

Chapter 22

Sylas was too angry to notice the surprised looks he got as he stormed his way through the city.

People who knew him from the markets did double-takes as they saw his strange new form. And even those who didn't know him stared; for he looked none like any of the eight known races who commonly walked the streets. He was something new and unfamiliar to the humans around him— Something to take a step away from, as his ears pinned back and he pressed through the crowd towards his sister's house.

A crowd drew around him as he slammed into the gate, gripping his hands on the old metal and shrieking as loud as his lungs would allow:

'PETER YOU WIFE-BEATING BASTARD! GET OUT HERE OR I'LL BREAK DOWN YOUR DOOR!'

There was movement at the window, the curtain pulling aside so the man inside could look out with a confused scowl as Sylas leapt the gate and stumbled furiously towards the house.

He was at the door before Peter was; his foot slamming into its hard wooden surface with enough force to cause splinters at the hinge.

Sylas kicked it again, as he heard Peter making for his hallway.

The third kick broke the lock, and the door narrowly missed the man inside as it flew open.

'PETER!' he shrieked, his voice echoing through the house with the violence of canon-fire. 'YOU BASTARD!'

'Sylas?!' it was obvious Peter was surprised to see his in-law. In this form. In this rage. It was clear that everything about Sylas was a shock, as Peter's eyes went wide and he took a step back.

'YOU BASTARD!' Sylas repeated, advancing on the man. 'How dare you! How *dare* you hurt her!'

Peter dodged around Sylas, stumbling into his front yard. For a moment his face turned in a scowl, but then his eyes cut to the crowd who watched them and it quickly changed into a cool, false expression of confusion. 'I don't know what you mean—'

'You know *very well* what I mean!' Sylas hissed. 'You lay your hands on my sister— You lay your hands on her *son!* A baby, Peter! You beat a fucking baby!'

The crowd whispered amongst themselves; but it was not of Sylas' concern. While Peter seemed to worry of his reputation and the looks that followed Sylas' accusation, Sylas knew that his reputation was the last thing Peter should have been thinking of.

He should have been running for his life.

A vicious feeling contorted through Sylas' body, and he lunged at his brother-in-law; chasing him backwards into the gate.

Peter was too slow fumbling with its lock, and Sylas' new, sharp teeth found his shoulder.

Blood oozed from the marks Sylas left in his skin. Though as he clamped down and yanked he realised his teeth had caught more fabric than flesh, and the sleeve of the

thick cotton garb Peter wore ripped away with a cracking of seams that echoed over the noise of screaming from the crowd.

Peter gave up on his gate's lock, then, and all but fell over it into the street.

Sylas was quick to follow, leaping on the man as he tried to find his footing and biting again; this time snapping at his ear and scoring deep, sharp marks across Peter's cheek.

He was thrown off Peter's back to the ground, though he missed no beat between rising to his feet and taking to pursuing his in-law as he fled.

He chased the man through the city, ignoring the people who screamed and scattered around them. Every time Peter glanced back, Sylas would scream his name in rage; vile threats and putrid words following from both their mouths.

From Peter's house to the beach, Sylas pursued; driving the man towards the waves before finally catching up as Peter stumbled on a loose rock, and leaping onto his back.

His teeth met his ear again, this time tearing it off.

That was when Peter's hand closed around Sylas' throat, and Sylas was slammed into the sand. A boot met his face before he could roll to his knees, and Peter grabbed Sylas by his long blond hair and repeatedly lay his fist to the side of his head.

The taste of his own blood mixed with Peter's in his mouth as he struggled to free himself; though Peter's grip was too firm, and his strikes too precise for Sylas to properly fight back.

The expertise in Peter's punches only made Sylas that much angrier as he realised how the man had become so skilled in laying down blows. And the thought of exactly who he had been practicing this violence on filled Sylas with a mind-numbing fury like none he had ever felt before.

Peter's fist met his jaw again, and Sylas let out a cry of rage as he kicked out at Peter, writhing in the man's grasp before finally breaking free.

He fell to the ground, barely having time to right himself before Peter lifted his boot to stomp on him— But then a heavy form slammed into Peter from the side and the man's horrified screams echoed against the crowd's as Morel, slick and wet with seawater, clamped down on his arm and tugged back violently; blood spurting into her face as flesh tore from bone.

She stumbled back as Peter pushed her, releasing her hold so the meat of Peter's arm could fall and hang loosely from the few strands of tendon that connected it to the rest of him.

Peter stared at Morel as she gave a snarl and flicked her whiskers furiously, and Sylas felt all of her anger and rage hit him in a violent wave that sent him chasing after Peter again.

They flanked him together as he ran over the sand, spatters of blood trailing behind him.

Sylas leapt upon him, his teeth scoring deep gouges into the skin of Peter's cheek. And then he felt Morel at his side; her teeth clamping onto Peter's shoulder and tearing meat from bone with inhuman strength.

Peter broke free and stumbled back, torn skin and flesh hanging from his arms and face as he stared, wide-eyed, at the couple.

He looked terrified as they stood together, shaking in rage and watching him with

sharp eyes.

Good, Sylas thought. *I hope you're feeling every bit of fear you ever put into my little sister!*

Peter took another step back as Morel licked her teeth, and Sylas readied himself to take chase again—

But then Cordelia rushed in from the ocean, coming with the wave that washed Peter's feet. She sunk her teeth in Peter's arm, ripping a chunk out of him as he pulled away with a shriek.

He turned to stare at the woman with wide eyes; clearly surprised by her shae'vah-like size and crocodile-strength jaw.

'Wh-What?!' he breathed, stumbling back as Cordelia took a deep breath and growled so low the sand at her feet rumbled. 'What *are* you?!

'A *mother*,' she retorted. 'A mother who sees a man not worthy of his wife and pup!'

Peter trembled under Cordelia's form, before rushing around her and making to flee — But he was cut off by Isseal, herself, as she emerged from the waves and loomed over him.

Horrified screams echoed through the crowd at the monstrous creature that stood before them; though Isseal's focus, as she let out a whale-blow breath of fury from her nose, was completely on Peter.

'How dare you,' Isseal said, her voice trembling with a deep, violent rage. 'What kind of monster attacks his own child?'

Peter was too shocked to reply as he stumbled back; his breath choking in his throat as Isseal inhaled deeply and stood to her full, terrifying height.

'You are a vile creature,' she growled. 'And if you want to act like an animal, I'll end your life as one!'

It was so fast Sylas wasn't sure he'd even seen Isseal lunge. All he knew was what he saw now; a huge, looming beast of a seal that was as large as two horses standing side-by-side had clamped her humongous jaws over Peter's head and throat. She lifted herself up, biting down as Peter shrieked and struggled in her grasp....

And then she threw all of her weight downwards with a sickening *CRUNCH* and horrific snapping sound.

Peter fell limp at Isseal's feet as she stood back up to her full height and pushed back her blood-covered curls.

Sylas felt his heartbeat begin to slow as Isseal flicked out her whiskers.

It was done.

It was over.

She had performed her duty as the colony's matriarch and protected her family from the danger that had threatened them.

She met Sylas' eye, giving him an exhausted nod— And then she stumbled as a pole arm narrowly missed her, its spiked axe-head top sticking into the sand beside her.

Sylas recognised it immediately as belonging to the city guard and gave a cry of fear, his whiskers flicking with urgency for his family to flee.

'Into the water!' Isseal ordered, ushering Cordelia into the ocean. 'Morel! Sylas! You too!'

Morel made for the sea, but Sylas hesitated.

The water was still so looming and vast, and he still struggled to swim— What if it hindered him? What if he drowned?!

‘*SYLAS!*’ Morel’s shriek caught his attention, but not in time.

An arrow sunk in his leg and he collapsed with a cry in the sand.

A spear-tip then aimed itself at Sylas and he rolled to raise his hands in submission.

‘Don’t move!’ the lead guard ordered, his voice cracking in fear as he side-eyed the dead man on the ground. ‘Stay down until we bind you!’

Sylas nodded, ready to submit. But then he felt a shooting feeling of fear sting his whiskers as Morel threw herself over him, shielding him from the guards as they pointed their weapons at him. She made to lunge, but Sylas grabbed her; willing her with everything he had to follow their orders.

If she tried to fight, they would kill her.

But if she stayed still as they said, they would take them both alive.

He felt Isseal’s call for him and Morel break through the waves, and he sent out another signal for her to retreat; to go home. To check on Amelia.

He felt her hesitation at his plea. But he pressed the urgency for her to not come for them. To listen to his warning and keep her distance.

He begged with all his heart for Isseal to trust that he knew this world of men and spears, just as she knew her world of currents and coral, and that he would keep Morel from harm.

But she had to leave them behind to save them.

The thought sent a horrible pang of guilt through Isseal, and he felt it radiate through the air painfully as she, against all her instincts, listened to Sylas and turned away.