

## Chapter 7

The boat rocked gently, stirring Sylas from his sleep. He couldn't remember when he'd dozed off.... It had still been dark, last he remembered; but now the sun was peeking from behind the cliffs on the distant horizon, and he wished it wouldn't.

He buried his face back into Morel's soft form and squeezed his eyes shut tight.... Though sleep didn't return and he gave a sigh and rolled onto his back.

The boat rocked again, and something tapped against its side. It sounded small, and wet, and suspiciously like hands. And as it moved from the bow to the stern Sylas closed his eyes and held still.

'Morel!' spoke a very young voice. 'Morel!'

The boat rocked, and Sylas dared to peek. He let his eyes half-flutter open to look at whoever was whispering and spied a young girl, no more than fourteen, with tight-curved hair and dark dappled skin almost identical to Morel's. She stared at Sylas, and it was clear she hadn't noticed he was awake as her whiskers twitched curiously and she leant in close and sniffed at him.

'*Who's this?*' she muttered. Then she gasped in surprise and slipped, clumsily splashing back into the water. 'A boy!'

Sylas almost sat up to watch her, but stopped himself as he felt the boat rock again and heard the girl clamber onto its other side. He glanced to Morel and saw the child tapping her on the shoulder.

'*Morel!*' she whispered. '*Morel, wake up!*'

'Mmm?' Morel turned, though her eyes barely opened as she gave a grunt and a sniff. 'Kas?'

'*Shh!*' the child, Kas, hissed. '*Don't be so loud! There's a boy next to you! You can get away if you're quick!*'

'That's Sylas,' Morel yawned. 'He's a nice boy.'

'*Auntie Isseal said there's no such thing!*' replied Kas.

'Well, Auntie Isseal was wrong,' Morel retorted.

'*Auntie Isseal was—*' Kas gave another gasp. '*Morel! Auntie Isseal is never wrong!*'

'She's wrong all the time,' Morel snorted, turning away and burying her face under Sylas' arm. 'You just don't hear about it because you're a kid.'

'*I'm not a kid!*'

'Yes you are. Leave me alone.'

'*But Mum said you have to come home.*'

'I'm sleeping, Kas. I'll be home later.'

'*But Mum said—*'

'Go away!' Morel growled, burying herself deeper into Sylas' side. 'I'm of age, unlike you! I don't have to do anything Mum says.'

Sylas had to bite his tongue to hold back his laugh as Kas frowned and sank down, until all that was visible of her behind the gunwale was her eyes and long ears.

'*Hm. Fine...*' Kas grumbled. '*I guess I'll go home and tell Auntie Isseal that I found you sleeping next to a boy!*'

‘DON’T YOU DARE!’ Morel launched herself into the ocean, and Sylas was flung onto the floor of the boat.

He heard the girls splash away as he rolled back up to sit, and by the time he’d recovered he could see them in the distance— Or, two seal-like shapes that he could only assume was them.

He stretched out his stiff muscles and let out a chuckle. He could remember when Amelia had been that annoying, chasing him down in the woods to bring him home.

Actually, it was quite funny that Morel’s mother was still calling her home at her age, when he hadn’t spoken to his own mother in years. Not after what she’d done to his father. He barely knew where she was living nowadays. With that new man of hers, most likely. Or perhaps she’d cheated on him, too....

He shook away the thought and stumbled off the boat and jetty, his blanket slung over his shoulder and his book grasp tightly in his other hand.

So. Morel had a sister, huh?

That was news.

Sylas chuckled again.

She was pretty young. There was a good... what? Nine, maybe ten years between them?

Hm. It couldn’t be considered *that* big an age difference, could it? Perhaps it just *seemed* big, to Sylas, because Amelia was barely a year younger than he was.

Probably.

Sylas furrowed his brow and bit his lip.

*Amelia.*

He barely saw her, anymore. Yesterday had been the first time in months. And it had been... different. Like they’d grown apart. He supposed they must have. Their lives were so different now it was like she was a whole other person from who she had been growing up.

Sylas felt a pang in his chest as he reached his front door, and had to lean on it a moment to catch his breath. He missed his sister. He regretted not reaching out to her. And if yesterday was anything to go by, it seemed like she regretted it, too.

He took a deep breath and pushed his way inside.

Perhaps it wasn’t too late, though, and they could still mend their relationship. If he wrote her a letter, and asked her down.... He was sure she’d come. And perhaps he could meet with her when he went to the city to sell his fish. Sure, she was on the other side of the city to the markets, but she’d made the effort to come here. So he could make the effort to go there.

Sylas gave a nod and made for his room. He would write to Amelia, and ask her over.

He picked up his pen and paused.

*Peter.*

Peter read Amelia’s letters to her. So an invite to her was an invite to him.

Sylas grimaced.

That was a downside....

But he wanted to meet with Amelia again. So he supposed he would *have* to put up with Peter. Perhaps if he got to know him more he might see what Amelia saw in the

man.

He almost laughed.

Oh. No. That didn't seem likely. He didn't think he could *ever* understand what Amelia saw in that bastard.

Sylas shook his head again and quickly penned a letter for his sister. He would give it to the post when he went to the markets today. He had enough fish to sell, even after Morel had eaten some, and he figured now that his wagon was fixed he had no excuse not to go.

Oh.

Or perhaps, instead of the letter, he could go see Amelia in person if he found the time after the markets closed.

He bit his lip and sighed.

He would see her, *if* he found the time?

No. No.

He would *make* the time to see her.