

## Chapter 4

Sylas fell back against the side of his boat and felt a bead of sweat roll from his face to his neck as Morel pushed herself into his side and giggled.

That certainly hadn't been letting her down. And it certainly hadn't been gentle. It hadn't been anything he'd intended to do...

But when he'd come back to his boat to row out and meet Morel he'd found his lost vest and tackle box placed carefully under the seat and he'd let down his guard, just that little bit. And then when he'd asked Morel if it had been her who found his things and she'd giggled out her answer, he felt his defences crumble completely and had forgotten what he meant to say to her.

And *then*, when she'd pressed her lips against his neck he'd melted into a puddle of hopeless jelly and taken every suggestion she'd made without a second thought.

He half-wished he hadn't been so weak. But, at the same time, he found himself too entranced by Morel to care. She was so beautiful... he couldn't help but melt for her.

As he looked to her, her legs disappeared into a tail; which she rested over his feet as she shifted closer. And by the time she got settled her tail had turned to legs again and she had entangled them in his own.

Sylas didn't stop her. The feeling of her webbed fingers trailing his body made his heart beat fast. And he loved the way her whiskers brushed against his cheek when she buried her face into his neck. And the warmth that soaked into him as she pressed her soft form into his was like nothing he'd ever felt before.

What had he done to deserve feeling this wonderful? Why had Morel chosen him?

Without thinking, he asked it aloud.

'Why you?' Morel echoed. Then shrugged. 'Oh, well, I don't know. You looked lonely.'  
'Lonely?'

'Yeah,' she confirmed, her hand laying gently on his chest. 'And I know what it's like to feel alone. I can't sleep properly most nights and there's never anyone to talk to. I thought... well, you were awake. And I'd never seen a boy before and thought we could have some fun.'

Sylas gave a nod.

'Did you have fun?'

'A lot,' Sylas admitted with a chuckle. 'A *lot* of fun.'

'Good!' Morel beamed, pushing herself onto her elbows and grinning widely. 'I had a lot of fun, too!'

'Good,' Sylas laughed. 'Good...'

He took a deep breath and let his head fall against the boat's wooden edge. The stars were starting to fade and the first rays of morning sunlight were peeking over the horizon, and he hoped Morel didn't notice. Not just yet. He didn't want her to leave in a hurry like she had the day before. But then Morel shifted, and gave a disappointed sigh, and he knew she'd seen the sunrise.

'Ugh, cods,' she muttered as she rolled to the edge of the boat. 'I have to go. My aunt will kill me if I'm not back before she's up.'

'Oh,' Sylas felt his heart wrench as Morel dropped into the ocean, and he leant over to watch her shadow as she rightened herself. When she came back to the surface they shared a quick kiss.

'Should I come again tomorrow?' Morel asked.

'I'll be here,' Sylas promised.

The grin she gave him was priceless.

Then she disappeared into the water and all Sylas saw was her shadow as she spun away into the distance. For a moment he felt like his heart was being tugged away with her....

Then he frowned and shook his head and told himself to be sensible, and reminded himself of his father's broken heart.

He didn't need that sort of pain.

Ugh, why had he promised to meet Morel again? He was perfectly happy on his own!

What was it about her that made him lose control?

He sighed.

Why had he let himself fall for her again tonight? He should have just said no, and been done with it....

Though... it hadn't been *too* bad a thing, had it? It had been fun. And Morel seemed like a lovely woman. Could it really be that terrible to spend time with her?

He shook his head.

*Of course it is!* Sylas let out a groan. *Don't be an idiot! Not like Father was!*

Sniffing, Sylas grabbed his boat's oars and made for his jetty.

His father was the last man he wanted to turn into; a heartbroken fool who's only comforts were found at the bottom of an ale mug... and who's last breath had floated up from bottom of a shallow pond. That would never be him. He wouldn't let himself become that.

Sylas climbed out of his boat and stumbled over the creaking jetty, only stopping at the end to watch the early sun reflecting off the waves below him.

He would be stronger than his father. And not give his heart away. He....

He caught sight of his reflection and hesitated.

Had he always looked so ill?

Sylas reached a hand to his gaunt face and sighed. The bags under his eyes were deep and dark, and his skin clung to him like there was nothing underneath.

Why did he look so....

*Lonely*, Morel's voice echoed in his thoughts, and he had to shake his head to chase her words away.

He supposed he didn't spend much time around others. And when he was with people he was working. Selling his fish in the markets, and making a point to keep his distance from his customers.

He never spent time with friends; he didn't have any. Morel had been the closest thing to a night out he'd had in years.

Perhaps that was what had made it so hard to refuse her.

Perhaps he was more like his father than he liked to think....

He pushed the thought down and stumbled off the jetty.

He wasn't *anything* like his father!

Sylas hurried home, feeling the weakness in his legs growing again like the morning before.

He would sleep off his thoughts, he figured, and meet his sister with a clear head.