

Chapter 15

It was a beautiful evening. One of the best that there had been all year. The air was crisp, but didn't bite bare skin or sting through clothes, and the rays of light shining in the orange sky still kissed away what little cold may have otherwise nipped exposed faces.

It may have been that the miserable weather of the past few months was finally starting to warm up with the first days of Spring, or it might have been that Sylas' own heart had melted its icy shell and he was finally seeing his future from a different perspective, but life suddenly seemed worth living.

He may have said it to be either of those two things, or those two things combined. But, mostly, Sylas knew that it was because Morel had spent the day by his side, joking and laughing with the Earnshaws as they manned their stall and served their customers.

Morel had been practising holding her full-human form, and she had been feeling confident enough today to join Sylas in the city.

Her aunt had, of course, warned her away from it the previous night. But Morel was not one for being held back from opportunity. And so she had come with Sylas anyway. Her whiskers only slipped out once, and it was as much to Sylas' surprise as it was to Mrs Earnshaw's; though no words had been spoken on it besides a curious "oh?" from the older woman before she had motioned to her own face and Morel had quickly hidden her selkie features away again.

It had only been a month since Isseal had spoken to Sylas on the beach and given him and Morel tentative permission (he would not dare call it her *blessing*) to continue seeing each other, but that month had been one of the best of his entire life.

And, with Isseal's permission for the couple to meet, Morel had not seen the need to rush away come sunrise. They had time to sit together, now. To talk properly about things. About anything, and about everything.

Morel sat on the stool that Mr Earnshaw had offered her as Sylas packed up his stall. Deep, dark bags were starting to form under her eyes and she had begun looking very tired. Twice, she had almost nodded off, and both times Mrs Earnshaw had tapped her on the shoulder and said something to lift her spirits.

Not that her spirits seemed to need lifting, as she was already as happy as any person could ever be.

'I can take you home, if you need,' Sylas offered as he pulled the cover over his stall. He placed a hand on Morel's back as she looked up to him and shook her head. 'I can visit Amelia tomorrow.'

'I want to meet her pup,' Morel said, simply. 'I've never seen a boy pup, before.'

A muffled chuckle came from Mrs Earnshaw, who pet her confused husband on the chest and whispered something softly to him.

Sylas pursed his lips as he thought, seriously, about whether or not Morel would make the trip.

Peter was working on the night shift, he knew that much— Amelia had specifically timed their visit so that they could avoid seeing the man. She was too tired, looking after

the new baby, to watch the couple pick a fight with her husband.

But Sylas still wasn't sure if going to his sister's house was the wisest idea....

Then, as if reading his mind (which, he knew she couldn't), Morel gave a childish huff and flopped limply against the back of her chair, reforming her long selkie ears just so she could press them back in a display of frustration.

Mrs Earnshaw quickly yanked off the scarf around her own head and used it to cover the girl from view; affixing it safely over her hair and ears before pulling its last length over her face and tucking it in just right to obscure her whiskers.

Morel gave a relieved sigh, and Sylas saw her entire body relax as she reached up to put a webbed hand against Mrs Earnshaw's own in a grateful motion.

'Amelia's house is closer than mine,' Sylas found himself saying aloud; if they hurried to his sister's, Morel could lay down and rest until she felt up for the long trek home.

Morel simply nodded as the Earnshaws helped her to her feet, and she rested against Sylas to balance herself as he led her through the crowded streets.

There were only a few looks in their direction, as they made their way through the city; but it seemed more like concern at Morel's clear exhaustion and clumsy gait, than any sort of notice to her strange clawed hands or unusually dappled skin.

They arrived at Amelia's house quickly and, as she had instructed Sylas to do in her letter, simply opened the door and entered the building.

Morel made her way for the nearest chair and sat down on its padded cushioning, her legs disappearing as she fell onto her side and let out a long, animal-like groan and turned completely into a seal.

'Sylas, is that you?' Amelia's voice called from the direction of the bedroom, and she soon emerged and paused; her eyes falling onto the seal that lay, panting heavily, on her couch.

And the seal's own eyes widened as she saw the frail little bundle that was latched to Amelia's breast.

'Is that him?' Morel asked, rolling over and off the couch with a heavy *fplap* onto the hard wooden floor. 'That's the smallest pup I've ever seen in my entire life! Are all boys born that small?'

'All *humans* are,' Amelia told her, her concerned look turning into a warm smile as she stepped over to sit on the couch that Morel had just rolled off.

She readjusted the sling that helped her hold her baby and Sylas caught sight of the newborn, eyes closed and little hands gripping his sister's hair tight, and thought he might cry as he felt tears coming to his eyes and a lump forming in his throat.

His nephew.

This tiny little thing was his *nephew*.

Little baby Willis.

He was the smallest, most precious thing that Sylas had ever laid eyes on.

'*Can I hold him?*' Sylas asked; his whispered voice breaking as he took a step forward and, shakily, lifted his hands.

'Of course you can! I'd appreciate the break,' Amelia chuckled. 'Just let him finish eating, first.'