.

The hunger in her eyes was unmistakable, mirroring what his wolf had recognized from the first moment—they belonged to each other. Her scent shifted subtly, the sweet tang of arousal impossible for his heightened senses to miss.

Still, he remained where he stood, refusing to approach her first. She had questioned his intentions. Let her come to him.

He reactivated the simulation without breaking eye contact. Three new opponents materialized, and he engaged them with deliberate, powerful movements. The staff became an extension of his body, weaving patterns in the air as he danced between attackers.

"Is this supposed to impress me?" Her voice floated across the room, but the uptick in her pulse gave her away.

He didn't break his stride, taking out another holographic warrior with a decisive blow. His body moved with fluid grace, each strike demonstrating control and power.

The last opponent fell, and Nereus stood victorious. He knew exactly how he looked—centuries of female attention had taught him the effect of his physical form. But never had he cared about impressing someone like he did now.

He turned and marched from the combat facility, his muscles still burning from exertion.

The cool air hit his bare chest as he stepped outside and strode down the path behind his castle, not bothering to grab a shirt on his way out.

He sensed her behind him—her scent carried on the breeze, that intoxicating blend of saltwater and citrus that made his wolf pace restlessly beneath his skin.

He didn't slow down. Didn't acknowledge her presence. His pride wouldn't allow it quite yet.

The well-worn path beneath his feet had been traveled by his ancestors for generations, cutting straight through the dense woods that separated his castle from their true domain.

As the trees thinned and the sound of waves grew louder, Nereus felt his tension begin to ebb.

The ocean had always been his sanctuary.

Without hesitation, he shed his remaining clothing at the edge of the sand, leaving himself completely bare.

The breeze caressed his naked form, and he welcomed it, striding purposefully into the welcoming embrace of the water.

His body sliced through the cool surf with practiced ease, each powerful stroke carrying him deeper until the water lapped at his chest.

Only then did he turn.

She stood frozen at the shoreline, her blonde hair floating around her face, her eyes fixed on the rolling waves with unmistakable apprehension. Something was wrong. His Luna, who lived on water and dedicated her life to studying it, looked at the ocean as if it might attack her.

"What's wrong?" he called, his voice carrying across the water.

The wind carried her sigh to him. "I went to the research station site. They wouldn't let me in."

He watched her face harden with the memory.

"I got angry. The ocean reacted again—waves started building." She hugged herself, looking out at the horizon. "It's ironic. I always thought I had this special connection with the water. Now it turns against me like some kind of weapon. It hates me."

He shook his head, droplets of water flying from his dark hair. "That's not true. The ocean doesn't hate you, Isolde. It responds to you because it recognizes what you are."

"And what am I exactly?"

"My Luna. The ocean's daughter." He spread his arms wide, encompassing the vastness around them. "Think about it. You dedicated your career to marine biology. You chose to live on a houseboat. The water has always been a part of you. Did you ever wonder why you felt such a pull toward it?"

Her eyes widened slightly, and he knew his words were finding their mark.

"The ocean isn't turning against you, Isolde. It's answering you now. For your entire life, it's been trying to tell you who you truly are. You just didn't understand the message." He lowered his voice, letting the authority of centuries color his tone. "But you can learn. If you want to."

Something shifted in her expression—acceptance mixed with curiosity. Without breaking eye contact, Isolde reached for the hem of her shirt and pulled it over her head. Her fingers worked at the clasp of her bra, then her jeans and panties, until she stood gloriously naked on the shore.

He drew a sharp breath. His Luna was magnificent.

Her curves caught the late morning light, her golden skin glowing against the backdrop of sand and sky.

Her full breasts swayed gently as she took her first tentative steps into the surf, and his mouth went dry at the sight of her rounded hips and the soft swell of her ass.

His wolf howled with approval. This was their mate—all curves and strength and beauty.

Slowly, she waded deeper, her eyes never leaving his as the water rose to her thighs,

then her waist. He remained perfectly still, fighting every instinct that demanded he claim her, mark her, and make her undeniably his. The water lapped at her breasts, and his hands fisted beneath the surface.

Not yet.

When she was finally before him, water swirling between their naked bodies, he could hear both their heartbeats racing in perfect synchrony. The ocean seemed to hold its breath, waves gentling around them as if acknowledging the power of the moment.

Her lips parted slightly, but no words came.

None were needed. The water connected them more intimately than any touch could have, currents swirling between them like invisible caresses.

Her blonde hair floated like seaweed around her shoulders, and the ocean breeze brushed across her skin, causing goose bumps to rise on her exposed flesh.

His wolf urged him to close the distance between them and claim what was rightfully his.

"I didn't mean to call you creepy and controlling earlier," she said softly, her sea-blue eyes holding his gaze with surprising steadiness. "I was just overwhelmed."

Her lips suddenly curved into a playful smile that made his blood run hot. "And I'm sorry for suggesting people would think rebuilding the research station was a deal for your benefit. Though if we form a relationship, people will definitely think you did it for me."

"I am doing it for you," he replied without hesitation, his voice a deep rumble that

floated over the gentle lapping of waves.

He watched understanding dawn in her eyes—the realization that this wasn't a casual flirtation or temporary arrangement. His wolf purred with satisfaction as her scent changed, tinged now with excitement and trepidation in equal measure.

"Oh," she whispered, blinking rapidly. "So this is... you're really... I mean, I'll be dating the local billionaire."

He suppressed a smile at her human perception of his wealth. If only she knew the true extent of his power and influence accumulated over centuries rather than decades.

"I'll be in magazines," she continued, her voice rising slightly. "Tabloids. There'll be speculation about me. I hate being the center of attention."

The water around them stirred more forcefully, responding to her agitation. He reached out, his large hands cupping her face, forcing her to focus solely on him.

"I don't want you to think about all that right now," he said firmly, his thumbs brushing across her cheekbones. "What matters is you feeling comfortable and safe here with me."

His wolf prowled beneath his skin, demanding he pull her closer. For once, he didn't fight his instincts. His arms encircled her waist, drawing her naked body against his. The sensation of her soft curves pressing against his hard planes sent electric pulses through his entire being.

The ocean seemed to respond, warm currents swirling around them like invisible hands pushing them together. His Luna's powers were already working in harmony with the water and his powers, even if she didn't realize it yet.

"I'm going to kiss you now," he stated rather than asked, because alphas didn't ask permission—they took what belonged to them. Yet something in her gaze made him pause, waiting for the subtle nod of consent that came a heartbeat later.

When his mouth claimed hers, he felt the centuries of longing dissolve in an instant. Her lips were soft and yielding beneath his, opening with a sigh that he swallowed hungrily. The taste of her—salt and sweetness combined—was more intoxicating than any wine he'd sampled over his long existence.

His hands slid down her back, memorizing the curve of her spine, the dip of her waist, before settling possessively on the swell of her hips.

The water buoyed her against him, creating a weightless sensation as if they were suspended between worlds—neither fully human nor supernatural, but somewhere gloriously in between.

"Mine," he growled against her lips, unable to contain the primal claim any longer.

He felt her shiver in response, her fingers threading through his wet hair, nails scraping lightly against his scalp in a way that made his wolf keen with pleasure. She might be human, but her body recognized what her mind was still processing—they belonged to each other.

"This is surreal," she whispered as she pressed herself more firmly against him. "I just met you."

He laughed, a deep sound that rumbled from his chest. "Time is measured differently for my kind. What humans might take months to decipher, we experience in moments of clarity."

His hands cupped her face again, forcing her to meet his gaze. "Tell me you don't feel

it—the pull between us that defies explanation. Tell me, and I'll let you go."

The words cost him, but he meant them. Alpha he might be, but he would not trap an unwilling Luna by his side.

Her lips parted, but instead of denial, she surged forward and kissed him with such unexpected ferocity that even he—with all his supernatural strength—was momentarily caught off guard.

THIRTEEN

ISOLDE

I solde surged forward and kissed Nereus with a ferocity that even surprised herself.

Her hands tangled further into his dark hair, and she felt him groan into her mouth as his hands tightened on her hips.

The ocean lapped at their bodies, the cool water a sharp contrast to the heat building between them.

His hands soon began roaming her curves like they were mapping out every inch of her.

His lips were soft yet demanding, coaxing a response from her that she didn't know she had in her.

She kissed him back with equal fervor, her fingers tightening their grip on his damp hair, pulling him closer as if she could fuse them together.

"Mine," he growled against her mouth, the word sending a shiver down her spine. It wasn't a question or a request—it was a declaration, firm and unyielding.

Her body reacted before her mind could catch up, arching against him as if to say yours . The water around them seemed to hum, alive with their connection, and for a moment, she felt weightless, suspended in a world that was pure sensation.

His hands slid lower, tracing the curve of her back before settling on the swell of her ass.

He lifted her slightly, the water helping to support her weight, and she wrapped her legs around his waist without thinking.

His lips trailed down her neck, nipping and sucking at her skin, and she let out a breathy moan that was swallowed by the sound of the waves.

"You're perfect," he murmured against her skin, his voice rough with desire. "Every inch of you."

Her mind was a whirlwind of conflicting thoughts— this is crazy, I barely know him, I should stop—but her body didn't care.

It had taken the reins, and it wasn't letting go.

She tilted her head back, giving him better access to her neck, and his teeth grazed her skin, sending a jolt of pleasure through her.

His hand slid between her thighs, and she gasped, her hands gripping his shoulders.

The water made everything feel heightened, the coolness of it contrasting with the heat of his touch.

She let out a strangled sound as his fingers found her most sensitive spot, and he kissed her again, swallowing her moans.

"Relax," he murmured against her lips. "Let me pleasure you."

She didn't have the willpower to argue even if she wanted to.

Her body was on fire, every nerve ending sparking with pleasure as he worked her with skilled fingers.

The ocean waves seemed to pulse in time with her heartbeat, and for the first time since her powers had awakened, she felt in control.

Not of the water, but of her own body and her own emotions.

When she finally came, it was with a cry that echoed across the water, her body arching against his as the waves crested around them. He held her through it, his lips pressing soft kisses against her neck as she trembled in his arms.

"See?" he said, his voice thick with satisfaction. "The ocean didn't react. Together, we can control it."

She blinked up at him, her mind still fuzzy with pleasure. "So you're saying you are my... pacifier?" she teased, her voice breathless.

He chuckled, the sound low and warm. "Among other things."

She laughed, the sound bubbling up from deep within her, and suddenly she felt lighter. Maybe this wasn't so crazy after all.

He reluctantly pulled away from her, his eyes dark with desire.

"Follow me," he said, his voice gentle yet commanding.

He took her hand, leading her back toward the shore, the water lapping at their legs as they moved.

Her heart pounded, her body still humming from his touch, but she didn't resist. There

was something about the way he spoke, the way he moved, that made her want to follow him anywhere.

When they reached the soft sand, he turned to her, his gaze intense.

"Lie down," he instructed, his voice firm but gentle.

She hesitated for a moment, her cheeks flushing as she realized they were both still completely naked, but the look in his eyes made her comply.

She lowered herself onto the sand, the grains warm beneath her skin, and he followed, caging her in with his powerful body.

His lips found hers again, and she melted into the kiss, her hands tangling in his hair.

His hands roamed over her body, exploring every curve as if he were memorizing her.

She gasped as his mouth trailed down her neck, his teeth grazing her skin in a way that sent shivers down her spine.

"You're so beautiful," he murmured against her skin.

Her breath hitched as his lips found her breasts, his tongue flicking over her hard nipples. She arched into him, a moan escaping her lips as he teased her, his hands sliding down to grip her hips. "Nereus," she whispered, her voice trembling with need.

He didn't respond with words, but his actions spoke volumes. His mouth trailed lower, leaving a trail of kisses down her stomach until he reached the apex of her thighs. She tensed, her heart racing as he settled between her legs, his breath warm

against her sensitive skin.

"Just relax," he murmured, his voice a low growl that sent a thrill through her.

His tongue flicked over her folds, slow and deliberate, and she gasped, her hands clutching at the sand. His tongue movements grew more urgent as he explored her.

His fingers soon slid into her depths, and he continued to lick and suck her in rhythm. Her mind went blank, her body consumed by the sensations he was eliciting. She had never felt anything like this, and it was overwhelming in the best possible way.

"Nereus," she moaned. "Please..."

He didn't need to be told twice. His movements became more intense, his fingers curling inside her as his tongue worked her clit with relentless precision.

Her body tensed, her back arching off the sand as pleasure built within her, coiling tighter and tighter until it finally snapped.

She cried out her pleasure, her body shuddering as wave after wave of ecstasy washed over her.

He didn't stop until she was completely spent, her body limp against the sand. He kissed his way back up her body, his lips brushing against hers as he settled beside her. "How was that?" he asked, his voice teasing but laced with genuine concern.

She blinked at him, her mind still hazy with pleasure. "I... I don't even have words," she admitted, her voice breathless.

He smirked, clearly pleased with himself. "Good. Because I'm not done."

Her eyes widened. But before she could respond, he was on top of her kissing her again, his hands roaming her body once more. Her heart raced, but she didn't pull away. She was completely under his spell, and she didn't want it to end.

She let out a gasp as she felt his hard member press against her slick entrance.

Her body trembled with anticipation. Her heart pounded in her chest like the rhythm of the ocean waves crashing nearby.

She looked at him, her eyes wide with a mix of excitement and nervousness.

His intense gaze bore into hers, his alpha presence making her feel both vulnerable and safe at the same time.

"Are you ready for this?" he asked, his voice deep and husky, laced with a primal need that sent shivers through her.

She nodded, her voice a whisper. "Yes."

He didn't need any further encouragement. Slowly, he entered her, his large member filling her completely. She gasped again, her hands gripping his muscular shoulders for support. The sensation was intense, a delicious blend of pleasure and fullness that made her head spin.

"Oh, Nereus," she moaned, her voice trembling with desire. "You feel... amazing."

"You're so tight and perfect," he growled, his voice rough with restraint.

He began to move, thrusting in and out of her with a slow, deliberate rhythm that made her feel every inch of him.

She moaned, her body arching into his, her hands sliding down to his hips to pull him closer.

The heat between them was undeniable, their bodies moving together in a primal dance that seemed to sync with the rhythm of the ocean waves.

"Faster," she begged, her voice breathless. "Please, Nereus."

He obliged, his thrusts becoming faster and deeper, each one driving her closer to the edge. She matched his rhythm, her hips moving with his in a perfect sync. The pleasure built with each thrust, coiling tighter within her until she felt like she was going to explode.

"You're all mine," he growled, his voice a fierce declaration as his thrusts became more urgent.

His words sent a thrill rushing through her, the intensity of his claim only heightening her pleasure. "Yes," she moaned, her voice filled with abandon.

She could feel his control slipping, his movements becoming more primal as he chased his own pleasure. The sound of their bodies meeting, the feel of his cock filling her so completely, the heat of his skin against hers—it was too overwhelming, too intense, and too perfect.

"I'm close," she gasped, her nails digging into his back as the pleasure threatened to consume her.

"Let me feel you come undone, Isolde," he commanded softly.

His words were her undoing. With a cry that echoed across the beach, she came, her body arching off the sand as waves of pure ecstasy washed over her body. The ocean

responded to her pleasure, the waves rising slightly in harmony with her climax.

His control soon snapped completely. With a loud groan, he drove deep into her depths. His powerful orgasm tore through him as he spilled his seed into her. His body shuddered with the force, gripping her hips tightly as he held her close.

For a moment, they stayed like that, their bodies still connected, their breaths mingling as they both came down from their intense highs. She felt a sense of contentment wash over her.

"That was..." she began, her voice soft and dreamy.

"Incredible," he finished for her, his voice filled with a deep satisfaction. He looked down at her, his eyes filled with a warmth that made her heart skip a beat. "You are incredible."

She reached up, her fingers brushing against his cheek as she looked into his eyes. "You're not so bad yourself," she teased, her voice playful.

He chuckled. "Not so bad? I'll take that as a compliment."

She laughed, feeling light and happy. "You should," she said, her voice filled with unexpected affection. "Because I've never met anyone like you."

"Same," he said, his voice filled with sincerity. "You're one of a kind, Isolde."

She smiled, her cheeks flushing with a mix of warmth and shyness. "You know, I've never felt anything like this."

"Good," he said, his voice firm but gentle. "Because I plan on making you feel this way every day."

His words sent warmth through her, the intensity of his promise making her feel both cherished and desired. And in that moment, as they lay together on the sand, she believed him. She didn't know what the future held, but she knew one thing for certain—she was falling for him, hard and fast.

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FOURTEEN

NEREUS

N ereus watched the sun play across Isolde's curves as she slipped back into her jeans, admiring how the denim hugged her generous hips.

The sight was almost enough to make him want to strip her down again, but he restrained himself.

There would be time for that later. Right now, his Luna needed guidance.

He pulled on his own jeans but left his chest bare, enjoying the way her eyes kept drifting to his muscles.

"Your magical power isn't your enemy," he said, stepping closer to her. The ocean breeze tousled her blonde hair, and he fought the urge to run his fingers through it. "It's an extension of you."

"Easy for you to say." She buttoned her light blue blouse, which perfectly matched her eyes. "You've had centuries to practice."

Nereus smirked. "Are you calling me old?"

"If the shoe fits..." Her teasing smile sent a jolt straight to his core.

He moved behind her, placing his hands on her shoulders. Her body immediately

responded, leaning back against his chest.

"Feel the water," he murmured against her ear. "Don't fight it. The ocean reacts to your emotions because it recognizes you as its daughter."

"That's what scares me." Her voice was but a whisper. "What if I get upset again and hurt someone?"

He turned her to face him, tipping her chin up with his finger. "That's why we're going to practice. Now."

He guided her to the water's edge where gentle waves lapped at their feet. The tide was coming in soon, perfect for what he had in mind.

"Close your eyes," he commanded. When she hesitated, he added more firmly, "Trust me, Isolde."

She complied, her lashes fluttering shut against her cheeks.

"Now, feel the pull of the tide. It's already moving with natural forces. Your job isn't to create the power, but to direct what's already there."

He placed his hand on her lower back, feeling her tremble slightly under his touch. The contact sent a surge through his own power, the ancient water magic that had been his birthright.

"Raise your hand," he instructed, his voice low and authoritative. "Palm facing the ocean."

She extended her arm, hesitant at first, then with more conviction.

"Now, visualize the water rising to meet you. Don't command it—invite it."

A small ripple appeared, different from the natural pattern of the waves. It moved toward shore with purpose.

"Yes," he encouraged, feeling pride swell in his chest. "That's it."

The water climbed, forming a column about a foot high.

"I'm doing it!" Her eyes flew open in wonder, and for a second, the water wavered.

"Focus," he said, pressing his body against her back, his arms encircling her waist. "Feel how our powers mesh together."

The sensation was intoxicating. Where his skin met hers, energy flowed between them, amplifying and harmonizing. The water column grew higher, more stable.

"This is..." she breathed.

"Us," he finished. "Together. This is what the mate bond means. My strength flows into you, yours into me."

He guided her other hand up, and the water split into two dancing columns.

"When you feel yourself losing control," he continued, "remember this sensation. Our connection acts as an anchor."

She turned her head, her lips tantalizingly close to his. "So I just need to keep you around all the time?"

"That's the plan," he replied with a wolfish grin.

The water columns wobbled as she laughed softly, then collapsed with a splash.

"That was simply incredible," she said, turning fully in his arms.

He brushed her damp hair from her face. "No, you're simply incredible. And this is just the beginning of what you'll be able to do."

He immediately sensed a shift in her energy.

Her sea-blue eyes clouded over, her shoulders slumping as the reality of her newfound powers crashed over her.

The sight of his Luna in distress triggered every protective instinct in his body.

He wrapped his arms tighter around her, refusing to let her spiral into darkness.

"I don't think I can stay here near the water," she whispered, her gaze fixed on him. "I should really go inland, somewhere far from the ocean."

He felt his wolf bristle at the mere suggestion. His Luna, leaving? Unacceptable.

"No." The single syllable held the weight of his centuries of authority. "You will not run from who you are."

"But I destroyed?—"

"You're not listening." He cut her off abruptly. "Running from your true nature isn't the answer. It never is."

Her full lips trembled slightly, and he fought the urge to claim them with his own. Later, he promised his wolf. First, she needed to understand.

"Your powers aren't just about destruction, Isolde." He softened his tone. "They're about life. About healing. About harmony with the very essence of this world."

The wind picked up around them, tousling her hair. He brushed a strand from her face, allowing his fingers to linger against her cheek. The contact sent a current of electricity between them—their mate bond strengthening with each touch.

"But the research station?—"

"Is just a building," he finished for her. "No one was hurt. And I'd bet every dollar in my accounts that all your precious research was backed up to those cloud servers you scientists love so much."

A hint of a smile tugged on her lips, and he pressed his advantage.

"Besides," he continued, his thumb tracing the curve of her jaw, "I've already directed my team to rebuild the station. Better equipment, expanded facilities—whatever you need."

"You can't just throw money at everything," she countered, but there was no heat in her words.

He chuckled, a deep rumble that originated from his chest. "Watch me."

He pulled her closer, reveling in how perfectly her curves fit against his hard frame. His wolf howled in approval at the contact. This woman—this magnificent, powerful creature—was meant for him. Had always been meant for him.

"Think of what you'll be able to accomplish now," he murmured against her ear, feeling her shiver in response. "Not just with a new facility, but with your powers."

She pulled back slightly, curiosity brightening her eyes. "What do you mean?"

"The connection you've always felt with the ocean?"

It wasn't just passion or interest—it was your power calling out to you.

"His arms tightened further around her waist, anchoring her to him.

"Imagine what you could do for marine conservation now.

Healing ocean life, redirecting pollution, and guiding endangered species to safety. "

He watched her face as the possibilities dawned on her, satisfaction flooding his veins. This was his Luna—intelligent, compassionate, and powerful. He would help her see her full potential, even if he had to drag her kicking and screaming toward it.

"You really think I could do all that?"

"I know you can." He pressed his forehead against hers, their breath mingling in the salt-laden air. "But not if you're hiding in some landlocked state, pretending to be something you're not."

Her hands came up to rest against his bare chest, and he felt her power humming just beneath her skin, responding to his own.

"I'm scared, though," she admitted, vulnerability shining in her eyes.

"You don't have to be. I'll help you through it and keep you safe. I promise."

He lowered his head, capturing her lips in a kiss that was equal parts dominance and tenderness. He poured all of himself into it, branding her as his. When he finally

pulled away, her cheeks were flushed and her breathing unsteady.

"Stay with me," he commanded, though he knew the decision had to be hers. "Stay and become who you were always meant to be. My Luna. The ocean's daughter. A force of nature in your own right."

The lingering hesitation in her frustrated him, yet he understood her fear. Power like hers—raw, untamed, magnificent—would terrify anyone who didn't understand its purpose.

"You might think your powers are a curse," he stated, his eyes locking onto hers. "But they're not. They're a gift."

Her piercing blue eyes bore into his, reflecting both doubt and yearning. "A gift that destroys."

"A gift that will rebuild better than before." He reached for her hand, savoring the electric spark where their skin connected. His wolf growled approvingly within him. "Walk with me."

He didn't phrase it as a question. Alphas didn't typically ask; they directed. Yet he was careful not to drag her, allowing her to follow his lead willingly. That was the delicate balance he needed to master with his Luna—guiding without forcing.

The private stretch of beach before them was pristine, untouched by the pollution that plagued so many coastlines. He had made certain of that over the centuries, using his influence and power to protect what belonged to the Seafang pack.

"Your powers are essential to us," he explained, his voice deep and unwavering. "A pack without a Luna is vulnerable. We need your strength."

"What if I can't learn to control it?" Her curves brushed against his side as she walked, sending a rush of heat through his body.

"You will." He didn't entertain her doubt. "Because you must."

They rounded a bend in the shoreline, and he immediately sensed distress in the water. His heightened senses detected it before his eyes confirmed—a young seal pup stranded on the rocks, bleeding from a gash on its side.

Perfect. The universe had provided exactly what he needed to show her.

"Look," he directed, pointing toward the injured creature. "The ocean has brought you a test."

She gasped, immediately moving toward the pup. Her instinctive compassion was exactly what made her the ideal Luna—strong yet empathetic, powerful yet gentle.

"Stop," he commanded when she was halfway to the rocks. "This isn't about rushing in with human help. Use what's inside you."

She froze, confusion clouding her features. "I don't know how."

"Yes, you do." He moved behind her, his chest against her back, his hands on her hips. The contact sent his wolf into a frenzy of possessive pleasure. "Feel the water calling to you. It wants to help its creatures. You're just the conduit."

Her body tensed against his, then gradually relaxed as she closed her eyes. He felt the surge of power building between them—his ancient magic recognizing and amplifying hers.

"That's it," he murmured against her ear, inhaling the intoxicating scent of her skin.

"Direct the water to heal, not harm."

The tide shifted subtly, water swirling around the rocks where the pup lay whimpering. A luminescent blue glow emanated from the water as it encircled the creature, bathing the wound in light.

"It's working," she whispered, her voice filled with wonder.

He felt pride swell within him. His Luna was extraordinary—learning in days what had taken others years to master. The mate bond between them intensified the sensation, creating a feedback loop of power and pleasure.

The seal pup's cries quieted as the water cleansed and sealed its wound. When the glow subsided, the creature lifted its head, alert and healed.

"I did that?" She turned in his arms, her eyes wide with amazement.

"You did." He couldn't resist capturing her lips in a possessive kiss, claiming her triumph as their shared victory. When he pulled back, she was breathless.

The seal pup barked once before sliding back into the waves, disappearing beneath the surface.

"The ocean isn't just your workplace, Isolde.

It's part of you. Part of us." His hands slid down to cup her generous curves, appreciating the softness that his wolf found so appealing.

"Every creature in these waters will benefit from your protection.

Every coral reef will flourish under your care. "

Her eyes sparkled. "My research—I could do so much more now."

"Exactly." He smiled, a rare expression that transformed his usually hard features. "Your powers serve the pack, the ocean, your work, and yourself. All aligned in perfect harmony."

"I've been fighting it," she admitted, her hands resting on his chest. "Afraid of what I might do."

"Fear has its place," he acknowledged, his thumb tracing her lower lip. "But it shouldn't stop you from becoming what you were born to be—my Luna, powerful and unafraid."

The ocean breeze swirled around them, responding to her acceptance and newfound confidence. He felt the shift in her energy—no longer chaotic and resistant, but flowing and purposeful.

"I'm ready," she declared, her chin lifting with determination that made his inner wolf howl with delight. "Teach me everything."

The alpha in him thrilled at her submission to his guidance, while the man appreciated her strength. She would be no weak Luna, but a true partner—exactly what he needed after centuries of solitary rule.

"We start now," he growled, pulling her flush against his body. "And I guarantee, you'll enjoy every lesson."

FIFTEEN

ISOLDE

I solde closed the door to her guest suite and leaned against it for a moment. Her thirtieth birthday was definitely one she would never forget. Magical water powers awakening inside of her, a devastating tidal wave, and the most passionate sex she ever had.

The plush carpet cushioned her bare feet as she padded across the room to the enormous bay window overlooking the moonlit ocean. The water looked deceptively calm now, betraying nothing of the chaos it had caused at midnight—the chaos she had caused.

She pressed her fingertips against the cool glass. "I can command and manipulate water," she whispered to her reflection. "All because I turned thirty."

The ridiculousness of the statement hung in the air. Yet she couldn't deny what she had seen on the beach today—her power coaxing the ocean water to rise and to heal that injured seal—with Nereus guiding her every step of the way.

Nereus. Her body flushed hot at the memory of him on the beach, water droplets sliding down the hard planes of his chest, his hands confident on her body. She had never been so bold with anyone before. Something about him made her feel both reckless and safe at the same time.

Another sudden and unexpected memory surfaced—Lorelei's strange behavior after

her thirtieth birthday nine months ago. The way the earth seemed to shake around her at her birthday party. Those comments months later about "finding her power" and her whirlwind romance with Draken.

Isolde grabbed her new phone from the nightstand and entered Lorelei's number into the keypad. She hesitated for a few seconds, then hit the call button before she could talk herself out of it.

Lorelei's familiar voice came through after three rings. "Hello?"

Isolde sank onto the edge of the bed. "Hi, Lorelei, it's Izzy.

I lost my phone yesterday, so I'm calling from this temporary one I got.

" She half-lied so that she wouldn't send Lorelei into immediate panic.

"I'm sorry for calling at this hour. I just..

. something weird happened and I thought of you. "

"Weird how?" Lorelei's tone sharpened with interest.

"Well, there was this freak wave that hit the research station yesterday. Completely destroyed it." Isolde twisted a strand of hair around her finger. "I was there when it happened. Someone rescued me."

"Are you hurt?" Alarm colored Lorelei's voice.

"No, I'm fine." Isolde bit her lip, suddenly uncertain how much to reveal. "But something's happening to me. With water. It's like—" She paused, searching for words that wouldn't sound completely insane. "It's responding to me somehow."

The silence on the other end stretched long enough that Isolde checked to see if the call had dropped. Then Lorelei exhaled audibly.

"It started at midnight on your birthday, didn't it?"

Isolde's heart skipped. "How did you know?"

"Because the same thing happened to me, Izzy. With earth and plants instead of water." Lorelei's voice softened. "Remember all those weird growth spurts in my garden when you saw me three months ago? The plants that shouldn't have survived but thrived? That wasn't just good gardening."

"So I'm not losing my mind?" Isolde pressed her hand to her forehead.

Lorelei laughed. "Definitely not. I had the same freak-out. But it gets easier, I promise. You learn to control it."

"How?" Isolde demanded, leaning forward. "How did you figure it out?"

"Draken helped me." Something in Lorelei's voice changed and became warmer. "He understood what was happening to me before I did. He showed me how to channel it. To use it when I need it rather than having it burst out when my emotions run high."

Isolde thought of Nereus earlier today near the ocean, his steady hands guiding hers as she manipulated the water. The instant calm she felt when he was near. The way the ocean seemed to respond to them when together, their powers combined into one stronger force.

"Izzy?" Lorelei prompted. "Are you somewhere safe? Do you need me to come get you?"

"No, I'm safe." Isolde glanced around the luxurious suite. "I'm staying with... a friend. Someone who's helping me figure this out."

"A friend, huh?" Lorelei's tone turned teasing. "Must be some friend if you're trusting them with this."

Before Isolde could respond, a muffled voice called out on Lorelei's end.

"Sorry, Izzy—Draken needs me for something. Pack business." Lorelei sighed. "Let's talk more soon? I want to hear everything."

"Pack business?" Isolde repeated, the word triggering something in her memory.

"I'll explain more later. Just—trust your instincts, okay? And your... friend. If they're helping you control this, they probably know more than they're letting on."

The call ended before Isolde could ask more questions. She stared at her phone, her mind racing with connections she was beginning to make.

Luna. Pack. Powers awakening at thirty. It couldn't be a coincidence that Lorelei had experienced something so similar.

Isolde flopped back on the bed, her heart pounding in her chest. The water in the decorative fountain across the room rippled in response to her agitation.

She took a deep breath, trying the centering technique Nereus had shown her earlier.

The water calmed within seconds. She smiled, a small triumph in a day filled with revelations. Maybe she could do this after all.

Five days later, Isolde scrunched her toes into the wet sand, focusing on the gentle

push and pull of the tide. Several days of intense practice had strengthened her connection to the water, but mastering control was like trying to harness a wild stallion – thrilling yet frightening.

"Again," Nereus instructed from behind her, his deep voice carrying over the crash of waves. "This time, try to separate the water into three distinct columns."

She inhaled deeply, centering herself before extending her hands.

The ocean responded immediately, rising in a single impressive wall before trembling and dividing into the requested columns.

Sweat beaded on her forehead as she maintained the formation for thirty seconds before releasing it with a gasp.

"I did it!" She spun around, her face flushed with triumph.

Nereus's usually stern expression softened, the corners of his mouth lifting. "Impressive. You're progressing faster than expected."

His praise warmed her more than it should have. Their physical connection had been explosive from the start, but these small moments of approval felt just as intoxicating.

Their training session was interrupted by a pack member jogging down the private beach path. The young man's eyes flickered to Isolde before addressing Nereus directly.

"Your Highness, the pack meeting can't proceed without you."

"I'll be there shortly," Nereus dismissed him with a curt nod.

The pack member departed with a barely concealed glare at Isolde. It was the fifth such interaction she had witnessed today alone.

"They hate me," she murmured once they were alone. "Every single one except Xavier and Damien."

Nereus wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her against his hard chest. "They fear what they don't understand. Once I formally announce you as Luna and we complete the mating ritual, they'll recognize your place."

She bit her tongue against the obvious follow-up question: when exactly would that happen? The uncertainty of her position and future was becoming increasingly uncomfortable.

"I sense your frustration," he said, tilting her chin up. His blue eyes studied her face with unnerving intensity. "Your thoughts are practically screaming at me."

"Mind-reading too? That's cheating." She attempted to lighten the mood, not wanting to push him like she had on her birthday.

His thumb traced her lower lip. "Tomorrow, I'm taking you somewhere special. Just the two of us, no pack business, no interruptions."

"Where?" Excitement bubbled up inside her.

"It's a surprise." He leaned down, capturing her mouth in a commanding kiss that made her knees weak. "Consider it part of your training."

When he pulled away, she noticed the waves had risen around their ankles in response to her arousal. Nereus smiled knowingly.

"Your power responds to all strong emotions, not just anger." His hand slid down her back possessively. "Remember that."

As they walked back toward the castle, she watched a group of pack members dispersing ahead of them, their whispered conversations falling silent at her approach. The walls they built against her were as palpable as physical barriers.

Nereus must have sensed her unease. His arm tightened around her shoulders, and he pressed his lips to her temple. "Patience, little Luna. Everything worth having requires time."

She nodded, but inside she wondered how much longer she could remain in this limbo – neither fully accepted as Luna nor free to return to her former life. Tomorrow's surprise couldn't come soon enough.

The next morning, Nereus led Isolde through a dense stretch of forest in his territory, his hand warm and firm around hers.

The air was thick with the scent of pine and damp earth, and the sunlight filtered through the canopy in golden streaks.

Isolde's curiosity buzzed beneath her skin, but Nereus had been tight-lipped about their destination, only offering her a sly smirk when she pressed him for details.

"You're really not going to tell me where we're going?" she asked, her voice teasing as she stepped over a gnarled root.

"Patience," he said, his tone low and amused. "You'll see soon enough."

After a while, the trees began to thin, and the sound of rushing water grew louder. They emerged into a small clearing, and Isolde's breath caught. Before them was a

cave entrance, partially hidden by a curtain of ivy. The air around it was warm and humid, carrying the faint scent of minerals.

"A cave?" she asked, raising an eyebrow. "This is your big surprise?"

His lips curved into a wolfish grin. "Trust me."

He pulled aside the ivy and gestured for her to step inside.

The cave was dimly lit by sunlight filtering through cracks in the rock, but as they ventured deeper, the space opened into a breathtaking chamber.

The walls glistened with moisture, and in the center was a natural hot spring, its surface steaming gently.

The water was a deep, inviting blue, and the air was thick with warmth.

"Oh," she breathed, her eyes wide. "This is... beautiful."

He stepped up behind her, his hands resting on her hips. "I thought you might like it. It's one of my favorite places in the territory. The water's infused with minerals—good for healing and relaxing. And it's completely private."

She turned to face him, her heart skipping a beat at the intensity in his gaze. "Private, huh? What exactly are you planning?"

His hands slid up her sides, sending a shiver through her. "I think you know."

She laughed, a soft, breathy sound. "You're impossible."

"And yet, you're here with me." He leaned down, his lips brushing her ear. "Take off

your clothes, Isolde."

Her breath hitched, but she didn't hesitate.

There was something about the way he commanded her that made her want to obey and to give herself over to him completely.

She reached for the hem of her shirt, pulling it over her head, and then stepped out of her shorts.

He watched her with a predatory gaze, his eyes darkening as she stood before him in nothing but her bra and panties.

"All of it," he said, his voice rough with need.

She unhooked her bra and let it fall to the ground, then slid her panties down her legs.

The air was warm against her skin, but it was nothing compared to the heat of his stare.

He stepped closer, his hands skimming over her curves, and her body responded instantly, a flush of desire spreading through her.

"You're so beautiful," he murmured, his fingers tracing the curve of her hips. "Every single inch of you."

She reached for the hem of his shirt, tugging it up. "Your turn."

He let her strip him, his muscles flexing as she pulled his shirt over his head and undid his pants.

When he stood before her, completely bare, she couldn't help but admire him—the broad shoulders, the defined chest, the powerful legs, the...

large throbbing member. He was every bit the alpha male, and it made her pulse race.

He took her hand and led her to the edge of the hot spring. "Ready?"

She nodded, and he stepped into the water, pulling her in after him. The heat enveloped her, soothing and invigorating at the same time. She sank into the water, letting it lap at her skin. He soon pulled her close, his hands roaming over her body.

"You're mine, Isolde," he said, his voice low and possessive. "Mine to protect, mine to cherish, and mine to pleasure."

She shivered at his words, her body leaning into his touch. "Nereus..."

He kissed her then, deep and demanding, his tongue sliding against hers. She moaned into his mouth, her hands gripping his shoulders as he pressed her against the edge of the pool. His hands were everywhere, exploring her, teasing her, until she was trembling with need.

"Please," she whispered, her voice breaking.

He didn't make her wait. He lifted her, positioning her so she could wrap her legs around his waist, and then he was inside her, filling her completely.

She cried out with pleasure, her nails digging into him as he began to move.

His thrusts were slow and deliberate at first, drawing out her pleasure.

But as her moans grew louder and her breathing more ragged, his thrusts became

faster and harder.

The water rippled around them, responding to the intensity of their connection. She clung to him, her body trembling as pleasure built inside her, sharp and sweet. His breath was hot against her neck, his growls sending shivers down her spine.

"That's it," he murmured. "Come for me, Isolde."

Her climax soon hit her like a freight train, her body convulsing around him as wave after wave of pure ecstasy washed over her.

He soon followed her, his own release shuddering through him as he held her close.

For a moment, they stayed like that, their bodies pressed tightly together and their breaths mingling like one.

When he finally pulled back, his eyes were soft, a rare vulnerability in his gaze. "You're everything, Isolde. Everything I've waited for all this time."

She smiled, her heart swelling with emotion. "And you're everything I never knew I needed."

SIXTEEN

NEREUS

N ereus watched Isolde emerge from the hot spring. Water cascaded down her bare curves, every droplet accentuating her beautiful body. He fought the urge to pull her back into his arms, knowing they needed to leave soon.

As they dressed in silence, Nereus sensed the tension building between them. He had known all week something was bothering Isolde, her frustration growing palpable with each passing day. It's why he had brought her here today - hoping to ease whatever troubled her.

Isolde turned to face him, her sea-blue eyes stormy. "Nereus, we need to talk."

He nodded, bracing himself. "What's on your mind?"

"Why haven't you made the formal announcement to the pack that I'm the Luna?" she asked, her voice steady but tinged with hurt. "Or claimed me properly as your mate?"

He inhaled sharply, caught off guard by her directness. His wolf howled inside, eager to claim what was rightfully theirs. But the man in him knew better than to rush.

"I was waiting for you to fully understand and accept your role as Luna," he explained, his tone gentle yet firm. "And to learn to control your powers before thrusting you into pack politics."

Her brow furrowed. "And the mating ritual?"

He stepped closer, cupping her face in his hands. "It's not some barbaric ritual done solely for my benefit, Isolde. It's a mutual bonding, one that should only happen when both parties feel the mate bond."

He paused, struggling to find the right words. "But you're human. I... I'm not sure if you'll ever feel it the way my shifter nature does."

His heart clenched at the thought. The mate bond sang in his veins from the moment he had first laid eyes on her. But could a human truly comprehend the depth of that connection?

His thumbs stroked her cheeks softly. "I don't want to rush you, even though my wolf aches for it. You deserve to come into this on your own terms."

He searched her eyes, hoping she understood. He had already waited so long for her to come into his life; he could wait a little longer for the claiming if it meant doing this right.

Her blue eyes bore into his, and for a moment, he thought he saw a flicker of uncertainty. But then her chin lifted, and her lips curved into a small, defiant smile.

"You think you know what I feel, don't you?" Her voice was soft but firm, and it sent a jolt through him. "Because I'm human, you assume I don't understand this... this pull between us. That I can't feel it the way you do."

His brow furrowed. "Isolde?—"

"No," she interrupted, her hands coming up to cover his where they still cupped her face.

"You don't get to decide what I feel or what I know.

Just because I don't have a wolf inside me doesn't mean I'm blind to this.

I feel it, Nereus. Every time you're near me, it's like something is pulling me toward you.

I don't need a fancy name for it to know it's real. "

His breath caught in his chest. Her words were like a balm to the restless ache in his soul, and he felt the weight of his own doubts lift. She felt it. She understood. His wolf howled in triumph, and he couldn't stop the grin that spread across his face.

"You're right," he said, his voice rough with emotion. "I underestimated you. I thought I had to explain it, to guide you, but you've been feeling it all along, haven't you?"

She nodded, her eyes shining with a mix of determination and vulnerability. "I don't know everything about your world or your pack, but I know this. I know us ."

Pride surged through him, fierce and unrelenting. This woman, his Luna, was everything he had ever hoped for and more. She was strong, intelligent, and unafraid to challenge him. She was his equal in every way.

"You're magnificent," he murmured, his hands sliding to her shoulders, pulling her closer. "You have no idea how much I've needed someone like you. Someone who isn't afraid to stand up to me, to tell me when I'm wrong or when I'm not seeing things clearly."

She smiled, her fingers tracing the line of his jaw. "Well, get used to it because I want to be with you."

His wolf growled with approval, and he couldn't resist the urge to kiss her. His lips crashed against hers, claiming her with a hunger that had only grown stronger since the moment they met. She responded with equal fervor, her hands tangling in his hair as she pressed herself against him.

When they finally broke apart, he rested his forehead against hers, his heart pounding in his chest. "You're mine, Isolde," he growled softly. "And I'm yours. No matter what happens, we're in this together."

She smiled again, her eyes sparkling with mischief. "Good. Because I'm not letting you off the hook that easily. You've still got a lot to teach me, and I'm not going to let you slack off any time soon."

He chuckled, the sound deep and rich. "Oh, I'll teach you, Luna. But don't think for a second that you won't be teaching me a thing or two as well."

Her laughter echoed through the cave, and after so many centuries, Nereus felt a sense of peace settle over him. He had found his mate, his equal, and together, they would face whatever challenges lay ahead.

He wrapped his arms tighter around her, her skin warm against his. The steam from the hot spring curled around them like a private cocoon. His chest swelled with pride and contentment, his wolf humming in agreement. Isolde was everything he had been waiting for, and more.

Suddenly, the faintest shift in the air caught his attention. A low growl rumbled in his chest, his instincts screaming danger. Isolde tensed in his arms, her eyes widening as she sensed it too.

"Nereus, what?—"

He didn't let her finish. "Get behind me," he ordered, his voice a sharp command as he stepped in front of her, shielding her body with his own.

The cave darkened as two wolf shifters prowled in, their eyes glowing with malice. Nereus didn't recognize them.

"So, the rumors are true," one of them sneered, his gaze flicking to Isolde. "The Alpha Prince has found his Luna. And she's... human." He laughed, a cruel, mocking sound. "How pathetic."

Nereus's blood boiled, but he kept his focus, his muscles coiled and ready. "You think attacking an alpha in his own territory is a good idea? You're clearly idiots."

The second shifter lunged first, his movements quick but predictable. Nereus shifted mid-step, his body erupting into his massive wolf form, fur bristling and teeth bared. He met the attacker head-on, their bodies colliding with a bone-jarring crash.

Nereus's teeth sank into the rogue's shoulder, the metallic tang of blood filling his mouth. The shifter yelped, his claws scrabbling against Nereus's sides, but he held firm, shaking his head violently until the rogue was thrown to the ground.

Out of the corner of his eye, Nereus saw the first shifter darting toward Isolde.

His wolf howled in fury, but before he could intervene, Isolde raised her hands.

The water from the hot spring surged upward, a crystalline whip that lashed out and struck the shifter square in the chest. He stumbled back, his expression a mix of shock and rage.

"Didn't see that coming, did you?" Isolde taunted, her voice steady despite the intense situation. She flicked her wrist, and the water coiled around the shifter's legs, yanking

him off balance.

Pride surged through Nereus, fierce and unrelenting.

His Luna was proving herself, and it was the hottest and most invigorating thing he had ever seen.

He turned his attention back to the injured shifter at his paws, who was trying to crawl away.

With a snarl, Nereus pounced, pinning him down with one massive paw.

"You should've stayed away," Nereus growled telepathically. He leaned in, his teeth inches from the shifter's throat. "Now, get out of my sight before I change my mind about ending you. But be sure, if I catch you near my territory again, I'll rip your throat out."

The shifter whimpered, scrambling to his feet and limping toward the cave's entrance. His companion, still tangled in Isolde's water bonds, managed to break free and bolted after the injured shifter before Nereus could attack him too.

Nereus shifted back into his human form, breathing heavily as he turned to Isolde. She stood tall, her hands still glowing faintly with the residual energy of her magic. Her hair was wild, her eyes blazing with a mix of fear and triumph.

"That was incredible," he said, his deep voice rough as he closed the distance between them. He cupped her face in his hands. "You fought like a true warrior."

She smirked, though her hands trembled slightly as she rested them on his chest. "You're not the only one with tricks up your sleeve."

He laughed, capturing her hands in his. "I think you just officially earned your place as my Luna."

Her smile softened. "I fought for you," she whispered. "For us ."

His chest tightened, his wolf howling with delight. He pulled her closer, his lips brushing against her soft ones. "And I'll fight for you always, Isolde. My Luna. My true mate."

Her breath hitched, and then she kissed him, her lips fierce and demanding.

He responded in kind, his large hands sliding down to her waist, pulling her even closer until there was no space between them.

The adrenaline from the fight morphed into something hotter, something primal, and he knew that everything between them had shifted.

She wasn't just his mate—she was his future.

Before long, Nereus draped his arm protectively around Isolde's shoulders as they left the cave.

The memory of her wielding the water with such precision and power still burned brightly in his mind.

She had fought like a warrior, like his warrior, and the sense of pride mingled with something deeper—something that made his wolf growl with approval.

She wasn't just his mate, she was his true equal, and the thought of her standing by his side as Luna filled him with a fierce, unrelenting satisfaction.

The forest path back to the castle was quiet, the only sounds the crunch of their footsteps on the fallen leaves and the distant crash of waves against the shore.

His thoughts, however, were anything but quiet.

The attack in the cave had shaken him, and not just because it had been unexpected.

Whoever those shifters were, they spoke about a rumor about his Luna.

"You're quiet," she said, her voice cutting through his thoughts. She glanced up at him, her eyes glinting with curiosity. "Already plotting how to protect me from the next ambush?"

He couldn't help the smirk that tugged at his lips. "Always. But I'm more impressed you didn't scream and run the first chance you got. Most humans would've bolted at the sight of my wolf tearing into someone like that."

She rolled her eyes, but there was a playful spark in her expression. "Please. I've seen worse in documentaries about great white sharks. Besides, you're kind of hot when you go all alpha on someone."

A low chuckle rumbled from his chest. "Kind of hot, huh?"

"Don't let it go to your head," she teased, nudging him with her elbow.

He laughed outright at that, the sound echoing through the trees. "I won't as long as you promise to keep fighting by my side like you did back there."

Her expression softened, and she leaned into him, her warmth seeping into his side. "I wasn't going to let them hurt you. Or me. I'm not just some damsel in distress, you know."

"I know," he said, his voice turning serious. He stopped walking, turning to face her fully. "That's what makes you so incredible. You're strong, Isolde. But I need to figure out who those shifters were and why they came after us. I can't promise they'll be the last ones to try something."

Her brow furrowed, but she didn't pull away. "You think this is bigger than just a random attack?"

"I don't know yet," he said, his jaw tightening. "They knew about you. They called you human like it was an insult. And they were bold enough to come onto my territory."

She nodded slowly, her expression thoughtful. "So, what's the plan? I'm guessing you're not just going to sit around and wait for them to come back."

He smirked, the alpha in him relishing her sharp mind. "No, I'm not. I need to find Damien. He's got connections and resources I don't. If anyone can figure out who's behind this, it's him. But first..." He leaned in and kissed her gently. "First, I need to make sure you're safe."

She pulled back slightly, her eyes narrowing in a mock glare. "I thought we already established I can take care of myself."

"You can," he agreed, his voice low and heated. "But that doesn't mean I'm not going to do everything in my power to protect you. You're my Luna, Isolde. And I'll fight for you until my last breath."

Her breath hitched, and she rested her hands on his chest.

"But we need to move fast," he continued firmly. "The longer we wait to officially mark you as my Luna, the more vulnerable you are. And the weaker I become."

She nodded, her expression resolute. "Then you better talk to Damien."

"I will. You're everything I've ever wanted, Isolde. And I'm not letting anyone take you from me."

He took her hand, intertwining their fingers as they continued down the path toward the castle.

His mind started racing as he tried to piece together the puzzle of the attack.

His protective nature flared as he thought about the threats they were now facing.

He needed to get to the bottom of this before it was too late.

SEVENTEEN

ISOLDE

I solde paced the length of her suite in Nereus's castle.

Without consciously thinking, she began combing her fingers through her blonde hair in agitation.

The stone walls that had seemed grand and romantic just days ago now felt like the confines of a gilded cage.

Through the ornate windows, she could see the ocean glittering beyond the castle grounds, calling to her with a familiar song that now carried new meaning.

"I don't even know what I'm doing here exactly. I feel like I'm under some kind of spell whenever Nereus is around," she murmured to her reflection in a massive antique mirror.

For the past week, she had been at Nereus's beck and call—training her newfound powers, learning pack customs and traditions, and trying to win over wolf shifters who looked at her with thinly veiled disdain. She'd barely had time to breathe, let alone think about what this all meant for her life.

She soon flopped onto her four-poster bed, staring at the canopy above.

She hadn't been back to her houseboat once.

Hadn't called her work colleagues to check in.

Hadn't even thought about what would become of her career as a marine biologist after she becomes Luna of the Seafang pack.

The tidal wave she had unwittingly caused had destroyed her workplace, but Nereus was rebuilding it with a wave of his financial power—just another example of how swiftly he took control of every situation.

"Damn it." She sat up and grabbed a decorative pillow, hugging it to her chest. "When did I become this person who just... follows along with everything?"

Before meeting Nereus, she had been fiercely independent. Sure, she struggled with standing up for herself sometimes, but she had built her life around her own passions and choices. Now she was letting Nereus dictate her schedule, her training, even where she lived.

The memory of their encounter in the cave flushed her skin with heat. The sex was mind-blowing, but those attackers... they weren't random. Someone in the pack wanted her gone.

"Because I'm human," she whispered, the revelation settling like ice in her stomach.

She had overheard the whispers when Nereus wasn't around or paying attention. A human Luna? Unprecedented. Unacceptable. A threat to their bloodlines. No wonder someone had tried to eliminate her today.

She stood and walked to the window, pressing her palm against the cool glass. The ocean responded to her emotions, waves rising slightly in the distance.

"I need to get back to my life," she decided. "At least part of it."

A knock at the door interrupted her thoughts.

"Enter," she called, surprised by the authority in her own voice.

A young woman—Mira, one of the few staff members who treated her with some respect—stepped into the room with fresh towels.

"Is there anything you need, Miss Isolde?"

Isolde studied the woman, noting how carefully she avoided using the title "Luna."

"Actually, yes. Has His Royal Highness mentioned when he'll return from his meeting with Damien?"

Mira's eyes flickered nervously. "I believe they'll be discussing security matters for some time. The alpha was... quite angry about the attack."

"I bet he was," Isolde muttered. Nereus's grave concern for her safety after the fight had been evident. He had practically vibrated with protective fury. "Tell me, Mira, do many in the pack share the opinion that I don't belong here?"

The towels in Mira's hands wrinkled under her tightening grip. "It's not my place to?—"

"Please. I need to know what I'm up against."

Mira sighed. "There are... traditions. Expectations. A human Luna is difficult for some to accept."

"Even though I have magical water powers?"

"Some believe those powers would be better served by a true wolf shifter."

Isolde nodded slowly. "And the attackers in the cave?"

"I couldn't possibly know?—"

"Was it someone from the pack? Someone who doesn't want Nereus to claim me?"

Mira placed the towels down and moved toward the door. "You should discuss this with the alpha when he returns."

"Of course. Thank you, Mira."

When the door closed, Isolde felt the weight of her situation press down on her.

She was expected to be this powerful Luna, yet the pack wouldn't accept her until Nereus officially claimed her, and Nereus wouldn't claim her until.

.. what? Until she was ready? Until she proved herself to the pack?

Meanwhile, she was letting her identity, her independence, just slip away.

"No more," she said firmly. "I need some balance and space." Besides, as long as she was on the water, she could protect herself from just about anything. She was a Luna, for crying out loud.

The ocean outside responded to her resolve, waves smoothing into gentle ripples. Isolde smiled. At least one relationship in her life was improving.

She slipped out of the castle without telling anyone. She needed space from Nereus, from the pack, and from the constant pressure of becoming someone she didn't fully

recognize yet. The weight of her new identity pressed against her chest, making it hard to breathe within those stone walls.

The silver Aston Martin purred to life as she started the ignition.

It felt defiantly good to take his most ostentatious car.

"Fastest in my collection," he had said with that infuriatingly sexy half-smile.

She hadn't understood at the time why his arrogance both irritated and aroused her—but now she recognized it as the confidence of an alpha who had spent centuries getting his own way.

"Not tonight," she muttered, revving the engine and peeling out of the castle's garage with more speed than necessary.

The coastal highway stretched before her like a ribbon of freedom.

She rolled down the windows, letting the salty air whip her hair into wild tangles.

The ocean paralleled her drive, its rhythmic waves seeming to pace her journey home.

Home—the word felt strange now. After just a week, her houseboat already felt like a relic from someone else's life.

"Dr. Isolde Morgan," she said aloud, testing the sound of her professional title. "Marine biologist. Defender of coral reefs. Researcher of cetacean migration patterns."

Those identities felt clearer, more solid than "Luna of the Seafang pack" or "mate to

Prince Nereus." She flexed her fingers on the steering wheel, remembering how those same hands had once carefully collected water samples and tagged endangered sea turtles in her college days.

"I spent three years tracking migration patterns of sperm whales," she reminded herself. "I published in the Journal of Marine Sciences. I have a life—a real one."

The memory of her research made her smile. She had been on the verge of a breakthrough regarding sperm whale feeding habits regulating the ocean's nutrient cycle just before her birthday. Would she ever get back to that work? Could she balance being Luna with being a scientist?

"You're not just his," she told her reflection in the rearview mirror. "You had a purpose before him."

The speedometer crept higher as memories of her former life flooded back.

Sunrise boat launches with her research team.

Late nights analyzing data while anchored in her houseboat, the gentle rocking lulling her into a state of perfect concentration.

The triumph of securing grant money for her conservation projects.

Her new phone buzzed insistently on the passenger seat. Nereus's name flashed on the screen, accompanied by a photo she'd sneakily taken of him staring out at the ocean, his profile sharp against the sunset. She ignored it.

"You don't get to dictate my every move," she said to the ringing phone. "I'm not some puppet you can control."

The phone fell silent, only to start buzzing again seconds later.

She sighed. That was Nereus—persistent, demanding, and unwilling to accept being ignored. Part of her admired his relentlessness. The same quality that made him impossible to refuse also made him an exceptional leader.

The ocean beside her churned slightly, responding to her conflicted emotions. With a deep breath, she calmed herself, watching the waters smooth in response.

"At least I'm getting better at that," she murmured, pride warming her chest.

As the familiar turnoff to her houseboat approached, Isolde felt a pang of longing for the simple life she'd had before her birthday. A life without pack politics, without people hating her because she was human, or an overwhelmingly attractive wolf shifter who looked at her like she hung the moon.

"Just one night," she said to herself. "One night to remember who Isolde Morgan really is."

Her hands trembled as she guided the sleek Aston Martin along the worn dock path toward her houseboat.

The expensive vehicle looked absurdly out of place beside her weathered but beloved floating home and her used silver Lexus.

She cut the engine, letting silence wash over her as the gentle lapping of water against the hull filled the emptiness.

"Home," she whispered, her voice breaking on that single syllable.

Her houseboat swayed slightly in greeting as she stepped onto the deck.

Unlike Nereus's castle with its imposing stone walls and formal staff, this place was truly hers decorated with colorful throw pillows, shelves overflowing with marine biology texts, and windowsills lined with shells she had collected over the years.

She ran her fingers along the sun-bleached handrail, remembering countless mornings spent right here with coffee in hand, watching dolphins play in the dawn light. The familiar scent of salt mixed with old wood enveloped her, bringing a wave of tears.

"I can't just abandon all this," she murmured, moving inside where research papers and water sample kits still covered her small dining table. "My entire life is here."

Her doctoral diploma hung crookedly on the wall—the culmination of years of study and dedication. Beside it, a framed photograph showed Isolde knee-deep in tide pools, teaching local children about marine conservation.

"That's who I am," she said, touching the glass. "Not some mystical Luna figure for a pack that doesn't even want me."

The reality of her situation crashed over her like a rogue wave.

She had spent the past week so caught up in Nereus's world—the training, the sex, the politics—that she had forgotten the foundation she'd built for herself.

Years of research, of fighting for ocean conservation, all apparently meant to be cast aside for a role she never asked for.

She collapsed onto her sofa, burying her face in a familiar throw pillow. "He can't expect me to just surrender my entire life and identity."

Even as she said it, her body ached with longing for Nereus—his touch, his scent, and his commanding presence. The mate bond pulled at her like an invisible cord

connecting their souls.

"If he's managed this long without a Luna, he'll be fine on his own," she tried convincing herself, but the words felt hollow.

The tears came harder now, streaming down her cheeks as she hugged her knees to her chest. "I can't be what they want or need.

I'll never be good enough for them. I'm a human . "

The memory of those attackers in the cave flashed through her mind—the hatred in their eyes when they had lunged at her. Just for being human. Just for existing.

"They'll never accept me," she sobbed. "And I can't spend my life fighting an entire pack just because fate decided to play a cruel joke on me."

Outside, the water churned in response to her distress, waves slapping harder against the houseboat's hull. Her newfound connection to the ocean—once a source of wonder—now felt like another burden in this moment.

"I'm supposed to just accept that we're fated mates and surrender my entire life?" She wiped angrily at her tears. "That's not fair."

Her phone buzzed relentlessly on the coffee table where she had tossed it. Nereus's name flashed on the screen again and again. With each ignored call, the ache in her chest intensified.

"I can't be the Luna just for him," she whispered, even as her soul screamed otherwise. "I'll get over this. Somehow."

She stumbled to her bedroom, collapsing onto sheets that smelled of home rather than

Nereus. The buzzing of her phone continued from the other room as she curled into herself, sobs racking her body until exhaustion finally pulled her into merciful darkness.

EIGHTEEN

NEREUS

N ereus slammed the solid oak door to his royal study hard enough to rattle the ancient brass hinges.

The sound echoed through the stone corridors, a physical manifestation of the rage boiling inside him.

He had maintained perfect composure in front of Isolde, not wanting her to see how deeply the attack had shaken him.

But now, alone in his sanctum, he let the fury loose.

With a savage growl, he swept his arm across the nearest shelf, sending centuries-old nautical charts and bound journals crashing to the floor.

"Fucking cowards," he snarled, pacing the length of the room like the predator he was. His muscles coiled with tension under his skin, the wolf inside him demanding blood.

Never in his three centuries of rule had anyone dared strike him directly within his own territory. The audacity of it—attacking his Luna during what should have been a private, intimate moment—burned like acid in his veins.

His study door opened, interrupting his violent thoughts.

Damien stepped in first, his weathered face grave. Xavier followed, the beta's powerful frame filling the doorway before he closed the door firmly behind them.

"Those weren't Seafang wolves," Nereus stated, not bothering with pleasantries. "I'd know the scent of my own, and these had a different mark on them. Foreign."

Xavier's eyebrows shot up. "Foreign shifters breaching our borders? That's an act of war."

"It's worse than that," Nereus growled. "They weren't just here for territory. They targeted Isolde specifically. Waited until we were vulnerable."

Damien moved to straighten the fallen charts. "Your human Luna has awakened extraordinary powers. Word travels fast in our world."

"She's not just 'my human Luna,'" Nereus snapped, his wolf's hackles rising. "She's the Seafang Luna. My true mate."

Xavier and Damien exchanged a quick glance that Nereus caught immediately.

"If either of you has something to say, say it now." The temperature in the room seemed to drop several degrees with his words.

Damien sighed. "Your Highness, we must consider the implications. A human Luna with magical water powers this strong—there are those who would see her as a weapon to be controlled or eliminated."

"You think I don't know that?" Nereus slammed his fists on the massive oak desk, the wood groaning under the impact. "I've spent centuries protecting this coast and these waters. And now the greatest threat we've ever faced comes the moment my Luna arrives."

Xavier approached cautiously. "We need to secure the perimeter, double the guards. No one enters or leaves without thorough checking."

Nereus's jaw clenched tightly. "That's not enough. I want every shifter we have patrolling the borders. The ocean sensors need to be recalibrated for magical signatures."

Damien stepped forward, his ancient eyes holding a warning. "Your Highness, there's more at stake than just territorial security. The legends speak of human Lunas possessing powers that could reshape the world. If someone were to capture her and control her..."

"No one is taking her." Nereus's voice dropped to a deadly whisper. "No one is even going to get close enough to try."

"With respect," Xavier interjected, "she doesn't fully understand our world yet. If she were to leave the protection of the castle?—"

"She won't," Nereus cut him off, though doubt flickered in his mind. Isolde was independent and stubborn. Qualities he admired but that now threatened her safety.

"I need names," Nereus demanded. "Who would dare breach Seafang territory for this? Which pack would risk open war?"

Damien's face grew more troubled. "There is an unfounded claim of a national alliance forming among those who fear what a human Luna might mean for our shifter kind. They believe the old ways must be preserved."

Nereus felt his canines lengthen involuntarily. "Then they'll learn why the Seafang Alpha has ruled unchallenged for centuries."

"And if these rogues come for her again?" Xavier asked quietly.

Nereus turned to the window overlooking the churning sea, his voice as cold and merciless as the depths. "Then they'll die. Simple as that."

Nereus soon stalked down the corridor toward Isolde's suite, his footsteps echoing against the marble floor with purpose.

The attack had left him seething with protective rage, but he'd forced himself to handle the security briefing with Damien and Xavier before seeking her out.

Now all he wanted was to hold her, to breathe in her ocean scent, and feel her warm curves against him.

He knocked on her door. No answer. He knocked again, harder this time.

"Isolde?"

When silence greeted him a third time, he pushed the door open. The room was empty. Her scent lingered, but it wasn't fresh. The bed was made, though he could see impressions where she had lain on it earlier.

A cold weight settled in his gut. After three centuries as alpha, Nereus had learned to trust his instincts, and right now they were screaming that something was terribly wrong.

He stormed through the castle, checking the library, the gardens, the training rooms—anywhere she might have gone to clear her head after the attack. With each empty room, his wolf grew more agitated.

"Where is she?" he demanded, cornering one of the housekeepers in the main hall.

The woman flinched at his tone. "The human lady? She left about twenty minutes ago, Your Highness."

"Left?" Nereus's voice dropped dangerously low. "What do you mean left?"

"In the Aston Martin, Your Highness." The housekeeper backed away slightly. "She didn't say where she was going. Just had the keys in her hand and walked out."

Nereus closed his eyes, fighting for control. The wolf inside him wanted to roar, to tear through the castle and hunt her down immediately. "And no one thought to inform me of this?"

"She's not a prisoner, is she, Your Highness?" the housekeeper ventured, then immediately regretted her words when Nereus's eyes flashed turquoise.

"No. She's my Luna," he growled. "And we were just attacked."

He stormed off before he could terrify the poor woman further, making his way to the massive windows overlooking the ocean. The waves mirrored his agitation, white-capped and restless against the shore.

Then it hit him—a strange clarity washing over him like the tide. It wasn't just the mate bond tying him to Isolde. It was more, something deeper and more profound than he had experienced in his centuries of existence.

He loved her. Not just as his Luna, not just as his destined mate, but as Isolde—the stubborn, compassionate woman who challenged him and stood up to him and made him feel alive after all these centuries.

The realization staggered him. His ancestors would laugh at the mighty Seafang Alpha, brought to his knees by a human woman he'd known for barely a week. But

there it was—the raw, undeniable truth. He couldn't imagine his world without her in it.

"Fuck," he muttered. If those attackers knew she was out there alone—if they were tracking her...

He slammed his large fist against the window frame, cracking the ancient wood. What was she thinking, leaving without telling him? Did she not understand the danger?

No, of course, she didn't know. He hadn't told her how serious the situation was. What was he thinking not telling her how she would be hunted by their enemies? But if he'd done that, she would certainly have run as far from him as she could.

His love for her had just taken root, and already she was slipping through his fingers. He would not lose her, not now, not ever.

He tore through the castle corridors, his heavy footfalls echoing against the stone walls. The wolf inside him clawed at his skin, demanding release, demanding to hunt for his mate. He found Xavier in the security room, preparing their new security measures.

"She's gone," Nereus growled, his voice a thunder rolling across the room.

Xavier spun around. "Who's gone?"

"Isolde. She took the Aston Martin without telling a damn soul where she was headed," Nereus fumed.

Xavier shot to his feet. "I'll assemble the guard. We'll?—"

"No time." Nereus cut him off with a sharp gesture. "I need you to coordinate from here. Have the coastal patrols double their rounds."

"She probably just needed some space, Nereus. It's a lot to take in?—"

"Space?" Nereus's laugh held no humor. "She doesn't understand what's going on or how much danger she's in. Those shifters that attacked us weren't random rogues. They knew exactly who she was, and what she is."

Xavier's expression darkened. "How could they possibly know though?"

"Someone's been watching. Someone knows she's manifested her powers." Nereus tugged at his short black hair, his turquoise eyes flickering with wolf energy. "She needs to master those powers quickly, not just for her safety, but for all of us."

"What do you mean?"

Nereus paced the room, his massive frame coiled tight like a spring. "A Luna with control of water magic could turn the tide in any conflict. She could protect the pack in ways I never could alone. That's part of the reason they're after her."

"But you can't force her to be what you need," Xavier cautioned.

Nereus whirled on him. "This isn't about what I need! This is about her survival, and ultimately ours. She needs to prove herself, and fast, so I can formally announce her as Luna and complete the mating ritual."

He pulled out his phone, hitting redial for what felt like the hundredth time. Straight to voicemail again. "Fuck! Isolde." His voice softened despite his rage when he left another message. "Call me back. Now. You have no idea what you're walking into out there. It's not safe for you to be alone."

He hung up, shoving the phone back in his pocket with excessive force.

"I gave her that phone as a birthday gift after the tidal wave. She's had it less than a week, and suddenly can't be bothered to answer when her life might depend on it?"

Xavier watched his alpha with wary eyes. "The mate bond—can you feel where she is?"

Nereus closed his eyes, reaching through the invisible tether that bound him to Isolde. It pulsed faintly, tugging him eastward. "Toward the ocean. Probably her houseboat."

"I'll send men?—"

"No." Nereus's eyes snapped open. "I go alone. She's my responsibility."

He stalked out of the room, leaving Xavier staring after him. In the garage, Nereus bypassed the luxury vehicles in favor of his custom Ducati motorcycle—sleek, black, and faster than anything else in his collection.

The engine roared to life between his legs, vibrating with raw power. Just like the beast inside him, ready to be unleashed. He peeled out of the garage, the front wheel lifting off the ground as he accelerated down the private coastal road.

Wind whipped past him as he pushed the motorcycle to its limits, weaving through the territory's traffic with supernatural precision. All the while, he focused on the pull, that invisible line drawing him toward Isolde.

"Stubborn, infuriating woman," he muttered. The mate bond hummed stronger as he drew closer to her location, confirming his suspicion that she had headed back to her houseboat.

Did she not understand what it meant to be his? To belong to him as he belonged to her? The thought of her alone out there, vulnerable to attack, made his blood run cold despite the early autumn heat.

His phone buzzed in his pocket. He pulled over long enough to check it, hoping it was Isolde, but found Xavier's name instead.

"What?" he barked into the receiver.

"Our patrols picked up foreign scents near the border. Ten miles from her houseboat."

Nereus felt his canines start to lengthen, the partial shift triggered by rage. "How many?"

"At least four. Maybe more."

Four against one human woman who barely understood her powers. The math made his chest tighten with primal fear.

"I'm not too far, maybe twenty minutes tops. Keep the patrols back unless I call for them. If they spook these bastards, Isolde could get caught in the crossfire."

He ended the call and gunned the engine, the speedometer climbing past numbers that would make most humans squirm. The coastal road curved ahead, revealing the stretch of ocean where Isolde's houseboat was anchored.

Nereus had waited lifetimes for his Luna. He had stood alone, led alone, and fought alone. The thought of losing her now, after just finding her, was completely unacceptable.

"Hold on," he growled as the ocean came into view under the setting sun. "Your

alpha is coming."

NINETEEN

ISOLDE

I solde awoke from her nap. The gentle rocking of her houseboat, once a familiar comfort, now felt strangely hollow.

Sunlight streamed through the small porthole window, casting golden patterns across her rumpled sheets.

She rolled onto her back and stared at the wooden ceiling.

The knots in the pine boards she had memorized over the years now suddenly seemed fascinating as she avoided facing her thoughts.

"Damn it," she said to the empty room, her voice sounding too loud in the silence.

Her bed felt too big, too empty without Nereus's muscular frame taking up most of the space. She missed his warmth, his scent—that mix of ocean spray, earth, and something deeply masculine that was uniquely him. Her body ached for him in ways she'd never experienced before meeting him.

"This is stupid," she muttered, throwing her arm over her eyes. "I barely know him."

But that wasn't true, was it? She'd spent an entire week with him, training her powers, learning about his world, and feeling that inexplicable pull drawing them together. Somehow, in that impossibly short time, he had become essential to her.

She sat up abruptly, pushing hair from her face. "I can't just become someone's Luna. I have a life, a career—" But her career was currently underwater, and her life had been upended the moment that tidal wave crashed ashore.

The memory of Nereus's hands on her body made her shiver. Those powerful, commanding touches that somehow knew exactly what she needed. The way his blue-gray eyes darkened when he looked at her. The absolute certainty in his voice when he called her "mine."

"Stop it," she told herself firmly. "The pack doesn't want you. You don't belong there."

But the truth pushed back against her denial—she had never truly belonged anywhere until Nereus had shown her that her place was beside him. The pack's rejection stung, yes, but wasn't that just another obstacle to overcome?

The walls of her houseboat suddenly felt claustrophobic. She needed air, space to think clearly without the ghost of Nereus haunting every corner of her mind.

"A walk. I need a walk."

She pulled on a pale blue sundress and slipped into sandals. Outside, the afternoon sun warmed her skin as she made her way down the dock and toward the beach.

The shoreline stretched before her, nearly empty this late in the day. Waves lapped gently at the sand—the ocean calm as if missing her touch. She walked along the water's edge, letting the foam brush her toes, feeling the pull of the tide like a magnetic force.

"Why can't I stop thinking about you?" she whispered to the horizon, knowing somehow that her words might reach him across the distance. "I was doing fine

before you crashed into my life."

But had she been? Alone on her thirtieth birthday, her friends scattered across the country, and her work her only true companion. And now she knew why the ocean had always called to her—it wasn't just scientific fascination. It was her power and her birthright.

A seagull cried overhead, its wings catching the sunlight as it wheeled above her. She stopped walking and closed her eyes, feeling the water recede around her ankles, pulling back, then surging forward again, just like her thoughts about Nereus.

"I miss you," she admitted aloud to the empty beach. "I miss your arrogance, your commands, and your certainty. I miss the way you look at me like I'm the answer to a question you've been asking for centuries."

When she opened her eyes again, she noticed a woman walking some distance behind her on the beach—a stranger with dark hair, watching her with unusual interest. Isolde frowned slightly but continued walking, her thoughts returning to the alpha who had claimed her heart so completely.

The ocean whispered against the shore, and for a moment, she thought she heard Nereus's voice in its rhythm.

"How am I supposed to forget you when even the waves speak your name?" she asked the water, letting her fingers trail through the air as if she could reach across the miles and touch him. The water responded with a gentle surge that curled around her ankles like a caress.

She knew then, with a certainty that shocked her, that running from Nereus was like trying to run from herself. The question wasn't whether she should go back—it was how long she could possibly stay away.

Isolde soon noticed the dark-haired woman approaching her along the shoreline.

Unlike the few scattered beachgoers in the distance, this woman walked with purpose, her eyes fixed directly on Isolde.

Her sleek black hair fell to her shoulders, contrasting with a flowy white sundress that caught the breeze.

There was something magnetic about her presence— a confidence that reminded Isolde of Nereus, though softer and more approachable.

"Beautiful evening for contemplation," the woman called out, her voice melodic against the gentle rhythm of the waves. "The ocean speaks to us when we're truly listening."

Isolde felt an immediate connection to the stranger's words. "It does, doesn't it? Though lately, it's been saying things I'm not sure I want to hear."

The woman smiled, extending her hand. "I'm Marina. Just moved into the houseboat two down from yours. I saw you on the dock earlier and thought I'd introduce myself."

"Isolde." She accepted the handshake, noting how cool Marina's skin felt against her own. "Welcome to the neighborhood, I guess. Though I haven't been around much this past week myself."

Marina gestured toward the horizon. "Mind if I walk with you? New places can be lonely without friendly faces."

"Sure." Isolde nodded, surprising herself with how comfortable she felt with this stranger. Something about Marina's presence felt soothing like cool water on

sunburned skin.

They walked in companionable silence for a few minutes before Marina spoke again. "You seem troubled. The ocean carries our burdens if we let it, you know."

The gentleness in Marina's voice broke something in Isolde. Her carefully constructed walls crumbled, and words spilled out without thinking through them first.

"I turned thirty last week. Spent my birthday alone, then watched a tidal wave destroy my workplace.

Now I'm being told I have water powers and that I'm supposed to be the Luna to a pack of wolf shifters.

" Isolde laughed bitterly. "And I'm falling for their alpha, who's gorgeous and commanding and makes me feel things I've never felt.

But his pack hates me. They actually attacked us. "

Instead of the disbelief Isolde expected, Marina's expression remained open and oddly understanding. "Water powers? That's why I felt drawn to you. I have a connection to the water myself." She reached down, letting the incoming tide swirl around her fingers in an unnatural pattern. "See?"

Isolde's eyes widened. "You have powers too? I thought I was the only one."

"I just have a special affinity for water." Marina smiled mysteriously. "This alpha of yours—he's demanding things of you, isn't he? Expecting you to adapt to his world immediately?"

"He's..." Isolde hesitated, feeling a flash of loyalty to Nereus. "Intense. Commanding. Used to getting his way."

"Men like that take without asking," Marina said softly. "Especially those with power. They expect women to bend to their will, to put their needs first."

The words struck Isolde with unexpected force. "He says I'm his Luna, that I belong with him and his pack, but it's all happening so fast. I've been training my powers constantly, trying to please him and prove myself worthy to a pack that doesn't even want me."

Marina placed a gentle hand on Isolde's shoulder. "And what about what you want? What about your needs?"

The two simple questions pierced Isolde's heart. When had anyone asked her that? Even her best friends were too busy with their own lives to celebrate her birthday.

"It's not selfish to make sure you're okay before attending to others," Marina continued. "The ocean gives and gives, but even it needs the moon's pull to replenish itself."

A tear slipped down Isolde's cheek. "I just wanted some space to breathe. To figure out who I am with these new powers before becoming who he needs me to be."

"That's perfectly reasonable." Marina squeezed her shoulder. "You know what you need? A break. Some fun. I've got a hot tub on my boat and a pitcher of margaritas with our names on it. Just us girls—no wolf shifters, no pack politics, no training. Just relaxation."

Isolde thought of her empty houseboat, of the crushing loneliness that had driven her to the beach in the first place.

She thought of her five best friends being too busy to visit for her birthday.

The idea of female companionship, of simple conversation without expectations, called to her like a siren song.

"That sounds..." Isolde smiled, truly smiling since leaving Nereus today. "That sounds perfect, actually."

Marina's answering smile was radiant. "Excellent! Let me show you where I'm docked. And on the way, you can tell me more about these water powers of yours." She looped her arm through Isolde's as they turned back toward the marina. "I think we have much more in common than you realize."

As they walked, Isolde felt the ocean's waves growing slightly stronger behind them, but she ignored it. For once, she was going to focus on herself. Not on the water, not on Nereus, and not on what everyone else needed from her.

Isolde soon stepped onto Marina's pristine houseboat, immediately noting how much larger and luxurious it was compared to her own modest floating home. The deck gleamed with polished teak, and the interior featured sleek furnishings that looked straight out of a design magazine.

"Your place is gorgeous," Isolde said, running her fingers along a smooth marble countertop. "Mine looks like a floating shack in comparison."

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 2:00 am

Marina laughed, the sound tinkling like wind chimes. "Oh, I've had centuries to acquire nice things." When Isolde raised an eyebrow, Marina winked. "I'm joking. I just have expensive taste."

Marina disappeared into what must have been her bedroom, returning moments later with two bikinis. She handed the blue one to Isolde. "This should fit your curves perfectly. The bathroom's through there if you want to change."

The bikini was a deep shade of turquoise that matched Isolde's eyes.

As she slipped it on in the bathroom, she noticed how perfectly it fit, accentuating her fuller breasts and curvy hips.

For a moment, she wondered what Nereus would think if he saw her in it, then pushed the thought away.

This was her time, and she wasn't going to spend it mooning over a man who expected her to bend to his expectations.

When Isolde emerged, Marina had already changed into a black bikini that contrasted beautifully with her pale skin.

"You look stunning," Marina said, her eyes appreciatively taking in Isolde's figure. "Now, let me get those drinks started while you settle into the hot tub. You look like you could use some relaxation."

The hot tub was located on the upper deck, bubbling invitingly against the backdrop

of the blue sky. Isolde slipped in, sighing as the warm water enveloped her body. This was what she needed—warmth, comfort, and no expectations.

"One margarita, extra strong," Marina announced, returning with two salt-rimmed glasses. She handed one to Isolde before sliding into the water beside her. "To new friendships and unleashed powers."

They clinked glasses, and Isolde took a generous sip, the tangy sweetness of the drink dancing on her tongue. "This is delicious."

"Secret recipe," Marina smiled. "So, tell me more about this hot alpha wolf of yours. Is he as domineering as he sounds?"

Isolde felt heat flood her cheeks that wasn't due to the hot water. "Nereus is... a lot of things. Everything about him is larger than life. His presence fills a room before he even speaks."

"And in the bedroom?" Marina raised her eyebrows, refilling Isolde's already half-empty glass with a pitcher she had brought up.

"Incredible," Isolde admitted, the alcohol loosening her tongue. "Like he knows exactly what I need before I do."

Marina laughed. "Men like that are rare. Though they can also be exhausting." She swirled her drink thoughtfully. "Always expecting, demanding, and taking."

"It's not like that," Isolde found herself defending Nereus again despite her frustrations. "He gives too. It's just—his pack doesn't want me around, and I feel like I'm constantly trying to prove myself worthy."

Three margaritas in, Isolde's head was pleasantly fuzzy, her body completely relaxed

as she and Marina swapped stories and laughed under the setting sun. It felt good to have female companionship and to talk without having to defend her choices.

"You're carrying a lot of tension," Marina observed, setting her glass aside. "Turn around, let me work on those shoulders."

Something about the suggestion felt oddly intimate, but Isolde was too tipsy to question it. She turned, exposing her back to Marina's cool hands.

"You poor thing," Marina murmured, her fingers expertly finding knots of tension Isolde hadn't realized she was carrying. "Everyone wants something from you, don't they? The wolf, the pack, the ocean itself."

"Mmm," Isolde mumbled, her eyes fluttering closed as Marina's thumbs worked circles along her spine. The sensation was heavenly after days of stress and training.

"Drink up," Marina encouraged, reaching around to hand Isolde her refreshed glass. "You deserve to relax completely."

Isolde took a long sip, then another. Something tasted different—sharper, more bitter—but she attributed it to the alcohol content. Almost immediately, a wave of dizziness washed over her, more intense than mere tipsiness.

"I don't feel right," she mumbled, her tongue suddenly heavy in her mouth. She tried to turn around, but her limbs refused to cooperate.

Marina's hands tightened on her shoulders, no longer soothing but restraining. "That's because I don't need you to feel anything at all, my dear."

Alarm bells rang distantly in Isolde's foggy mind. "Wha—what did you do?"

Marina's laughter had lost its melodic quality, turning cold and cutting. "Did you really think you were the only one with magical water powers? I've spent centuries perfecting mine, and now yours will make me unstoppable."

Isolde tried to summon her powers, to make the water respond, but her connection to it seemed muffled and distant.

"Don't bother," Marina hissed, her beautiful face transformed by malice. "The drug blocks your connection temporarily. Just enough time to get you where I need you."

Through growing darkness, Isolde watched Marina leave the hot tub and return with rope, which she wound efficiently around Isolde's wrists and ankles.

"The ocean responds to you in ways I've never seen," Marina continued conversationally, as if she weren't in the process of kidnapping Isolde. "With your powers added to mine, I'll control every creature and every current. The entire seaboard will bow to me."

"Nereus—" Isolde managed to mumble.

"Oh yes, your wolf prince." Marina smirked. "He'll come looking, of course. Men like him always do. But by then, it will be too late."

Marina half-dragged, half-carried Isolde off the boat and toward the parking lot where a black SUV waited. The windows were tinted, but Isolde could make out shadowy figures inside.

"My associates," Marina explained, opening the rear door. "Not all wolves are loyal, you know. Some can be bought—or persuaded."

As consciousness slipped away from her, Isolde glimpsed four hulking men in the

vehicle, their eyes glinting amber in the fading light—wolf shifters just as Marina had claimed. The drug pulled her under before she could process the betrayal.

Her last coherent thought was of Nereus—his blue eyes, his warmth, his absolute certainty that she belonged with him. She had run from that certainty, and now she might never see him again.

The darkness claimed her completely as the SUV pulled away, carrying her toward an unknown fate.

TWENTY

NEREUS

N ereus's Ducati roared beneath him as he pushed the motorcycle to its limits down the coastal road.

The rushing wind whirled in his ears, but it couldn't drown out the thundering of his heart.

Fifteen minutes since hanging up with Xavier felt like fifteen hours.

Each second that ticked by with Isolde missing ratcheted his anxiety higher.

The mate bond pulsed weakly inside him, a distant lighthouse in an emotional storm. She was alive. That knowledge alone kept him from losing control completely.

He swerved the motorcycle into the marina parking lot, barely taking time to kill the engine before vaulting off. His boots hit the wooden dock with a heavy thud as he sprinted toward Isolde's houseboat. The setting sun sparkled off the water, mocking the darkness spreading through his chest.

"Isolde!" His voice rang out over the lapping of waves against the dock.

The door to her houseboat swung open at his touch—unlocked.

His instincts screamed danger as he entered.

Everything appeared normal. The small kitchen with its quirky mermaid magnets on the refrigerator, the living area with marine life books stacked on end tables, and the faint scent of citrus and saltwater that was uniquely hers.

But no Isolde.

"Fuck." The word escaped through his gritted teeth as he moved through the quaint space, his nostrils flaring to catch any trace of an intruder.

A buzzing sound caught his attention. Her phone—sitting abandoned on the coffee table beside a half-empty mug of tea. He picked it up, swiping to see dozens of missed calls. His own name dominated the screen.

He stalked back outside, his eyes scanning the marina. His Aston Martin sat parked where she must have left it, and beside it, her silver Lexus. She hadn't driven anywhere.

He closed his eyes, centering himself. The mate bond flickered like a distant flame—too weak and too far. But present. He focused on her essence, letting his senses expand.

The scent hit him suddenly—faint traces of Isolde carried on the breeze. He followed it down the dock, passing several boats until he reached a sleek, modern two-story houseboat two docks over. The structure gleamed white against the blue water, its windows tinted nearly black.

Isolde's scent intensified here, mingled with something else—fear. His wolf stirred within him, hackles rising at the primal call to protect what was his.

But beneath that, another scent lingered. Female, but nothing human. Ancient. Powerful. Wrong.

Without hesitation, Nereus stripped off his jacket and boots, letting his transformation take him. His bones cracked and reformed, his muscles stretched and shifted, and within seconds, the white and gray wolf with brilliant turquoise eyes stood where the man had been.

In this form, the scents bombarded him with clarity. The foreign female scent carried notes of brine and thunderstorms, of depths beyond human reckoning.

Siren. Witch. The knowledge clicked into place like a key turning in a lock.

Centuries of instinctual hatred flooded his veins. Sirens—the ancient enemies of the Seafang pack, beings who corrupted the waters his kind had sworn to protect. The historical wars between them had nearly wiped out both species before an uneasy truce had been established.

A truce now clearly broken.

The faint pulse of the mate bond confirmed his fears. The fear he sensed from Isolde wasn't panic—it was too subdued, almost dreamlike. Drugged. The realization sent rage coursing through him.

The pieces assembled themselves with brutal clarity.

The attack in the secluded cave hadn't been random.

His initial suspicions were now confirmed, the attack was part of a bigger plan.

This siren had sent those wolves to capture Isolde, and now somehow, the ancient witch had taken his Luna. But where?

Nereus transformed back to his human form, pulling on his clothes with quick,

efficient movements. His jaw clenched tightly enough to crack his teeth as he rushed away from the siren's sleek houseboat.

The mate bond flickered again. Time was running out.

"Hold on, Isolde," he whispered to the wind. "I'm coming."

His mind raced through the tactical possibilities as he walked toward his motorcycle with purposeful strides. The mate bond kept flickering inside him, weakening with each passing minute. A primal growl escaped his throat as he pulled out his phone and dialed Xavier.

"She's been taken," Nereus said the moment Xavier answered, his voice deeper than usual, the wolf in him pushing to the surface again. "Siren witch. I can smell her all over that fancy houseboat two docks from Isolde's."

"Sirens? Here?" Xavier's disbelief crackled through the line. "Impossible. The truce?—"

"Is broken." Nereus cut him off as he approached his motorcycle. "Sound the pack alarm. All core pack members, now. We meet at Blackwater Cove in twenty minutes."

He didn't wait for a response before ending the call. The ancient cove lay hidden between two rocky cliffs, accessible only to those who knew of its existence—a sacred gathering place for the Seafang pack for generations.

Nereus arrived first, pacing the shoreline like the predator he was. The setting sun painted the water crimson, a visual echo of the rage burning through him. The weakening mate bond was like a physical wound in his chest—a constant reminder of his failure to protect what was his.

Within minutes, the soft padding of paws and the crunch of footsteps on sand announced the arrival of his pack. Some came in wolf form, others in human form, but all wore expressions of concern and determination. Xavier approached first, flanked by the patrol captains.

"Everyone's here," Xavier confirmed, his eyes scanning the assembled wolves. "What's the plan?"

Nereus looked out at his closest pack members—his core family—nearly sixty strong. The Seafang pack members that had followed him for centuries, through wars and peace, through triumph and hardship. His gaze landed on faces that had only days ago looked at Isolde with skepticism and distrust.

The injustice of it burned like fire within him.

"Before we discuss strategy," Nereus began, his voice soaring across the beach without effort, "I have something to say."

He ascended a large, flat rock that jutted from the sand—the Stone of Assembly where Seafang alphas had addressed their pack since before written history.

"For centuries, I have led you. I have protected you. I have guided our territory through times that should have ended us." His eyes glowed turquoise in the dimming light. "And in all that time, I have asked little in return."

The waves crashed behind him, responding to his emotions, rising higher with each powerful word.

"When my Luna arrived—when the Moon Goddess herself blessed our pack with her return—how did we respond?" His voice dropped dangerously low. "With suspicion. With rejection. With whispers in hallways and cold shoulders."

Several pack members lowered their gazes, shame evident in their postures.

"Isolde Morgan may be human by birth, but her heart—" Nereus thumped his chest, "—her heart is pure Seafang. She carries the ocean in her veins just as we do. Her connection to water rivals any born wolf among us."

The tide pulled further out as his anger built, the ocean itself listening to its prince.

"You saw her as weak because she didn't grow up with our traditions.

You saw her as unworthy because she doesn't wear fur when necessary.

" Nereus's fist clenched at his side. "But where were you when she faced down attackers with fierce courage in the cave?

Where were your judgments when she mastered in days what takes our born wolves years to control? "

He leaped down from the stone, landing with predatory grace, and strode through the ranks of his pack. They parted before him, no one daring to meet his eyes.

"Now my true mate—your Luna—is in the hands of our ancient enemy.

A siren witch who would drain her power and use it against everything we've sworn to protect.

" His voice cracked slightly, the emotion breaking through his usually controlled facade.

"And I ask myself, would things be different if we had embraced her from the start?

If she had felt the full strength of the pack behind her? "

Xavier stepped forward. "You and I will find her, Nereus."

"No." Nereus shook his head, his eyes blazing. " We will find her. All of us. Together. Because despite our failings as a pack, she is one of us. Human or not, she is Seafang. And Seafangs protect their own."

He returned to the Stone of Assembly, drawing himself to his full height. The muscles in his arms flexed as he gestured toward the horizon.

"Out there, a creature thinks she can steal what belongs to us. She believes we are divided, weakened by our prejudices." His voice lowered to a dangerous rumble. "Let's show her how wrong she is."

The silence that followed felt electric. The entire group stood motionless, the only sound the rhythmic crashing of waves.

"Who stands with me?" Nereus challenged. "Who will bring our Luna home?"

The response came not as individual voices but as a unified roar. Every member of his core pack—from the youngest to the eldest, from the most skeptical to his most loyal—stepped forward as one.

"For the Luna!" Xavier bellowed, and the cry was taken up by every throat.

"FOR THE LUNA!"

The unexpected unanimity struck Nereus like a tidal wave, and he was almost brought to his knees with overwhelming emotion.

As he looked out at his pack standing united and strong for the sake of Isolde, a flicker of hope sparked in his chest. The mate bond suddenly pulsed stronger as if Isolde somehow sensed their determination and support.

"Prepare the boats," Nereus commanded, a fierce smile breaking across his face. "We hunt at sea tonight."

Nereus soon cut through the dense foliage that separated Blackwater Cove from the private marina where he kept his prized vessel.

Xavier followed close behind, matching his alpha's relentless pace.

The scent of brine and wet earth filled Nereus's nostrils as he moved with predatory purpose, his footsteps barely making a sound despite his size.

"I still can't believe it," Nereus said, his voice a low rumble that matched the distant thunder. "Sixty of them. Every last one."

The image of his pack standing united, roaring their support for a human Luna most had barely acknowledged days before, ignited something primal in his chest. Pride, yes—but something more profound. Hope for his pack's future.

"Did you really think they wouldn't follow you?" Xavier's question pulled Nereus from his thoughts. "Prince or not, you're their alpha first."

They emerged onto the polished wooden dock where Nereus's primary watercraft—a sleek, thirty-six-foot offshore vessel—waited like a crouching raider. Its midnight blue hull absorbed the moonlight rather than reflecting it—perfect for tonight's mission.

"It wasn't me I was concerned about." Nereus ran his hand along the boat's hull,

feeling its smooth surface like the flank of a trusted companion. "It was her."

Xavier stepped aboard first, beginning immediate preparations while Nereus untied the moorings.

"So they were hesitant at first. Big deal." Xavier shrugged, throwing open compartments and checking the weapons systems Nereus had long ago installed for pack emergencies. "A human Luna isn't exactly what any of us expected after three centuries."

Nereus vaulted onto the deck, landing with silent grace before taking his position at the helm. The familiar vibration of the engines spreading through his body centered him somewhat, though nothing could truly calm the storm raging inside him while Isolde remained in danger.

"She's more than just a human." Nereus's fingers tightened around the wheel, his knuckles whitening. "She's everything that's been missing. Not just from me—from all of us."

Xavier paused his preparations, studying his alpha's face. "They would have come around eventually, you know. Even the most stubborn among us."

"None of that matters now," Nereus growled. "The only thing that matters is bringing Isolde back where she belongs—with me and the Seafang. And tearing apart that witch who dared to take her."

The thought of the siren witch having her hands on Isolde made Nereus's blood boil hot with primal rage. The mate bond within him pulsed weakly again, each flutter a painful reminder of Isolde's vulnerability.

"We'll get her back." Xavier's certainty was unwavering.

"I'm going to destroy that siren." Nereus's voice dropped to a dangerous whisper.

The deep thrumming of the engines matched the beating of his heart, both ready for battle. In three centuries of ruling the Seafang, Nereus had never felt such consuming wrath, such utter focus on a single objective. The wolf within him paced restlessly, demanding retribution.

"She'll regret the day she ever crossed into our waters." He turned to Xavier, his expression carved from stone. "Isolde is my everything. My mate, my future, and my heart. I'll tear this ocean apart piece by piece if that's what it takes."

Xavier nodded, understanding the depth of his alpha's devotion. "The fleet will be ready in ten minutes. Damien is coordinating the loading now."

Nereus looked back toward Blackwater Cove where his pack scrambled to prepare the dozen watercraft they maintained for pack use. He could see them moving with military precision—loading weapons, communications equipment, and medical supplies. The sight filled him with fierce satisfaction.

"For centuries, I thought power was about control," Nereus said quietly, almost to himself. "But this—the way I feel about her—it's not about controlling her. It's about protecting what makes me whole."

He breathed deeply, his senses extending outward, seeking the faint pulse of the mate bond. It flickered like a distant star, but it was there. She was alive. And while she lived, nothing would stop him from finding her.

"Let's bring our Luna home."

TWENTY-ONE

NEREUS

Nereus's hand closed over the throttle, and the powerful engines roared beneath him.

The vibration traveled up through his bones, centering him as he guided his vessel out of the cove.

Behind him, twelve other boats formed a coordinated armada, the moonlight absorbing into rather than gleaming off their hulls.

"All vessels report ready, Alpha," Xavier confirmed, tapping the communications headset. "Everyone's armed and tracking your lead."

Nereus nodded, his muscles coiled tightly, ready for action. The mate bond pulsed like a distant heartbeat, growing stronger as he adjusted their course. Every fiber of his being aligned with that singular connection—the invisible tether binding him to Isolde.

"She's due east, about thirty nautical miles offshore." His voice cut through the night air with absolute certainty. The wolf within him prowled restlessly, driven by primal instinct to reclaim what was his.

The midnight-blue craft sliced through the waves, spray flying up around them as Nereus pushed the engines harder. No normal boat could maintain such speed without risking structural damage, but this vessel—like its owner—was far from ordinary.

"The siren will have protection," Xavier said, checking the weapons locker. "Probably water wraiths, maybe bound selkies."

"Let her have an army." Nereus's eyes flashed turquoise in the darkness. "I'll tear through every last one to get to Isolde."

The Atlantic stretched before them, vast and ancient.

Nereus breathed in the salt air, drawing strength from the very element that had nurtured his kind for millennia.

The ocean responded to his presence, the waves parting slightly before his vessel, sensing the authority of the water prince commanding them.

"How did you feel when you met her?" Xavier asked suddenly. "Was it like everything before was just emptiness?"

Nereus's gaze remained fixed on the horizon. "I felt like I'd been drowning for three centuries without knowing it. And suddenly, there was air."

A faint smile crossed Xavier's face. "I see it now. The way you look at her, the way you would do anything for her... She changed you."

"She terrifies me, X," Nereus admitted, the raw confession startling even himself. "Not her powers. The thought of losing her."

The radio crackled. "Alpha, six o'clock. Something strange in the water."

Nereus spun to look behind them. The ocean's surface rippled unnaturally, a phosphorescent blue glow spreading beneath the waves.

"The witch is aware we're coming," he growled. "Good. I want her to feel the fear build."

The mate bond fluttered sharply, sending a jolt of pain through his chest. Isolde was afraid. The knowledge made his vision turn red with rage.

"She's trying to use Isolde's powers," Nereus snarled, his knuckles white on the wheel. "Trying to harness something she can't begin to understand."

"Alpha, visual confirmation," came a voice over the radio. "Large yacht, three miles ahead."

Nereus spotted it—a gleaming white vessel, ostentatiously large, illuminated against the night sky. His enhanced vision picked out movement on the deck, figures scurrying like ants. The siren was preparing for their arrival.

"Maintain speed and formation," he commanded into the radio. "No engagement until my signal."

The mate bond pulsed more strongly like a beacon calling him home. His chest ached with a mixture of longing and fury.

"I'm going to rip that witch apart with my bare hands," Nereus growled, the sound more wolf than man.

"Save some for the rest of us," Xavier replied, loading a weapon beside him. "The pack wants to prove themselves now to their Luna."

Nereus felt a surge of pride at those words. His pack—his family—united in purpose to rescue the woman who had, in just a week, become the heart of their existence. His existence.

"That siren doesn't know what's coming for her," Nereus said, a dangerous smile spreading across his face as they closed in on the yacht. "No one takes what's mine and gets away with it."

As Nereus steered the boat closer to the yacht, the water began to churn unnaturally beneath them. The ocean's surface bubbled and frothed as if boiling from below. The mate bond throbbed painfully in his chest—Isolde was very close, but something was interfering with their connection.

"Something's wrong," Nereus growled. "The siren witch is managing to use Isolde's powers."

Xavier tensed beside him. "How bad?"

"Bad enough that I'm going to enjoy tearing her limb from limb." The thought of anyone forcing his Luna to use her powers against her will made his blood run hotter than the disturbed waters around them.

Without warning, a massive tentacle erupted from the waves, slamming down on the boat to their left. The vessel lurched but held firm—Seafang boats were built to withstand supernatural assault.

"Water wraiths!" Nereus barked into the radio. "Defensive formation, now!"

His pack responded immediately, their boats shifting into a protective circle. More tentacles rose from the depths—translucent, glowing with an eerie blue light, and powerful enough to crush steel. These weren't ordinary sea creatures, but malevolent spirits bound to the siren's will.

"All units, silver-tipped harpoons," Nereus commanded. "Fire at will!"

The night air filled with the mechanical whirr of harpoon launchers. Silver projectiles arced through the darkness, finding their marks in the ghostly flesh of the water wraiths. Unearthly shrieks pierced the night as the creatures thrashed in pain.

"Keep moving forward!" Nereus shouted, pushing his boat's engines to their limit. "Don't let them isolate any vessels!"

A wraith rose directly in their path, its gaping maw large enough to swallow their boat whole.

Nereus didn't flinch. He reached for the controls of the mounted harpoon gun and fired three rounds in rapid succession, striking the creature's core.

It dissolved into luminescent foam with an otherworldly wail.

"Behind you!" Xavier warned.

Nereus spun the wheel hard, narrowly avoiding another tentacle. "These are just her foot soldiers," he snarled. "She's trying to wear us down before we reach her."

The mate bond pulsed again, stronger this time. Isolde was fighting back in her own way. Pride swelled within him. His Luna was no helpless damsel, even drugged and captive.

"Alpha, port side!" came a shout over the radio.

A dozen sleek forms cut through the water alongside their boats—humanoid but with seal-like features and razor-sharp claws. Bound selkies, forced into service by the siren's magic.

"Don't kill them if you can avoid it," Nereus ordered. "They're slaves to her will."

One of the selkies launched itself onto their deck, water streaming from its glistening skin.

Nereus met it head-on, catching its wrists before its claws could find purchase.

The creature was strong, but no match for an alpha waterwolf.

He threw it back into the ocean with enough force to stun but not kill.

"Xavier, take the wheel!" Nereus stripped off his jacket, his muscles rippling beneath his tight black T-shirt. "I need to clear a path."

Without waiting for a response, he vaulted over the side of the boat, hitting the water with barely a splash.

The ocean welcomed him like an old friend, its currents adjusting to his presence.

He let his wolf partially emerge—not a full shift, but enough to enhance his strength and speed in the water.

Swimming beneath the surface, Nereus tore through the selkie ranks with brutal efficiency. His clawed hands disabled rather than killed, breaking the siren's hold on the creatures one by one. They retreated in confusion once freed from her control.

A massive wraith descended toward him, its body rippling with malevolent energy.

Nereus bared his fangs in a feral grin. He had been fighting creatures like this for centuries.

The wraith was powerful but predictable, lunging forward with its tentacles extended.

Nereus twisted between them, diving straight for its pulsing core.

His claws ripped through the ethereal flesh, and the creature dissolved around him.

Breaking the surface, Nereus saw that his pack was holding their own. Half the wraiths had been dispatched, and the selkies were scattering, many freed from the witch's control. His boats had advanced significantly, now less than half a mile from the yacht.

He pulled himself back onto his vessel with inhuman grace, water sluicing off his body. "Status report," he demanded, shaking his wet hair from his eyes.

Xavier handed him back the wheel. "Three boats with minor damage. No serious injuries. We're making progress."

"Good." Nereus fixed his gaze on the yacht. "Signal the flanking teams. It's time for the next phase."

Two boats peeled away from their formation, circling wide to approach the yacht from different angles. Nereus kept his vessel on a direct course, drawing the main force of the siren's defenses.

A new wave of wraiths rose to meet them, larger than before. Nereus felt the ocean respond to his will, his ancestral connection to the water pushing back against the siren's corruption.

"She's desperate," he noted with savage satisfaction. "She feels us coming for her."

The mate bond flared with renewed strength, almost like Isolde was reaching for him. The sensation was so powerful, it momentarily took his breath away.

"Hold on, sweetheart," he whispered. "I'm coming to get you."

The final line of defense erupted from the depths—a massive kraken-like entity composed of multiple wraiths fused together by the siren's magic. Its tentacles whipped through the air, smashing one boat's railing and nearly capsizing another.

"All units, concentrated fire!" Nereus roared.

A volley of silver harpoons struck the creature from all directions. It writhed in agony but held together.

Nereus felt a cold fury settle over him. No more games. He reached deep inside himself, drawing on the power that had been passed down through his bloodline for millennia. The ocean responded, currents swirling around their boats, forming a protective barrier.

"Everyone hold position," he commanded. Then, focusing all his energy, he thrust his hands forward.

A massive wave rose at his command, lifting their boats safely while slamming into the kraken entity with devastating force.

The creature's unnatural bonds couldn't withstand the pure elemental power of a water prince.

It shattered into dozens of smaller wraiths, which quickly dissipated into the night.

The path to the yacht lay open.

"Prepare to board," Nereus ordered, his voice deadly calm. "The witch is mine. And if you find Isolde before I do, get her to safety."

As they closed the final distance, Nereus felt the mate bond singing in his blood. His Luna was waiting for him, and no force on earth or sea would keep them apart any longer.

TWENTY-TWO

ISOLDE

I solde woke with a pounding head and severe cotton mouth.

Her vision blurred as she tried to focus on her surroundings.

The constant rocking beneath her told her she was on water—a yacht possibly, judging by the luxurious cabin's polished wood paneling.

Her wrists and ankles burned from the rough ropes binding her to what felt like a bed bolted to the floor.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid," she muttered, testing the bonds. They held tight against her skin, biting deeper with each attempt to free herself.

The memories flooded back in nauseating waves.

Marina's welcoming smile. The hot tub's soothing warmth.

The margarita that had tasted just a touch too sour.

Then darkness, punctuated by glimpses of consciousness—being hauled into a black SUV, surrounded by men with predatory eyes that gleamed amber in the darkness.

Wolf shifters. And Marina's voice, silky and venomous: "With your powers under my

control, every drop of water on this planet will bend to my will. "

Isolde squeezed her eyes shut, shame burning through her. How could she have been so easily fooled? Because Marina had offered exactly what she had craved—understanding, validation, and the promise that putting herself first wasn't selfish.

"You ran straight from one trap into another," she chided herself. "Professional marine biologist can't even recognize a predator when she's sitting in one's houseboat."

The yacht suddenly lurched sideways, sending a decorative shell collection crashing to the floor. Distant shouts and the unmistakable sound of splintering wood filtered through the cabin walls. The battle cries grew louder—fierce, primal howls that could only come from one source.

"Nereus," she whispered, her heart leaping.

As if responding to his name, the mate bond flared to life in her chest, a warm, steady pulse that confirmed his presence. Not just him—dozens of others. The core pack must've come too.

Suddenly, a strange pulling sensation started deep in her core as if someone had hooked invisible fishing line around her insides and was steadily reeling it in.

The ocean outside the porthole window churned violently, waves cresting unnaturally high before crashing down on what sounded like multiple vessels.

"Stop it," Isolde hissed, realizing what was happening. Marina was siphoning her power, using it as a weapon against Nereus and his pack.

The pull intensified, her energy draining like water through a broken dam. Outside, something massive breached the water's surface with a thunderous splash. A sea monster, summoned by her stolen power.

"They really came for me," Isolde whispered, disbelief coloring her voice. "The Seafang core pack."

The realization struck her like lightning. The pack that had rejected her and sneered at her humanity, had rallied behind their alpha to rescue her. They might not fully accept her yet, but they were fighting for her.

The mate bond pulsed stronger, and through it, she felt Nereus's determination, his fear for her safety, and something deeper—a fierce, possessive devotion that left her breathless. He loved her. Not just as his destined Luna or the key to his power, but as simply her.

Marina's psychic grip tightened, twisting Isolde's power into something dark and violent. The yacht rocked harder as the ocean responded, whirlpools forming where there should be none.

"No," Isolde growled, channeling her anger and her resolve. "These are my powers."

She closed her eyes, focusing not on breaking her physical bonds yet but on reclaiming what was hers. She imagined her power as a tide—pulling away from shore when Marina siphoned it, but destined always to return to its source.

"You think because I'm human, I'm weak," she said to the empty cabin, her voice strengthening with each word. "But the ocean chose me. Not you."

The invisible hooks in her core began to slip as she fought back, mentally yanking her power from Marina's grasp. Outside, the unnatural waves faltered, the whirlpools

losing momentum.

A tremendous crash rocked the yacht, followed by the splintering of wood and furious snarls. Through the mate bond, she felt Nereus drawing closer, fighting through whatever stood between them.

"I'm here," she called out, pouring her strength into the bond, letting him feel her determination. "I'm fighting back."

The pulling sensation weakened further as she reclaimed her power inch by inch. The sea outside seemed to pause, caught between two wills—holding its breath to see which woman would command it.

Isolde smiled, newfound confidence surging through her. She might still be physically bound, but her power was returning to where it belonged. Marina had made a critical mistake thinking a human Luna would be easy prey.

"When will they learn?" she whispered, feeling the ocean respond to her call, separate from Marina's control. "The ocean isn't meant to be controlled. It's meant to be respected."

Isolde soon felt the ropes around her wrists loosening as her power surged through her body.

With her newfound connection to the ocean, she directed her energy into the traces of water soaked into the rope fibers from her transfer onto the yacht.

The rope weakened, stretched, and finally snapped as the water molecules expanded at her command.

"That's more like it," she whispered, freeing her ankles next.

The yacht pitched violently as something massive slammed against its hull. Through the porthole, she glimpsed scales—iridescent and dark as the deepest ocean trench—followed by the flash of Nereus's white-gray fur as he leaped between vessels.

She sensed Marina's power pulling at the ocean, creating unnatural currents designed to drown the wolves swimming toward the yacht. Isolde pushed back, reaching for control of the waters surrounding them.

"They're fighting for me. For their Luna," she whispered. "Nereus and his pack."

A fierce determination flooded her veins. She wouldn't be a victim anymore, waiting for rescue or apologizing for taking up space. This wasn't just about her anymore. It was about protecting the mate bond that sang in her blood and the pack that had finally rallied for her.

Isolde crept through the yacht's narrow hallway. Shouts echoed from above deck, punctuated by the guttural snarls of wolves and the eerie wailing of Marina's summoned creatures. She followed the sound, climbing the polished steps to the upper back deck.

There stood Marina, her black hair whipping in the violent winds she had conjured. Her hands moved in elegant, practiced motions, commanding the ocean to do her bidding. She hadn't noticed Isolde yet, too focused on maintaining her spells against the approaching wolves.

"You made a very critical error," Isolde called out, stepping fully onto the back deck. "You thought that stealing my power would be enough. That I wouldn't fight back."

Marina whirled around, her perfect features contorting with fury. "You're nothing but a vessel," she spat. "A human accident of nature. This power was never meant for

you!"

"But it chose me anyway," Isolde countered, standing taller. "I may be human, but I've respected the ocean my entire life. You only want to control it for your own selfish purposes."

Marina's fingers twisted in the air, sending a spray of saltwater slicing toward Isolde like liquid daggers. Isolde raised her hand instinctively, and the water stopped midair, hovering between them in crystalline beads.

"Impossible," Marina hissed.

Isolde shot Marina with a dangerous smile, feeling the ocean responding to her call more fully now. "You're not listening to it. The water doesn't want to hurt—it wants to nurture. It doesn't want to destroy—it wants to create."

With a flick of her wrist, Isolde sent the suspended water droplets cascading harmlessly to the deck. She could feel Marina's control slipping as the siren witch poured more power into her spells, frantically trying to maintain dominance.

"You'll never master it," Marina snarled, desperation edging her voice. She gestured wildly toward the ocean where one of her summoned monsters—a serpentine creature with multiple heads—rose from the depths. "Kill her!" she commanded.

The creature hesitated, caught between two mistresses. Isolde reached for it with her consciousness, feeling its ancient mind. Not evil—merely enslaved.

"It's okay," Isolde whispered to it. "You're free now."

A tremendous splash erupted from the port side as Nereus leaped onto the yacht's deck. His massive wolf form landed with predatory grace, his muscles rippling

beneath his fur and his turquoise eyes blazing with protective fury.

"Perfect timing," Isolde called to him, feeling their bond thrum with shared power.

Nereus padded to her side, his large body pressing protectively against her leg. Marina backed away, her eyes darting between them and her wavering sea monster.

"Two against one?" Marina laughed, though fear tinged her voice. "I've lived centuries longer than both of you combined. I've harvested power from a hundred mermaids and drowned a thousand sailors."

"And yet you never learned to respect what you take," Isolde replied. She extended her hand toward Nereus, who shifted instantly into his human form. Naked and magnificent, he took her hand without hesitation.

The moment their fingers interlocked, their combined power exploded outward. The mate bond completed its circuit, and Isolde gasped as Nereus's strength flowed into her and hers into him, amplifying each other beyond what either could achieve alone.

Marina's sea monster turned its massive heads toward her, intelligent eyes regarding its former master with newfound clarity.

"No!" Marina screamed. "I command you! I am your mistress!"

The creature looked to Isolde instead, waiting.

Isolde felt a moment of doubt. Could she order this creature to kill? Should she?

Nereus squeezed her hand. "It's not murder to end a predator," he rumbled, his deep voice vibrating through her. "She'll never stop hunting you—hunting us and killing others to get what she wants."

The monster lunged forward, jaws opening impossibly wide as it crashed down upon Marina. Her screams cut off abruptly as the creature swallowed her whole, returning to the depths from which it came with its final meal.

"That was..." Isolde breathed, her hand still clasped in Nereus's hand.

"Poetic justice," he finished, pulling her against his naked body. "And you were simply magnificent, Isolde."

"We were," she corrected, looking up into his fierce blue eyes. "I couldn't have done it without you."

"That's what true mates do, Luna." His mouth claimed hers in a scorching kiss that left her breathless. "We balance each other. Your compassion with my strength. Your heart with my tooth and claw."

Around them, the ocean calmed to gentle waves, celebrating rather than mourning Marina's demise. The Seafang pack's boats approached, wolves howling their victory.

"They really came for me?" Isolde murmured against Nereus's lips, still stunned by their support.

"For us," he corrected. "You're their Luna now. Fierce and powerful. No one will ever doubt that again."

TWENTY-THREE

NEREUS

N ereus stood on the deck of the siren's yacht with his naked body pressed against Isolde who was clad only in a turquoise bikini that perfectly accentuated her curvy form. His arms wrapped tighter around her, his heart pounding against her chest. She was alive and safe in his arms.

The ocean breeze whipped through Isolde's blonde hair, carrying away the last vestiges of tension from their battle.

Around them, his pack was cleaning up, dispatching the last of the siren's minions.

Pride swelled in Nereus's chest—pride for his pack who had rallied behind him, but most of all, pride for his Luna who had embraced her power and vanquished their enemy.

"The pack actually wanted to save me," Isolde whispered against his chest, her sea-blue eyes gazing up at him in wonder.

"Of course, they did." His voice was a low rumble as he brushed some strands of hair from her cheek. "You're their Luna. You're my Luna."

Nereus turned to his beta, Xavier, who was directing the cleanup operations.

"Take everyone back to the territory," he commanded. "Make sure the wounded are

tended to. And prepare for a celebration tonight."

Xavier nodded, his eyes flickering briefly to Isolde with newfound respect. "Yes, Your Highness."

As his pack members filed back to their boats, Nereus kept Isolde pressed against him, relishing the feel of her curves against his skin. Centuries of waiting, and here she was—his perfect Luna.

Once they were alone, Nereus guided her below deck. "Let's see what this yacht has to offer," he murmured, his hand trailing down her spine, causing her to shiver.

The cabin was luxurious—all polished wood and gleaming chrome with a massive bed dominating the space. Nereus kicked the door shut behind them, then pulled Isolde against him, unable to contain himself any longer.

"I thought I had lost you," he growled, his fingers tangling in her hair. "When I found your houseboat empty..." The memory of that moment sent a fresh wave of terror through him.

Her hands moved up his chest, her touch both soothing and electrifying. "But you found me."

"I will always find you." The words were a vow, spoken with all the authority of an alpha prince who had lived centuries. "You're my Luna, Isolde."

He captured her lips in a kiss that was equal parts tender and fierce, pouring all his fear, relief, and overwhelming love into it. Her body melted against his, responding with equal passion. The mate bond hummed between them, vibrant and undeniable.

Nereus backed her toward the bed, his large hands sliding down to cup the full curves

of her hips that he found so delectable. Even after centuries of life, he had never wanted anyone the way he wanted Isolde.

"I'm never letting you out of my sight again," he said against her lips.

Isolde pulled back just enough to look into his eyes, a mischievous smile playing at her lips. "Is that an alpha command or a promise?"

He chuckled, the sound rumbling deep in his chest. "It's a desperate plea from a man who's been waiting too long for his other half."

"Well," she whispered, her fingers tracing the hard planes of his chest, "in that case, I think I can accommodate you."

Nereus lowered her onto the bed, his body covering hers. "Show me again," he demanded softly, "Show me your power."

Isolde's eyes sparkled with newfound confidence as she raised her hand. A small sphere of water materialized above them, catching the moonlight filtering in through the porthole and casting prismatic reflections across their skin.

"Simply beautiful," Nereus breathed, not just meaning her magic.

Nereus hovered above her, his eyes darkening with desire and his body radiating heat.

She was absolutely breathtaking, her blonde hair fanned out like a halo and her sea-blue eyes glazed with need.

He couldn't get enough of her—her curves, her scent, the way she melted into him as if they were two halves of the same soul.

He captured her lips in a passionate kiss, and his tongue soon slid against hers, teasing and claiming.

Her hands roamed his back, her nails lightly scratching his skin, sending jolts of electricity through him.

He growled low in his throat, the sound rumbling through her as his hands slid down her bikini-clad body.

He traced the curve of her waist, the swells of her hips, the softness of her thighs, and she moaned into his mouth.

"Let me see all of you," he murmured, his voice thick with hunger.

She nodded, her breath coming in short gasps as he slowly peeled off her turquoise bikini.

He tossed it aside, his gaze devouring her naked form.

She was perfect—her full breasts, the delicate curve of her stomach, and the way her hips flared just enough to drive him wild.

He leaned down, trailing kisses along her collarbone, her shoulders, and the swell of her breasts.

"You're so beautiful," he said, his deep voice rough with need. "Every inch of your body."

Her fingers tangled in his hair as he moved lower, his lips brushing over the curve of her stomach.

He loved the way her body responded to him—the way her breath hitched, the way her skin flushed, and the way she squirmed beneath him.

He soon reached the apex of her thighs, her wetness a clear sign of how much she wanted him.

He inhaled deeply, her scent intoxicating, and he couldn't wait any longer.

"Look at me," he commanded, his voice firm yet tender.

Her eyes fluttered open, locking with his.

He held her gaze as he slowly licked her sensitive folds, savoring the taste of her.

She gasped, her hips bucking against his mouth, but he pinned her down with a firm hand on her stomach.

He teased her, alternating between soft licks and slow sucks, drawing out her pleasure until she was writhing beneath him.

"Nereus, please," she begged, her voice trembling. "I need more."

He chuckled darkly, the sound vibrating against her skin.

"Patience, my Luna," he murmured, before diving back in with primal hunger.

He licked and sucked her with fervor, his tongue flicking rapidly over her clit, and his fingers teasing her entrance.

Her moans grew louder, more desperate, and he knew she was close.

"Come for me," he growled against her.

She obeyed, her body arching off the bed as she screamed out her pleasure.

He didn't stop, though, drawing out her orgasm until she was trembling, her spent body falling back onto the bed.

He kissed his way back up her body, savoring the taste of her on his lips.

When he reached her face, she pulled him into a deep, passionate kiss, their tongues tangling as she tasted herself on him.

She pushed him back against the bed, her eyes gleaming with mischief. "My turn," she whispered, her voice sultry.

He raised an eyebrow, a smirk playing on his lips. "Oh? And what do you plan to do?"

She didn't answer, just kissed her way down his chest, her lips leaving a trail of fire in their wake. When she reached his large throbbing member, she looked up at him, her eyes dark with desire. "May I?"

He let out a low groan. "You don't need to ask," he said, his voice thick with need.

She licked her lips, her eyes devouring him, and he nearly lost control right then and there. But he held on, watching her as she slowly licked the length of him, her tongue swirling around the tip. He groaned loudly, his fingers tangling in her hair as she took him into her mouth.

She worked him with a rhythm that had him seeing stars, her hand moving in sync with her mouth. He could feel the pressure building, the pleasure coiling in his gut,

but he wasn't ready to let go. Not yet.

"Wait," he gasped, pulling her away gently. She looked up, her lips swollen, her eyes filled with confusion.

"What's wrong?" she asked, her voice breathless.

"Nothing's wrong," he said gently. "I just want to savor this night."

She smiled, her eyes softening as she climbed back up his body, her curves pressing against him. "Then let's savor it together," she whispered in his ear, her breath hot against his neck.

Her body was a masterpiece above him. Her curves glowed in the moonlight that streamed in through the yacht's porthole. His hands gripped her hips, his fingers digging into her soft skin as she straddled him. Her eyes locked onto his, her hair cascading over her shoulders.

She then leaned down, her breasts brushing against his chest, and captured his lips in a searing kiss.

Her tongue slid against his, and he groaned, his hands moving up her back to tangle in her hair.

She pulled away slightly, her breath hot against his skin, and whispered, "I want to feel all of you inside me. "

His large member throbbed at her words, and he watched as she positioned herself above him. She took him in her hand, guiding him to her entrance, and slowly sank down onto him. Her tight, wet heat enveloped him, and he let out a guttural growl, his hands gripping her hips tighter.

"Isolde," he growled, his voice rough with primal need. "You feel so good."

She moaned, her head falling back as she took him completely inside her. "I love how big you are," she breathed, her voice trembling with pleasure. "You fill me so perfectly."

His wolf stirred inside him, primal and possessive, as he watched her adjust to his size. Her body was made for him, and he couldn't wait to claim her fully tonight as his mate. But he forced himself to be patient, letting her set the pace.

She began to move, her hips rolling in a slow, sensual rhythm that had him seeing stars again. Her hands rested on his chest, her nails digging into his skin as she moaned his name.

"Nereus," she breathed.

"That's it, my Luna," he encouraged, his hands moving to her ass, squeezing the soft flesh. "Take what you need from me."

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Her pace quickened, her movements becoming more urgent as she rode him with wild abandon. Her moans filled the cabin, and Nereus could feel her walls tightening around him, signaling her impending climax.

"Nereus," she gasped, her body trembling. "I'm so close."

"Come again for me, Isolde," he commanded, his voice firm yet tender.

She soon cried out, her body arching as her orgasm crashed over her. Her walls clenched around him, and he let out a loud groan, his own release building rapidly. But he held on, needing to claim her fully before he let go.

"Isolde," he breathed. "Can I do the mating ritual now? Can I claim you fully as mine?"

Her eyes met his, filled with love and desire. "Yes," she breathed, her voice filled with excitement. "Claim me, Nereus. Make me yours."

He growled, his wolf surging to the surface as he flipped her onto her back, never breaking their connection.

He thrust into her with deep, powerful strokes, their bodies moving in perfect harmony.

Her nails raked down his back, and he could feel her walls tightening around him again as she neared another climax.

"Nereus," she moaned, her body trembling beneath him.

"Come, my Luna," he growled, his thrusts becoming more frantic.

She screamed out as her orgasm hit, her body convulsing around him. He felt his own release teetering, and with one final thrust, he buried himself deep inside her, his large member pulsing as he came.

As his climax washed over him, he leaned down, his teeth grazing the sensitive spot where her neck met her shoulder. "You're mine forever, Isolde," he growled, his voice filled with primal possessiveness.

He bit down, his teeth piercing her skin, and she gasped, her body arching against his. He licked the wound, sealing the mate bond, and felt the connection between them solidify, unbreakable and eternal.

"Nereus," she breathed, her voice filled with awe. "I feel it. The true mate bond."

He kissed her gently. "You're officially my Luna, Isolde. My everything."

She smiled, her sea-blue eyes filled with a deep love. "And you're my alpha. My everything."

He held her close, feeling her heart thunder against his chest as their breathing gradually steadied. The satisfaction of finally claiming his mate coursed through his veins like liquid fire. Three hundred years of patiently waiting, and now she was truly his—marked and bonded for eternity.

"Mine," he growled softly against her ear, his thumb tracing the fresh mating mark at the juncture of her neck and shoulder.

But suddenly, Isolde's body stiffened beneath him. Her fingers dug into his biceps with surprising strength, her back arching off the bed.

"Nereus," she gasped, her voice tight with alarm. "Something's happening?—"

He pulled back slightly, his keen eyes assessing her. The sea-blue of her irises began to glow with an eerie turquoise light, brightening until they resembled the luminescent depths of the ocean floor where sunlight barely penetrated.

"Stay calm," he commanded, though his own heart raced with excitement and disbelief. It couldn't be possible... could it?

Her skin shimmered beneath his hands like sunlight dancing across water.

Isolde let out a cry—not of pain but of surprise—as her body began to shift and transform.

Where his beautiful, curvy mate had lain moments before, a stunning white wolf now appeared, with distinctive patches of blue-gray fur swirling across her coat like ocean waves.

"By the Moon Goddess," Nereus whispered, unable to contain his awe.

The white wolf—Isolde—blinked up at him with panicked turquoise eyes, her body trembling beneath his hands.

He immediately slipped from the bed and called upon his own shift, the transformation happening in seconds through centuries of practice. His massive form landed gracefully on the yacht's cabin floor, his turquoise eyes locked on his mate's.

Easy, my Luna, he sent through their newly formed telepathic bond. Don't fight it.

You're truly magnificent.

Her thoughts tumbled back to him in chaotic bursts. How is this possible? I'm human! I shouldn't be able to ? —

Then he felt the shift in her consciousness as realization dawned. Images of her friend Lorelei flickered through their connection—another woman who had transformed after meeting her mate.

Lorelei... she changed too. After she met her alpha and turned thirty... Isolde's thoughts crystallized with sudden clarity. I'm not human. I never was.

Nereus padded closer, circling her wolf form with undisguised pride. You're a waterwolf shifter, just like me. Your powers were dormant until your thirtieth birthday, waiting for you to find your true mate. For us to complete the mate bond.

He nuzzled her neck, inhaling her scent—now enhanced with notes of wolf and ocean magic that made his blood sing. Do you understand what this means, my Luna?

Isolde's wolf form cautiously stretched, testing her new body. I'll live as long as you, she realized, her mental voice filled with wonder. Centuries...

Yes. His satisfaction rumbled through their bond. Now let's go home. I want to show my Luna what she can truly do.

He led her to the deck of the yacht, and without hesitation, leaped into the moonlit water below. Isolde followed with only a moment's pause, her instincts guiding her. The moment her wolf form hit the water, Nereus felt her exhilaration blast through their bond.

This is incredible! Her thoughts sparkled with joy as she found her rhythm,

swimming beside him with natural grace. I can feel every current and every creature around us!

This is your birthright, he told her, pride swelling in him as he watched her sleek form cutting through the waves. The ocean has always been calling to you. Now you understand why.

They swam side by side through the dark waters, moonlight guiding their way toward the shore of his territory. Their territory—not just his anymore.

When we return, Nereus projected, our pack will see their true Luna in all her glory. No one will question your place at my side again.

And Marina? Her thoughts turned to their vanquished enemy.

She never understood what you truly were, he replied. None of our enemies will. That's our advantage.

As they approached the shoreline of their kingdom, Nereus felt a completeness he'd never known. His Luna was his equal in every way—powerful, beautiful, and immortal. Together, they would rule the Seafang pack for centuries to come.

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She glanced at Nereus, his strong profile illuminated by the afternoon sun. His hands gripped the steering wheel with that casual confidence that still made her heart skip beats. Even after all this time together, the sight of him sent delicious ripples of awareness through her body.

"I still can't believe you did this," Isolde said, gesturing toward the horizon where the new research station gleamed white against the coastline. "You didn't just rebuild it – you made it three times better than before."

His mouth curved into that half-smile that never failed to make her insides melt. "The old building was inadequate for what you needed. This one has proper equipment, proper funding..."

"Proper sight lines from your territory so you can keep an eye on me?" Isolde teased, nudging his muscular thigh.

He captured her hand and brought it to his lips. "I don't need buildings for that. I'm always aware of exactly where you are now."

The possessive edge in his voice sent a shiver of delight up her spine. Three months ago, such dominance would have irritated her to the core. Now, it felt like safety – like home.

"Thank you," she said more seriously. "Not just for the building, but for everything. For using the pack's resources to help build relationships with the human world. I know it goes against centuries of tradition."

"Traditions change." Nereus's thumb traced circles on her palm. "You changed them."

The admission made her heart swell. She still marveled at how much their lives had intertwined.

Her shifts into wolf form had become smoother and her water powers more controlled.

The pack that had once regarded her with suspicious eyes now looked to her with respect – their Luna who bridged two worlds.

"I'd buy you a hundred research stations if that's what would make you happy," he said, his voice dropping to that deep timbre. "I'd make friends with every human on this coast if it pleased you."

Isolde laughed, the sound floated away in the wind through the cracked window.

"Lucky for you that's not necessary." She leaned closer, breathing in his scent – ocean salt and something distinctly, intoxicatingly Nereus.

"Just being with you makes me happy. Our life together in the castle, leading the pack – that's everything I never knew I wanted and more. "

His gray eyes darkened as he glanced at her, then back to the road. "The ceremony today will go well. Everyone's eager to see what you've helped create."

Isolde felt a flutter of nervousness mixed with pride.

The new marine research station wasn't just a replacement – it was a bridge between worlds.

Her colleagues had no idea that their new benefactor was an ancient waterwolf prince, but the facility would serve both human research and provide valuable data to help the pack better protect their ocean territory.

"I've come a long way from the woman who accidentally unleashed a tidal wave on her birthday," she mused.

Nereus chuckled, the sound rumbling through the truck cabin. "You've come fully into your power. As I always knew you would."

His hand slid from the gearshift to her thigh, a casual possessive gesture that sent heat pooling low in her belly. Even with the grand opening minutes away, Isolde found herself wishing they could turn around and race back to their private beach.

"Later," Nereus murmured as if reading her thoughts. "We have all night to celebrate properly."

The promise in his voice made her cheeks flush. Some things hadn't changed – the magnetic pull between them remained as powerful as that first electric kiss on the beach.

Isolde soon stepped out of his truck, her eyes drawn immediately to the gleaming glass and steel structure of the new marine research station.

The November sunlight played across its surface, reflecting the ocean's movements in a way that made the building itself seem alive.

Her breath caught in her throat at the sight of it—a phoenix risen from the destruction she'd unwittingly caused three months ago.

"It's perfect," she whispered, more to herself than to her mate.

Nereus's warm hand settled at the bottom of her back, his touch sending a familiar tingle up her spine. Even through her fitted charcoal dress, his heat radiated into her skin.

"Ready to show it off, Dr. Morgan?" he asked. The formal title was for public consumption—at home, he rarely used anything but possessive endearments that made her blush.

She straightened her shoulders, feeling the weight of dual responsibilities. To the humans gathered here, she was simply Dr. Isolde Morgan, marine biologist. None knew that beneath her professional exterior beat the heart of the Luna of the Seafang pack.

"As ready as I'll ever be," she replied, forcing confidence into her voice though her stomach fluttered with nerves.

As they approached the crowd waiting at the entrance, Isolde noticed Nereus checking their surroundings with sharp, precise movements of his head. Always the protector, always the alpha, even among humans who had no idea of his true nature.

"Dr. Morgan! Mr. Varon!" The new facility director, Dr. Hammond, bustled forward, his round face flushed with excitement. "Everything is prepared for the ceremony. We can't thank you enough for this extraordinary gift to the scientific community."

Nereus nodded, his public persona perfectly calibrated—generous benefactor, wealthy businessman with environmental interests. Only Isolde could see the predator beneath the tailored suit.

"The ocean deserves our best efforts," he stated simply. His hand hadn't left her back, a subtle claim that sent a rush of heat through her blood.

The dedication ceremony itself was mercifully brief.

Isolde stood beside Nereus as a plaque was unveiled: "The Varon-Morgan Marine Research Facility.

" Their names linked together permanently in gleaming bronze.

The symbolism wasn't lost on her—a public marking of territory that mirrored the more intimate claim Nereus had made on her body and soul.

After the applause died down, Isolde led the first tour group through the facility.

She pointed out the state-of-the-art laboratories, the expanded rescue facilities for injured marine life, and the massive data center that would process information from monitoring stations throughout the Seafang territory.

"And this," she said, opening the doors to the crown jewel, "is our observation deck."

The guests gasped as they entered the glass-enclosed space that extended out over the water. Below their feet, the ocean stretched endless and blue, the afternoon sun highlighting every ripple.

"The glass is specially treated to allow maximum visibility without disturbing marine life," she explained. "We can observe natural behaviors without interference."

"This must have cost a fortune," one of the city council members whispered, glancing at Nereus who stood slightly apart from the group.

Isolde followed her gaze. Nereus was watching her, not the ocean, with a piercing intensity that made her heart skip a beat. There was something different about him today—something beyond his usual possessive confidence.

"No expense was spared," Isolde agreed, trying to maintain her focus on the tour. "Mr. Varon believes in investing in the future of our oceans."

As the group moved on, Nereus caught her arm, holding her back for a moment.

"You're magnificent in your element," he murmured, his eyes darkening slightly as they swept over her. "Watching you share your passion with them—" he shook his head slightly "—it reminds me why the Moon Goddess chose you."

"Careful," she teased, though heat bloomed in her cheeks. "Someone might hear you talking about moon goddesses."

His lips quirked upward. "I can't wait to show you how a proper alpha honors and celebrates his Luna's achievements."

His words sent a rush of anticipation through her body. Whatever was making him act so mysteriously today, Isolde had a feeling their evening would be memorable.

Isolde's heels clicked against the observation deck's polished floor as she guided the last tour group through the new facility.

Her dress hugged her curves, professional yet flattering—a balance she'd struck more confidently since becoming Luna.

Through the glass walls, the sunset painted the ocean in ribbons of amber and rose gold, creating a stunning backdrop as she finished her presentation.

"The sensors embedded along the coastline will give us unprecedented data on marine migration patterns," she explained, gesturing to the digital map glowing on the interactive display. "We'll finally be able to track how climate shifts are affecting local populations."

Struggling to maintain her professional demeanor under their penetrating stares, Isolde asked the group, "Are there any final questions?"

Before anyone could respond, Nereus strode forward, parting the small crowd with nothing more than his presence. People naturally moved to accommodate him—an unconscious recognition of apex authority that even humans couldn't ignore.

"Dr. Morgan," he said, using her formal title though his voice warmed with the intimate timbre that made her pulse quicken. "I believe I have a question."

Isolde's breath caught. This wasn't part of the program. "Mr. Varon, perhaps we could address any concerns after?—"

"I'm afraid this can't wait." The corner of his mouth twitched upward in that subtle way that always signaled he was about to upend her world.

The group fell silent, attention riveted to the imposing man who'd funded the magnificent facility around them.

Isolde recognized several board members, prominent scientists, and even a reporter from the local paper among them.

Whatever Nereus was planning, he had chosen a moment with maximum witnesses.

He stepped closer, close enough that she could catch hints of his scent—ocean and earth and something primally Nereus that made her inner wolf stir.

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 2:00 am

"Isolde Morgan," he began, his deep voice sending shivers racing down her spine. "Three months ago, you changed everything. Not just for this research facility, but for me."

Her eyes widened as he reached into his pocket. The world seemed to slow around her as he lowered himself to one knee, the gesture oddly vulnerable for a man who commanded an ancient pack.

"You walked into the ocean and into my life," he continued, opening a small box to reveal a ring that caught the sunset's glow—an enormous blue diamond surrounded by smaller white ones. "The ocean brought us together, and now I'm asking you to let me be your anchor for all our days to come."

Gasps rippled through the audience. Isolde's hand flew to her mouth, emotion flooding her chest. She'd known they were mated for eternity in the eyes of the pack, but this—this was Nereus embracing her human traditions, claiming her publicly in a way her human side had never expected.

"Will you marry me, Isolde?" His voice soared above the space, commanding yet somehow tender. "Be my wife in the eyes of all worlds?"

The double meaning wasn't lost on her—the carefully chosen words that spoke truth to both her identities.

"Yes," she whispered, then louder as confidence surged through her. "Yes, Nereus Varon. I will marry you."

His smile turned predatory as he slid the ring onto her finger, then rose to his feet with fluid grace. Without warning, he pulled her against his hard body, one hand possessively cupping the back of her neck as his mouth claimed hers in a kiss that teetered on the edge of propriety.

The applause around them barely registered as his lips moved against hers, marking her as thoroughly as if they'd been alone. When he finally released her, his whisper was for her ears alone.

"Now everyone knows you're mine in every possible way."

The drive back to the castle was a blur of heady anticipation and lingering euphoria.

The full moon hung low in the November sky, casting silvery light over the landscape as Nereus's truck raced along the coastal road.

Isolde kept glancing at the ring on her finger, the blue diamond catching the moonlight.

It felt surreal like a dream she never wanted to wake from.

His hand rested on her bare thigh, his thumb tracing lazy circles that sent a shiver through her.

When they reached the castle garage, Nereus wasted no time. He was out of the truck and around to her side before she could even unbuckle her seat belt. The door swung open, and he reached for her, his movements deliberate and possessive.

"What are you—" Her question was cut off as he scooped her into his arms effortlessly, one arm beneath her knees and the other cradling her back.

"My future wife deserves to be carried into her castle," he said playfully.

Isolde laughed, wrapping her arms around his neck. "You're so dramatic," she teased, though her heart swelled at the gesture.

"Dramatic?" He raised an eyebrow, his eyes glinting with mischief as he carried her through the castle doors. "Wait until I show you what I've got planned next."

She didn't have time to respond. He moved with purpose, his long strides carrying them through the grand halls and up the sweeping staircase.

The castle staff wisely scattered, giving their alpha and Luna privacy.

By the time they reached their royal chambers, Isolde's pulse was racing and her body humming with anticipation.

Nereus kicked the door closed behind them, his gaze locked on hers as he set her down gently on the plush rug in the center of the room. His hands cupped her face, his touch both tender and commanding. "You're mine in every way now," he said, his voice a growl.

He kissed her then, deep and consuming, with the kind of intensity that left her breathless.

His hands moved to the zipper of her dress, tugging it down with practiced ease.

The fabric pooled at her feet, leaving her in nothing but her lace underwear.

His eyes darkened as they raked over her body, and she felt a heat bloom in her core at the way he looked at her—like she was the only thing that mattered in the world.

"On the bed," he commanded, his voice rough with a hungry need. "Hands and knees this time."

Her breath hitched at the directness of his tone, but she obeyed after she removed her lace panties without hesitation.

She climbed onto the massive four-poster bed, the sheets cool against her palms. She could feel him behind her, his presence overwhelming, and his scent filling the air.

His hands gripped her hips, and she arched her back instinctively, presenting herself to him.

"God, you're perfect," he growled, his fingers threading through her hair before tugging gently, tilting her head back.

He didn't waste time. She felt the tip of him press against her, and then he was inside her in one smooth, relentless thrust. She gasped, her fingers clutching the sheets as he began to move.

His rhythm was primal and unyielding, each thrust driving her closer to the edge, his fingers digging into her hips hard enough to leave marks.

"Nereus," she moaned, her body trembling as he hit that spot inside her that made her see stars.

"All mine," he growled, his voice a low rumble that vibrated through her. "Say it."

"All yours," she gasped, the words spilling from her lips as she felt the tension in her body coil tighter and tighter.

He leaned over her, his chest pressing into her back, his breath hot against her ear. "Again."

"All yours," she cried out, her voice breaking as the first wave of her orgasm crashed over her.

He followed her over the edge, burying himself deep as he spilled inside her. The force of his release was enough to send her spiraling into another wave of pleasure, her body shuddering with the intensity of it.

When it was over, he collapsed beside her, pulling her into his arms. Her head rested on his chest, the steady thud of his heartbeat beneath her ear. His fingers traced circles along her back, and she sighed contentedly.

"That was... so hot," she murmured, her voice still a little shaky.

"Just the first of many hot nights," he replied, his lips brushing against her forehead.

She glanced up at him, her eyes meeting his. "You're insatiable."

"Only for you," he said, his tone softening as he cupped her cheek. "My future wife. My Luna."

Her heart swelled at his words, and she pressed a kiss to his chest. "I wouldn't want it any other way."

As they lay there, wrapped in each other's arms, Isolde couldn't help but think about how far they'd come. That tidal wave had turned her life upside down, but it had brought her to Nereus—to this moment and to this love. She smiled, her fingers brushing over the ring on her finger. It wasn't just a promise of marriage, it was a symbol of everything they'd built together.

"Thank you," she whispered, her voice barely audible.

"For what?" he asked, his thumb brushing against her lower lip.

"For saving me," she said, looking up at him. "For not giving up on me. For waiting for me."

His gaze softened, and he pressed a kiss on her forehead. "I'd wait centuries for you, Isolde. You're worth every second."

The full moon shone through the tall windows, bathing them in its silvery glow, and she snuggled closer to him. In that moment, she felt a peace settle over her.

Not only was Isolde where she was meant to be, but also where she chose to be—in Nereus's arms.