

## Chapter 12

It had been a week since Amelia and Morel had met. They'd gotten along well, even after their initial confusion about each other, and in the end the two girls had all but *begged* Sylas to arrange another time for them to meet and talk.

So he had. He'd put aside time for dinner and invited them both.

This time, however, Amelia couldn't get away with leaving Peter behind. Which meant Sylas had needed to go into the city and buy Morel a dress.

She'd been very excited to try on the dress. And though in the end she complained that it was strange and uncomfortable, she had kept it on and promised that she would, once Peter and Amelia arrived, shape-shift into her full-human form and hold it.

Sylas wasn't sure why, but he had a bad feeling about what Peter might do if he discovered Morel was a selkie. And when Amelia had agreed it might be best for Morel to remain human in Peter's presence, Sylas had felt a sensation like a hot stone burning his gut.

Something about that man made his chest tight with rage.

But, as Peter's familiar and heavy knock sounded on Sylas' front door, the man pushed down his anger and forced a smile to his lips.

'Amelia, welcome,' he greeted his sister with a warm hug and ushered her inside. 'It's good to see you again! Morel's in the kitchen. She brought a salmon, so we've got that in the oven.'

'Ah, the fisherman's girl likes to eat fish!' Peter teased. 'Why am I not surprised—'

Sylas shut the door in Peter's face, cutting him off mid-sentence.

He ignored his sister's gasp, simply rolling his eyes and scooping a hand around her to lead her to the kitchen as Peter let himself in and followed them.

'Sylas, I wish you wouldn't...' said Amelia, quietly, as Sylas took the dish she carried and placed it on the table next to the food he and Morel had prepared. She looked like she wanted to say more, but as her eyes lay on the selkie-in-disguise she smiled and instead reached out a hand in friendly greeting. 'Morel, it's so nice to see you again. That dress looks beautiful on you.'

'Thanks! Sylas bought it for me!' Morel chirped, turning in place so the dress spun around her. Then, she stopped spinning and very, very gently lay a hand on Amelia's stomach. 'You must be so excited—'

'Wow, Sylas!' Peter's voice cut Morel off, and everyone cast him a glance. 'That's a big woman you've gotten yourself. With a twig like you, I'm surprised she hasn't broken something!'

Sylas felt his chest burn, then, and he almost said something— Though Morel beat him to it.

'*This* is your husband, Amelia?' Morel asked loudly, glancing back and forth between the pair before giving a scoff through her nose and casually turning to adjust the table settings. 'Alright, then.'

It was clear that the simplicity of Morel's statement cut Peter deep. The fact she had seemed to care *so little* about him that she hadn't bothered to put effort into an insult

appeared to offend him more than anything Sylas had ever said to him, and he sat down at the table with a quiet huff of annoyance.

Morel simply ignored him, though Amelia hurried to fuss over him in a way that made Sylas' chest squeeze in a rage he couldn't place the cause of.

'So, Amelia!' Morel turned to the woman and, seemingly unaware of her worry over her husband, took her hands and bounced in place. 'I told Auntie that you were pregnant, and she told me to give you this—'

Amelia chuckled, perhaps a little nervously, as her hands were released and Morel hurried from the kitchen to the main room and back.

When she came back she was holding up a necklace. Its thread was made from woven seaweed, with clean-but-unpolished seashells hanging from it in a decorative order that seemed to have a lot of thought behind it.

Amelia's smile turned from nervous to excited as Morel hurried over to her and carefully placed it around her neck.

'Wow, this is so beautiful!' Amelia beamed.

'Auntie caught each of these herself, just to make the necklace for you,' Morel explained, pointing to each shell. 'This one here brings you good health. And this one is lucky!'

'Doesn't sound too lucky, if your aunt was able to catch it,' Peter mumbled.

Sylas almost snapped at him, until Morel continued and he realised Peter looked more furious about being ignored than he ever did when someone argued back— So instead Sylas felt himself grin as Morel took Amelia by the arm and led her to the seat opposite the man so they could sit down together.

'And this one represents the inner spirit and true self,' Morel continued. 'Auntie said that might be the most important one. Because if you're not true to yourself, then who *can* you be true to?'

Amelia gave a laugh, gently petting Morel's hand as it lay on her shoulder. 'Tell your aunt I said thank you,' she said. 'I really appreciate it.'

'Maybe you can meet her and tell her yourself!' Morel suggested, beaming. 'She'd really love you, I think!' then, she turned to Peter. 'Not you, though. I think she'd hate you.'

Peter gave an offended squawk and Amelia's eyes went wide— But Morel didn't seem to notice as the kettle gave a squeal and she leapt to her feet and hurried over to it; pointing at it with enthusiasm.

'It's done! Sylas! It's done! Tea! Your tea!'

Sylas felt his heart flutter at Morel's excitement, and he couldn't help but give a dreamy sigh as he slipped past her and took the kettle from the stove.

'That means the salmon is ready, doesn't it?' Morel asked, practically dancing in place as she bounced from foot to foot in joy. 'You said that they would be ready at the same time! I can't wait! Ah! I'm so excited!'

'Hey, hey, careful!' Sylas laughed, quickly stepping away so she didn't knock the hot water from his hands as he poured it. 'You can't run around in the kitchen, Morel! You're going to hurt yourself.'

'Oh, sorry! Sorry!' Morel stilled herself as best she could, and Sylas saw her form

shift —just for a second— before she took a deep breath and composed herself. ‘Is this better?’

‘Yeah, at least while we’re in the kitchen,’ Sylas chuckled. Then, he retrieved the salmon from the oven and placed it on the stove.

‘Ooh!’ Morel’s eyes went wide. ‘That smells so good!’

‘Give me a hand?’ Sylas asked as he cut the salmon and served its pieces onto four plates. ‘One cup and one plate each; if you would give Peter his?’

‘Sure!’ Morel chirped, grabbing a cup and a plate and turning back to the table.

She was such a wonderful girl. He couldn’t help but smile every time she spoke to him, now....

And as he turned back to take Amelia’s food to her, he saw the smile on *her* face and felt himself blushing.

*Was he really that obvious?*

Then Peter snickered, as Morel placed his food down, Sylas he felt his face fall in annoyance as the man waved a hand at him and said in a mocking tone:

‘Wow you really *are* smitten, aren’t you, twig-boy?’

Before Sylas could open his mouth to respond, Morel spat loudly onto Peter’s dinner, before calmly turning away and retrieving her own plate.

Too stunned to respond, the trio of humans simply stared at the spit-covered salmon serving with their mouths hanging open and their eyes wide.

‘So, Amelia,’ Morel said as she casually took her place at the table. She put down her food, and then laid a hand over Amelia’s pregnant belly. ‘What are you thinking of calling them?’

Sylas almost laughed, but managed to hold it back as he placed his sister’s food in front of her and retrieved his own. He shifted his chair over to sit closer to the girls; leaving Peter to deal with his plate on his own.

He had doubted himself before, not wanting to admit it to anyone, including himself— But he knew now, undeniably, in that moment as he watched Morel lean forward to blow a playful raspberry on Amelia’s stomach:

He was in love with Morel.