

Chapter 6

Sylas hated Peter.

Women's work.

It made him want to spit.

Women's work!

By all the gods, Sylas hated Peter!

He wound in his line and placed his rod on the floor of the boat. Then he put his face in a hand.

How did his sister ever end up with such a bastard?

Sylas shook his head.

It was just proof that love was more trouble than it was worth. He wasn't going to end up like that. Ever.

So what are you doing out here? he thought to himself with a sigh.

Perhaps he should just go home. Morel was late, anyway— Or she'd forgotten him.

Yeah. She'd probably forgotten him.

He grabbed his oars and started home.

If Morel wasn't going to show there was no point in waiting around for her. He'd get a somewhat early night, and take what he'd caught to the markets in the morning. Then he could buy new clothes and some fresh food.

He was about halfway to the jetty when the boat gave a familiar jolt.

'You're late,' he commented as Morel clambered over the edge. The words came out softer than he had meant them to and he almost cursed. *Be strong!*

'Sorry,' she mumbled as she flopped heavily into the boat, making it sway dangerously. She seemed clumsier than usual— Which was impressive, considering how clumsy she already was. 'My aunt wouldn't leave me alone. Every time I got up she'd ask me where I was going. I had to wait for her to fall asleep before I could get away...'

'You have to ask your aunt's permission to leave?' Sylas gave a humoured snort and, without thinking, nudged his fish-bucket towards Morel.

'Well, yeah,' Morel took a fish from the top and sniffed at it, her eyes half closed as she swayed in place. 'She's the matriarch.'

'Matriarch?' that was a long word...

'Yeah,' Morel gave a nod and bit into her fish. 'You know how it is.'

'Uh, no. Not really,' Sylas admitted. 'What's a matriarch?'

'You don't know?' Morel cocked her head and stared at Sylas before letting out a yawn. 'The head of the family? She makes all the rules, and decides where we settle down and when we leave.'

'Ah,' Sylas' voice was flat as he looked to his feet.

'Sylas?' Morel edged closer. 'Are you alright?'

'Fine,' Sylas lied. Then he opened an arm and beckoned Morel over. 'Rough day, is all.'

'Oh, me too,' Morel replied as she settled against Sylas. She gnawed on her fish for a moment before letting out another loud yawn. 'My aunt didn't let me sleep.... She said

too many long nights would turn me nocturnal.’

‘Did she?’ Sylas felt Morel shift again and couldn’t help but grin.

‘She said that if I stayed up I’d sleep well tonight and fix my sleeping habits,’ Morel groggily pushed herself up and pressed her nose into Sylas’ neck. ‘But jokes on her... because I don’t intend to sleep *at all* tonight...’

Sylas felt himself chuckle as Morel’s kiss moved from his neck to his lips. He could see her drooping ears and whiskers and could tell she was exhausted.

But, even though she was so tired, she’d still come back to meet him.... He couldn’t help but feel good about it.

‘You okay?’ he asked as her head dropped to his chest.

‘Yeah,’ she replied sleepily, and he felt her body tremble as she let out a yawn. ‘Let’s have sex again. It’s fun...’

In the state she was in?

Sylas almost laughed.

She obviously wasn’t in any state to have sex; though as her lips lazily trailed up his chest to his jaw, he thought that she didn’t seem to realise it.

‘Lie down next to me,’ Sylas whispered, rolling over and gently pushing Morel off his lap and to his side. He kissed her cheek, and then her neck, and ran a hand along her side as she sighed. ‘*There we go...*’

Morel let out a quiet moan, closing her eyes as a contented grin spread over her face. ‘Mm... That’s nice...’

‘*Shh...*’ Sylas breathed into her ear before pulling her into his chest. ‘*Relax....*’

‘*Mm....*’

It only took a few moments before Sylas felt Morel’s breathing even out. When it did, he pulled away and lowered her head carefully onto the boat’s gunwale.

He watched her for a moment as she dozed, hypnotised by the way her body moved with each breath she took.

She was beautiful.

Sylas let out a heavy sigh and settled into his seat at the oars, casting another glance at Morel before starting towards shore. It didn’t take long to get to the jetty, and even less time to walk to his house and back; fish bucket in hand one way, book and blanket in hand the other.

He laid the blanket over Morel’s sleeping form before settling down beside her and pulling the lantern from his ship’s bow. He let out another heavy sigh as he held the light over his book and tried to read.

Sylas had never been very good at reading. Which was a shame, because he enjoyed it.

But his family had been too poor for tutors and his parents were always fighting too much to teach him properly. He was lucky he knew as much as he did— Poor Amelia had barely been able to write her own name until Peter had taught her how.

Sylas ran his tongue over his teeth and felt himself scowling.

Peter.

Gods, he hated Peter.

That man made his skin crawl....

Sylas shook his head and tried to put it out of his mind; Peter wasn't here. Morel was.
Morel was here.

Sylas looked to her and couldn't help but smile as she mumbled something and buried her face into his side.

Morel was here. And Morel was beautiful.

He closed his book and put it aside, instead shifting so that he could rest his head against Morel's.

He wished he didn't enjoy the feeling of her company so much. He wished he could shut her out like he'd done everyone else... but she'd put something deep inside him, and he knew the breathlessness that came when he thought of her couldn't be pushed away so easily.

He wasn't sure what it was, exactly, that she'd said to make him feel so warm. She'd made opening up seem so easy and natural and he couldn't figure out how. This was only the third time he'd seen her and already he felt closer to her than anyone he'd ever met before; closer than people he'd known for years.

Maybe it was her beautiful smile and the tickle of her whiskers that drew his attention.

Or maybe it was the way she talked; her infectious excitement so loud that he couldn't possibly put his walls up and ignore it.

Or maybe....

Maybe he wasn't as happy as he'd thought he was, all these years, and he was just too used to it to realise.

He shook his head at the thought.

No, no.

That was stupid.

He was fine.

It was probably just because Morel had caught him by surprise. That's all. It was just because Morel had appeared so suddenly and been so beautiful and friendly—

Sylas felt a shiver run up his spine and froze. A very sudden, terrifying feeling had gripped him. Like something was watching him. And that something wasn't happy with him.

Slowly, he turned and looked out across the ocean. He scanned the rocky outcrops that rose from the water and dotted the distance to the horizon.

And he saw it.

The huge shadow of a beast resting no more than a few hundred meters away on a large, flat outcrop.

It raised its head as his gaze fell on it, and there was a silver shimmer across its long whiskers as it stood; its form becoming much more human as it folded its arms across its chest and began to tap a foot.

Even slower than he had turned to it, Sylas turned back around and let out a long breath.

If he were to wager a guess?

That... was Morel's aunt.