

Chapter 2

He couldn't believe what had just happened.

Not in a hundred years would he have guessed that would have been how it happened.

Or how it felt.

He could never have guessed it would have felt like that.

Morel lay beside him, lifting a leg to the air and spreading out her toes playfully as she revelled in the last of the feeling of what they'd done.

'That was...' he hesitated.

'Fun?' Morel finished for him, rolling over so she could run a hand along his chest. She giggled again and buried her nose into his side, and he heard her tail slap onto the floor and realised her legs were gone again.

'Yeah,' he finally agreed, letting out an exhausted laugh that was more like a pant. 'That was.... Wow.'

'Yeah.'

'I've never done anything like that before,' Sylas admitted. 'Never.'

'Me either,' Morel's claws tickled Sylas' bare chest like the nip of the icy air, and she let out a deep sigh. 'I'd heard it was fun, but I didn't think it would feel *that* nice. And I've heard you boys aren't always so sweet.'

'Would you call that "sweet"?' Sylas breathed a laugh. 'I'd call it "sweaty."'

'*Sweaty*,' Morel echoed, moving her hand from Sylas' chest to her own, where it trailed over one of the dark, round marks he'd left on her.

He felt the urge to give her another, and found his lips meeting her neck as she gasped and squirmed. And when he pulled away he'd left another very visible kiss in her skin.

'Are all humans as fun as you are?' she panted.

'I wouldn't know,' Sylas admitted, wrapping an arm around the selkie and sighing. 'I don't spend much time with other people. I live by myself.'

'Really?' Morel pressed closer into him. 'That must be very lonely. I can't imagine being without my colony.'

'Your colony?'

'My family,' Morel gave a nod and pointed out to one of the rocky islands in the distance. 'We're staying over there. Though— Don't tell anyone! It's supposed to be a secret.'

'I won't tell,' Sylas promised. He stared out to Morel's home, and swore he could see movement along the island's edge. Was that her family? Or just waves against the shore? He couldn't tell. 'Is it a nice place to live?'

'It's wonderful. Better than the last place we stayed. I'm really not looking forward to moving on again.... There's kelp growing nearby, so we pad the banks with it to make the rocks softer. And at night we curl up together in a pile and sleep. It's nice.'

'It sounds it,' Sylas replied.

'So...' Morel's hand began to run along his chest. 'I uh.... This a little embarrassing,

but I think I forgot your name? Or forgot to ask for it in the first place. I don't remember which.'

'Oh—' Sylas realised she was right; he hadn't introduced himself. 'I'm Sylas. Sylas Hills.'

'Sylas Hills?' Morel echoed. 'Is that... ah, a last name! My aunt told me about "last names"! She said most boys have them.'

'You don't have a last name?' Sylas asked. When Morel shook her head he felt himself chuckle. 'Huh. Strange.'

'I think it's strange that you have two names!' Morel gave her own laugh, and rolled over. 'It's a little selfish, don't you think— Oh! Oh, cods! The sun! Oh, my aunt is going to kill me! I have to go!'

Before Sylas could argue Morel had leapt out of the boat with a splash and disappeared into the waves. He felt his heart drop as he stared after her.

She was really leaving?

Just like.... Just like that?

Well... uh.... Fair enough, he supposed as he leant over the water. If she hadn't left, he would have had to eventually, anyway. Wouldn't he? Though, he would have liked to have said goodbye.

And just as he thought it, she rose from the water again and pressed her lips against his.

'Will you be here again tonight?' she asked.

'Y-Yeah,' Sylas felt himself grin. 'I will.'

'Same time?'

'Yeah.'

She blushed, then disappeared under the waves again without another word, and Sylas was left in the warming rays of the early morning sun.

The sun.

Had they really.... All night?

'Wow,' he flopped back in his boat, not even caring that it lurched and rocked. 'Wow.'

Sylas looked out across the ocean to the lights of the city, and watched as the tiny specks in the distance sailed out from the docks.

He....

He'd....

Gods.

What had he done?

Why had he let that happen?

Why hadn't he pushed her away and said no? He wasn't supposed to let people in like that. He was supposed to be stern, and tough, and sensible. So why had Morel made him feel so breathless? Made his whole body tingle in a way that made it impossible to control himself?

He'd kept himself from those sorts of feelings for so long! He hadn't even *looked* at a woman in years—

A sigh, and he pulled on his pants.

He'd just answered his own question, of course.

Dammit.

He'd worked so hard to avoid situations like this. He'd built a reputation *specifically* so women avoided him.

But, he supposed, Morel didn't know his reputation. She was from out of town.

And a selkie.

He looked back to the city and bit his lip.

There was no point in heading to the markets, today. He hadn't caught enough to sell; and the few fish he had caught had already been chewed on by Morel.

Oh well, he shrugged. He could just eat the leftovers himself and try again tomorrow. Maybe come out early, catch some extra for Morel.... Would she appreciate that?

She seemed like she would.

No! he shook his head. *Don't make such an effort!*

Besides, he couldn't do anything like that, anyway, now his tackle box was at the bottom of the ocean.

Ugh. He couldn't afford to replace his gear. He was poor enough already without buying things he already owned!

Sylas' thoughts were broken as he let out a loud, sudden yawn. He rubbed his eyes and shook his head.

He could worry about that later. For now, he needed some sleep.

Muscles aching, Syllas rowed to the shore and found his usual jetty. It was old and falling apart —much like the boat that he moored— and creaked and groaned as he stumbled over it.

It wasn't far to his house; less than a ten minute walk. But in his exhaustion it felt like a lifetime. His legs were like jelly as he made his way up the dirt road, and the morning sun felt too bright and stung his tired eyes.

By the time he pushed through his front door his thoughts were a haze, and as soon as he collapsed in bed and his head hit his pillow he was asleep.