

Chapter 13

Sylas lay in his cramped bed, Morel pressed tight against him as she slept. He had an arm around her, both to keep her close and to keep her from rolling off the side to the floor, as he stared up at the roof and let out a long breath.

As soon as Amelia and Peter had left, Morel had all but collapsed from exhaustion; her human form slipping away as her whiskers returned and her ears grew and her legs fused into a tail. She'd lay on the floor where she was for a long while, before Sylas had convinced her to move to the bed so she could rest more properly.

She had fallen asleep almost as soon as the blanket was thrown over her, and Sylas had been feeling a churning mix of guilt and appreciation since.

It had been mentioned before that holding her full-human form was tiring, but Sylas hadn't realised just *how* exhausting it was for her.

He thought he'd have to find a way to make it up to her, as he rested his head gently against her own and sighed.

He could remember the conversation they'd had as they'd lay on the floor of his main room.

One thing Morel had said, in particular, had stuck out to him:

"Peter seems a lot more like the sort of boy my aunt warned me about."

It had made Sylas' skin crawl, to hear it.

It meant it wasn't just him who saw it. That something really *was* wrong with Peter. That the man really *was* vile and rancid and disingenuous.

He prayed that his sister would be okay.

Knowing that the worried looks she had cast him at Peter's annoyances weren't just in his head—that Morel had seen them, too—made his heart beat into his throat and his skin grow cold and clammy.

How could he help her, when she would never admit to anything being wrong?

It made his entire soul hurt. Because in the end it was his fault, wasn't it? His own vicious attitude had driven his sister into the arms of a horrible man who had trapped her in his grip and would never let her go.

He was a terrible brother.

He closed his eyes tight, his brow furrowing in frustration as a surge of guilt bit at his mind like an angry dog.

And then he heard the *clunk* of his front door and hurriedly sat up.

He fumbled at the side of his bed for something—anything—to take up as a weapon as he heard his front door close again rolled to his feet.

His hand gripped an old wine bottle, which he brandished at the ready as he slowly slipped out his bedroom door— But then he saw who had entered his house and hesitated, lowering the bottle.

It was Morel's young sister, Kas; gazing around curiously with her seal-like eyes and twitching snout.

She sniffed the air and slowly let her gaze trail around the room, before it fell on Sylas and she tensed, her seal-like features vanishing into a more human face as she took in a

sharp breath and stumbled back a pace.

‘Hey, it’s okay,’ Sylas said, softly, as he discarded the bottle. ‘You’re Morel’s sister, aren’t you? Kas?’

Kas gave an anxious nod, and Sylas thought he saw her swallow as she stared at him with a terrified look. ‘M... M-Mum s-says Morel... needs to come home. A-Auntie Is-Isseal is— She’s really mad.’

It was clear, now, that Kas was trembling from head to toe. Sylas wasn’t sure how to reassure her that she was safe with him; so he simply nodded and tried to keep his voice soft as he spoke. ‘She’s asleep,’ he said. ‘I’ll go wake her for you.’

Kas didn’t respond; instead, she rubbed at her arms and glanced around as if expecting something to come at her from another direction, before retreating a few more steps back.

Not wanting to make her any more nervous, Sylas headed back to his room and made his way to Morel; sitting beside her and gently shaking her by her shoulder.

‘Morel?’ he said, gently. ‘Morel, your sister’s looking for you.’

Morel simply groaned, rolling over and ignoring Sylas.

‘*Morel!*’ it came out as a laugh, as he leant back over her and pecked a kiss on her cheek. ‘Come on. She’s come all the way out here looking for you, I think you should at least acknowledge her.’

‘*Acknowledging,*’ Morel mumbled, waving a hand. ‘And then ignoring.’

‘Morel, she’s scared,’ Sylas explained. ‘I think she needs you to reassure her.’

‘Why?’ Morel groaned. ‘You’re not going to hurt her.’

‘I don’t think she knows that,’ said Sylas.

‘She’ll figure it out.’

‘Morel...’ it came out as a sigh, this time. And Sylas shook his head as he looked away.

And as he turned he saw as Kas, now standing in his bedroom doorway, flinched and instinctively moved to half-hide behind the wall.

They watched each other for a moment, as Morel groaned and rolled onto her back and rubbed at her eyes, before Kas’ ears flicked up attentively and she slowly eased into view.

‘Morel says you’re a *nice* boy,’ she said, a quiver in her voice as she took a deep breath. ‘You... you don’t seem so bad.’

‘He’s not bad at all,’ Morel huffed, sounding exhausted. She pushed herself up, then, and put an arm around Sylas, leaning close so she could press her nose into his cheek and chuckle.

This act seemed to calm Kas, who twitched her whiskers and took several steps into the room. She paused when Sylas smiled at her; fidgeting for a moment, before taking the last few steps to the bed and smacking her sister.

‘Ow! What was that for?!’ Morel complained.

‘Mum’s really mad!’ Kas blurted. ‘And Auntie Isseal is even madder! You were meant to be home before sunset! You *promised* you’d be home before it got dark!’

‘Yeah, well... I fell asleep,’ Morel dismissed, rising to her feet and waving a hand. Then she smiled, and cast a glance to Sylas. ‘Did you know Sylas’ sister might be having a *boy* for her pup?’

‘What?’ Kas’ brow furrowed in confusion. ‘Is that even possible?’

‘Yeah, boys up here are born just like girls are!’ Morel’s smile turned impish. ‘And they don’t know which it’s gonna be until they have them!’

‘That’s weird!’ Kas winced. ‘Boys aren’t meant to be *pups!* They’re just *boys!*’

‘Yeah, well, they have to make new boys *somehow*, right?’ Morel teased. Then, her ears flicked up and she cast a glance at Sylas. ‘Do you think when *we* have a pup, it might be a boy?’

‘No!’ Kas exclaimed, smacking at her sister again. ‘There’s *never* been a boy selkie, before! Auntie Isseal said so! She said it’s impossible!’

Sylas wasn’t sure what to say, as they argued on— He was too stunned by Morel’s question.

When they had a....

When?

It made his breath catch in his throat, and he covered his mouth with a hand as tears welled in his eyes.

‘Sylas?’ Morel’s tone changed, as Sylas let out his trembling breath, and she crouched down to meet his eye. ‘Sylas, what’s wrong?’

‘I always had this... this image in my head,’ he admitted. ‘Two children, sitting on the rug by the light of the fireplace. I’d watch them play. And read to them. And I’d mend their toys. But I could never imagine a mother for them. No matter how hard I tried.’

Morel’s eyes tightened in confusion as she cocked her head and leant closer. And behind her, Kas’ ears twitched curiously. But neither girl said anything as Sylas wiped his eyes and took Morel by the hands.

‘I can imagine you as their mother,’ he said, softly. ‘Even clearer than I can imagine them. I didn’t think you’d want that, as well. But... you do? You really want that, too?’

Morel blushed, deep dark red creeping over her cheeks as she looked Sylas in the eye. ‘Oh. I.... Oh, I said *when*,’ she realised aloud. ‘I meant if. *If we* had a pup.’

The look Kas gave her sister was one of shock, realisation, and perhaps a little bit of horror. ‘Oh, cods, you *did* say “when”!’ she blurted. ‘*Morel!*’

‘Stay out of this, Kas!’ Morel hissed viciously, before turning back to Sylas and letting the gentle note to her voice return. ‘You want pups?’

Sylas nodded.

‘Auntie Isseal said boys *never* want pups,’ Kas commented. ‘She said they *always* leave, when they find out a girl is going to have pups!’

Sylas felt a tired chuckle escape him. ‘I think your aunt might not know as much about boys as she thinks.’

Kas gave an incredulous gasp, covering her mouth with both her hands as she did. ‘You did *not* just say that! Morel! Did you hear what he *said?!*’

Morel ignored her sister, instead pecking a kiss on Sylas’ lips and rising to her feet. ‘Meet me tomorrow at the beach?’ she asked.

‘Of course,’ Sylas breathed.

‘Morel, no!’ Kas exclaimed. ‘Auntie will be *so mad* at you!’

‘Only if you tell her!’ Morel shot back. ‘And you’re not going to tell her, *are you?*’

Kas covered her mouth, again, and made for the door.

‘That’s what I thought,’ Morel said, her whiskers giving a smug twitch before she looked down at Syllas with affection. ‘Tomorrow. When the sun starts to set?’
‘I’ll be there.’