



*Sealed with a
fist*

jeanie johnson and jayha leigh

SEALED WITH A FIST

Jeanie Johnson and Jayha Leigh



www.beautifultroublepublishing.com

SEALED WITH A FIST

Jeanie Johnson and Jayha Leigh

The characters Mae Craig and Mitch Craig are copyrighted and property of Shara Azod and used with her permission.

This book is a work of fiction. References may be made to locations and historical events; however, names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the authors' imaginations and/or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons (living or dead), businesses, events or locales is either used fictitiously or coincidental.

Published by
Beautiful Trouble Publishing, LLC
PO Box 61
Colfax, NC 27235
www.beautifultroublepublishing.com

Copyright © June 2008, 2009 by Jeanie Johnson and Jayha Leigh

All Rights Reserved. No part of this book may be produced or shared in any form, including but not limited to: printing, photocopying, faxing, or electronic transmission, without prior written permission from the authors. Basically, that means no jacking our work, peeps.

Cover Art: Les Byerley
Editor: Jennifer Puckett
ISBN: 978-0-557-07442-6 (print)

CAVEAT

This work of erotica contains adult language and sexually-explicit scenes, which are smoking hot. This book is intended only for adults, as it is defined by the laws of the country in which the purchase is made. Keep this book out of the hands of under-aged readers.

Shout Outs

As always for Robert and C.

For our dads (all of them) for being so daddy-ish and loving and spoiling us in equal measures. Daddy, you're my Din Eidyn.

For Von and Rolanda for holding it down;

For Alcira, Charley K, and Chandra for being the kind of readers that make it worth it;

For Rhonda Scales – one badazz librarian.

Chapter One: How it all went to Hell in a Hand-basket

Somewhere in the Middle of No Fucking Where, 1995

One glorious day, Laverna and Rience Craig were going to die and when they did there would probably be one heck of a fireworks display because assuredly they were going to burst hell wide the fuck open. There was going to be a special place set for her imposter aunt and uncle and that place would be smack dab in the middle of that som'bitch. If Fate was kind then there would also be a comfy spot in Hell's Anti-chamber for the spawn that Laverna had birthed and set loose on the world.

That might be a strong statement, especially considering her actions in the last twenty-four hours, but it was a statement that she was going to stand by she thought as she closed her eyes and tried to get a handle on her pain. Her back was on fire and her self esteem and pride hurt right along with it. Not the best-looking female, she didn't want to even consider what she looked like so instead she thought about how she came to this point. And as always when thinking about any given moment, it was best to start at the beginning.

Yonder Austin was many things, a misfit, a catastrophe just waiting to happen, a pre-menopause surprise, and a genius. She could read at four years of age; she was fluent in Russian by the time she was seven; she could drive small cars and pilot boats by the time she was eight; she could assemble an engine by the time she was nine; and, before she'd even reached the age of ten, she'd already outgrown the need to go to school. Taking the SAT exam, she'd scored a perfect 1600 ... all three times.

Yes, Yonder Austin could be called many things ... including a millionaire heiress. Though Frontier and Meridian Austin had originally thought that she was nothing more

than a bad case of stomach flu, when she'd slid into the world (feet first of course) they'd loved her the best they could, which was unorthodox to say the least. Adventurists at heart, they never bothered enrolling her in school instead hiring a tutor to teach her so that it wouldn't disrupt the endless adventure that was their lives. It was a strange lifestyle, but at least they'd taken her along for some of it.

By the age of nine she'd already logged tens of thousands of miles of traveling. Oh, she didn't do Paris, London, or New York. No, she'd spent her travels visiting places such as Australia's Uluru (Ayers Rock); Tanzania's Mount Kilimanjaro, which Ernest Hemingway described as 'wide as all the world'); Mosi-oa-Tunya (Victoria Falls) which the Kololo Tribe referred to as the smoke that thunders; South America's Andes Mountain Range; and swam in Africa's Nile, South America's Amazon, and China's Yangtze Rivers. She experienced Gauguin's Tahiti (*without the sexual exploitation of Polynesian women*), Mark Twains' Mississippi River (*without the denigration of African-Americans*), and Ray Charles's Georgia (*without the segregation*).

For all of the places that Yonder did visit; Frontier and Meridian visited places that were far too dangerous for her to be able to accompany them. During those times – which were increasingly frequent and lengthy as she got older - her *'live by the seat of their pants'* parents entrusted her to the care of Torix. Torix was a man of unspecified origins who did an unspecified job for her parents. Having a voice that reminded her of the steady thrum of a train traveling over tracks, underneath his t-shirts and cargo jeans, he had the looks of a henchman. Still, he was nice to her. He let her tag along everywhere with him and he watched out for her. He always held her hand when she went to cross the street, he always cut up the food on her plate, and made sure she had on a hat in the hot summer sun and made sure no one picked on her. When she'd

outlived the need for a tutor, he'd taught her all the cool things like hunting, cooking food over an open flame, and most importantly how to drive. If it had wheels, then Yonder could drive it.

She had a good life, even though she spent most of it outside of the confines of her family. In theory, she should've missed having her parents around, but in reality even the few months a year that they were around, they really weren't. So one day when they went on an adventure and never returned she wasn't surprised. Since there were no bodies, she wasn't sure if they were dead or had simply lost track of time for years ... like they had that time when she was five. They'd gone off to Singapore and hadn't returned until two years later.

Things had been rolling along just fine until the family intervened and brought evil into her life in the form of the Craigs. The Craigs were distant relations - really distant. In fact, the only ancestors that they seemed to have in common were Adam and Eve. Still, for some reason, her father acknowledged Rience Craig as a pseudo-brother, which made Rience her pseudo-Uncle, his wife Laverna her pseudo-aunt, and Soroka - the demon spawn that was their daughter - her pseudo-cousin ... *heavy on the pseudo*. They'd simply waltzed into her home and taken it over like it was their name on the deed and spent money like it was their inalienable right to do so. Being that her parents were millionaires many times over their spending didn't even put a dent in their funds, but their presence had put a dent in Yonder's life.

Laverna Craig was appropriately named, as was her spawn Soroka. In ancient mythology, Laverna was the goddess of illegally-obtained money and the patroness of charlatans, con men and thieves. Soroka was simply a Russian surname that meant 'magpie'. Never in all of her years had she heard a being who could talk so passionately

and at such length about absolutely nothing. And then there was her Uncle Rience. Like the king in Arthurian legend, Rience was power hungry. The actual brother of the billionaire Mitch Craig, he was still miffed because he didn't get access to Mitch's money after his untimely death. But as mad as he was, it didn't come close to describing how Laverna felt about him not getting access to that money. Laverna Craig was the sister of Mitch's new wife, Mae, and never had there been two more money-hungry, unscrupulous individuals as Laverna and Mae Craig.

Yonder's parents might've been flighty; but they weren't stupid. African-Americans that accumulated as much money as her parents had rarely were. Her parents were worth far more than the fifty million dollars that was reported. Her parents had a net worth in the hundreds of millions. What they lacked in parenting they more than made up for in speculating, investing, and paranoia. They'd always remained mum about their means. A bulk of their money was hidden in secret accounts, stashed in various places around the globe – just in case something jumped off. A blind trust paid out monthly which covered household expenses and the like, so while the Craigs could live well as they had no house or car payment, like most Americans they lived month-to-month. But unlike most Americans, a hundred-thousand fifty thousand dollars a month wasn't enough for the lifestyle that they wanted. They'd tried to get money by every conceivable means, but the blind trust (the kind of financial situation that allowed OJ to keep the bulk of his money even after the civil lawsuit) that her parents had established couldn't be broken and the shell corporations and offshore accounts couldn't be located. But Yonder had to give it up to the Craigs: they'd tried. They'd begged like Keith Sweat, lied like used-car salesmen; and presented their case

like hosts of late-night infomercials. Hell, by the time they'd finished presenting their case even she was about ready to give them the money ... almost.

Having long ago learned the fine art of eavesdropping, she'd gone high-tech and jerry rigged the intercom system to pump in sound to her hiding room, she'd heard them talking with her parents attorney. After what had to be their fifteenth interruption, Mr. McDyess had rather gleefully informed them that they wouldn't get even one cent more than specified. Giving them a moment to digest that bit, he'd then delivered the proverbial nail in the coffin. He'd informed them that if she were to die, then they'd have twenty-four hours to vacate and that every single thing that was held in trust for her would be sold and be split between the accredited HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) of the Atlanta area, homeless shelters and women's resource centers.

Everything the Craigs had tried had failed. Every door that they'd entered had been slammed shut. They'd burned bridges that they didn't even know that they would have to cross. Soon, they became the laughing stock of Atlanta's elite but they had no shame. Regardless of what people thought they still had an address in prestigious Buckhead and though they didn't own it (Yonder did) they still had access to all of her parents' property including the beachfront home in St. Simons Island, GA, the villa in the south of France, the timeshare on the yacht, and the private jet.

Laverna and Rience had so much more than most people but it wasn't enough to people who wanted it all. They'd wanted everything and instead got a glimpse into everything that would never be theirs. Instead of fifty million in cash and assets, they'd instead gotten custody of a little girl who would have access to it all in just under a decade.

They also got Torix. Technically, they weren't required to keep him on board, but getting rid of him came with a hefty price tag – a price that was more than triple their monthly stipend. Like the properties, he was a fixture in the Austin household. Though his job was officially listed as butler, he pretty much got to choose his duties and his days off.

That had been the proverbial last straw for the Craigs. Rience pretty much spent his time ignoring her; however Laverna had spent her time tormenting her. Laverna had done every nasty thing she could to cause her pain including enrolling her in school on the pretense that she needed to be around children her own age.

School was the kind of hell that she could've done without. There weren't enough academic challenges to keep her attention or enough adults to police her classmates. There was hardly a moment of the day that went by that someone didn't refer to her a derogatory name or say something that chipped away at her self-esteem. She was an unsightly girl with a funny name. Deep down, Yonder knew why her classmates (and Laverna) picked on her, but that didn't stop their words from hurting. Already freakishly tall for her age, she was rail thin to go along with it. She was nothing like most of her peers in even temperament, circumstances, or appearance.

After hearing all manners of insult at school, she got more of the same at home. Laverna not only called her names, she attacked her situation reminding her that her parents hadn't really wanted her. If she didn't know better she might've thought that her name was Ugly Bitch, Ungrateful Fucking Cunt, or Stupid Mistake.

The time with her aunt had changed her. She went from being a happy child to a bitter, terrified, angry girl who skated the edge of all out paranoia. Now she was referred to as a problem and her school files were filled with comments such as '*doesn't*

apply herself,' and instead of the A pluses she should've received her record was laced with incompletes. But that wasn't the biggest change. The biggest change was that her body was riddled with bruises that Laverna had put there. Sure, she was a whole head taller than her aunt but alas she was growing taller at a much faster rate than she was growing wide. Whipcord thin, she didn't have enough body to get the creases out of her clothes.

The first time Laverna had struck her she'd been so startled that it was all that she could do to keep her wits about her but she'd had enough wits to stay out of arm's reach of her aunt. She'd threatened to tell Torix, but all that she had gotten for her trouble was more trouble. Her aunt had grabbed her hard and told her that if she said one word to Torix, she'd see to it that Torix was arrested for any and all manner of things. Laverna might be all kind of liar, thief and con artist but in that moment Yonder knew that she spoke the truth and she grew angry.

Yonder was angry at everyone and everything. She was angry at her parents for loving their wanderlust more than they loved her. She was angry at God for allowing people like Laverna to exist. She was angry at Laverna not for being greedy but for making her fearful. She was angry at Torix for not knowing even though she hadn't told him. She was angry at herself for caring.

Distrusting everyone, she foolishly kept her pain and fear to herself. Her heart a cauldron of anger and fear, she closed her ears to the insults, hardened her heart, developed faster reflexes, and counted down the years until she'd be free of the vipers that had infested her life. Surreptitiously, she watched the imposter family to see what, besides greed, drove them. After watching them she realized that nothing else drove them. The Craigs were simply greedy. She'd quickly concluded that her mere existence

incensed them, because her presence made it impossible for them to pretend that the wealth that they enjoyed was truly theirs.

She couldn't very well disappear so she did the next best thing. She made herself scarce. She confined herself to her room, the service areas of the stately house, and to the front seat of the limousine. She kept to herself, making as little noise as possible and dressing in drab colors so that Laverna and Soroka could stand out in their jewel tones and Rience could feel comfortable dressed up in his delusions of grandeur. Her acts didn't make Laverna treat her any better but at least she didn't treat her any worse. And Torix was safe.

And then came summer. Laverna and Rience had hired a one hundred eighty foot yacht to spirit them around the Caribbean Sea and North Pacific Ocean for the summer. With a crew of fourteen, the yacht had everything a millionaire could want including a manner of toys and a helicopter pad. It was obvious that no one wanted her along but as much as it irked them they couldn't very well leave her home not when they were living it up off of her inheritance.

Besides the owner's stateroom there were three cabins and one twin cabin. Yonder thought that she'd at least have her own room but Laverna and Rience had invited friends along and thus she was relegated to the twin cabin with Soroka ... and that cat of hers. Reluctantly, she'd resigned herself to sharing a room with her cousin though she spent as little time as possible there. Most nights she snuck out and simply spent the night curled up in some inconspicuous place going through the stack of books that Torix had brought along for her to read. That was her routine most nights, but there were those nights that her aunt and their friends were too drunk for her to be out

amongst them. The other night had been one of those nights so she'd reluctantly gone to the twin cabin she shared with Soroka and prepared for bed.

Having a body without the first hint at femininity, Yonder had taken extra special care of her hair. Though she kept it pinned up and tucked under a baseball cap, she'd reveled in brushing out the thick curls and feeling the length cascade down her back. It was a ritual she completed every night but one she may never get the chance to perform again thanks to Soroka. The one thing that had kept her from being outright ugly was gone – well most of it. She'd looked in the mirror but what she'd seen had caused her to do the one thing she'd rarely done. She'd cried. She'd cried so much that she couldn't even see past the misery of her situation, but at least she didn't have to see all of the hair that kept falling from her scalp. It wasn't that she was attached to her hair; it was just that she didn't want to look like a boy so much.

She was so angry that she'd run to Laverna crying at what Soroka had done to her while she'd slept. And what had Laverna done? Hardly anything. Not even bothering to check for chemical burns, she didn't even look up at her when she threw out her advice. Put on a hat she'd told her as she went right back to reading her magazine. Retreating from the apathy with which her aunt greeted her pain, she ran past a laughing Soroka on her way to the shower.

She was tired, so tired of being tired. Laverna, Rience and their spawn had busted into her life like the Gestapo and though they couldn't get their grubby hands on her inheritance, they'd wrecked her peace of mind, taken the one thing she'd been proud of and threatened the only person that she loved.

She was angry at them but also at herself. She'd let down her guard and gone to sleep in the presence of the enemy. As punishment, she'd woken up looking as if she'd

escaped from a leper colony. Seeing her hair come out in clumps she thought that the day couldn't get any worse but then once again she'd underestimated the enemy. Even through the haze of her misery she'd heard the door open and the soft meow of the only thing that Yonder hated more than her cousin.

She didn't like cats all that much to begin with and she liked this particular cat even less. It could've been because she was allergic to it or perhaps she was simply allergic to its owner. Either way, the last place she needed it to be was in an enclosed space with her. She'd barely got that thought out when the first sneeze shook her thin frame causing another chunk of hair to fall to the shower floor. That chunk of hair was the final straw. Something in her had simply broken.

Jumping out of the shower she'd grabbed the cat by the scruff of its neck, dumped it into the toilet bowl and flung it at her cousin knowing that cats always landed on their feet. Stopping to grab a t-shirt and some shorts, she set a new world record for dressing. So quick that her cousin didn't have time to get away. Ignoring the clumps of hair that fell around her like petals from a flower, ignoring the hives fast forming on her skin, she locked in on Soroka. Never having struck another person in her life, she'd bitch-slapped her with every ounce of strength she had in her body. And then she'd put her hands around her throat and closed her hands tighter and tighter and tighter. She would've kept squeezing but Laverna had rushed to her daughter's aid. Laverna had jumped on her back and pulled her off but crazy had taken over her and she'd been filled with a surge of power. She'd bitten, scratched, kicked and yelled before Rience had arrived.

For a moment she thought that Rience was going to strike her but then she saw Torix and she knew that regardless of how fucked up she was, whatever injuries she had would be the extent of it. Torix looked dangerous and everyone in the room backed up

from him. He'd reached out for her but before she did she had her *The Color Purple* moment with her playing Whoopie's character and the Craigs playing the role of 'Mister.' She didn't know what was going to happen but she knew that if any of them ever touched her again she was going to kill them. She didn't mean metaphorically, she meant literally -- and she said as much.

Taking a deep breath she exhaled the frustration that had been building since the Craigs had arrived in her life. Looking Laverna and Soroka in the eye she made a decree. "You win. You wanted to break me and you have. You've turned me into something more evil than you. My God is not money and flossing isn't my vice. Maybe I don't have a God anymore. I used to but you drove God away just like you drove the last bit of goodness in me away. Hate me. Revile me. Ignore me. Envy me. I don't care how you feel about me, but a word of advice, you should fear me. I know that you won't kill me because my very existence pays for your lifestyle. You might make my life more miserable but know this. Eighteen is only seven years away and the first thing that I'm going to do when I get my money is to hire someone to kill you and seeing what you'll do for a mere 1.8 million a year for eight years imagine what someone will do for thirty million dollars payable all at once."

And with that she walked away. She felt empty. She felt sad. She felt alone. She felt defeated.

Chapter Two: Exhaling

Yonder didn't know what to expect from anyone anymore, not even herself. She simply knew that she couldn't take another year like she just went through. Turning from her aunt and uncle she walked away every step tasting like freedom and every other step tasting like dust. She was walking away from her tormenters but she didn't know what she was walking to. Where was she going to go? How was she going to survive the next few years? And then she ceased wondering where she was going to because the answer walked to her. Torix stood before her looking like a place to rest. Scooping her up in his arms, all she'd felt was his strength.

Torix had taken her to the kitchen where he himself had washed her hair again to insure that all traces of the chemical hair remover were absent from her head. He'd tenderly checked her scalp for chemical burns and then he'd conditioned the half a head of hair she had left. And then he'd sat her down for what she was sure was going to be a lecture about death threats, felony charges, and foreign prison. Instead, he'd gently reprimanded her for not coming to him about the treatment she'd suffered.

"Didn't you trust me?" he'd asked as he knelt before her.

Seeing the hurt in his face had caused her heart to trip. "I didn't tell you because I love you."

"You are never to subject yourself to injury for any man."

"But you're not any man. You're *my* Torix."

"And you're the baby I never had," he'd said as he hugged her.

Lifting my chin up, he'd pulled back and looked me in the eyes. "Did Rience touch you?"

“No. He spent most of his time ignoring me.”

“I sense that you’re telling me the truth but I’m still taking you to the doctor when we get home. Now tell me all of the places that you’re hurt,” he’d demanded as he picked up a jar of mint-colored goo.

Telling him, she sat back and allowed him to rub the minty balm into the skin on her back, arms, and hands in time to what was assuredly cussing. Finishing that task, he sat her on a stool and tended to her hair. Carefully trimming the damaged side of her hair, he took his time braiding it into an intricate style all the while reminding her that she was beautiful. He was lying through his teeth but she couldn’t help to love him more.

Handing her a mirror, he let her look. She didn’t want to but he made her. She felt like that character from Batman – you know the one with the two faces.

“Why didn’t you just cut it all off?” she’d asked.

“Because you always keep the good regardless of how much bad surrounds it. The good reminds you of the reasons you fight. The good things in life are the things that keep you hoping. If you cut down those things, you cut down hope with it. In the fight of good versus evil we sustain injuries even whilst we achieve great success. Today, you did both. Now come, let’s get you tucked up into bed so that you can rest.”

Knowing that she didn’t want to spend any time in the vicinity of the vipers in the guest rooms, he’d given her his room. It was small but it was clean and it had all of her books and no cats, no Craigs, no worries.

It was amazing what threatening to kill everyone did for one’s disposition. Though the Craigs were still vipers they stayed away from her – far away from her. No

police were called in, Interpol wasn't bothered, counselors weren't called, and mental health facilities weren't put on alert. Nope, she was left to herself meaning that no insults were hurled, no names were called, and no threats were made. Having one hundred eighty feet of yacht meant that there was a lot of room for all of them. They got the sun deck; she got the upper aft deck. They got the upper saloon; she got the saloon. They got the gym; she got the observation. She let them keep the master suite and she got the double cabin and Torix got the one next to her. What happened to the guests that were previously occupying them she had no idea nor did she care. She only knew peace and she needed every bit of it for the past year had taken its toll. True, she'd accomplished a lot and seen a lot by the time she was nine, but damn, age ten had been a rough year and here she was just a few days away from being eleven and she'd already planned her first felony.

Torix was just a man, but he was not a man with which one should fuck. A simple man, he had more have nots than he had haves. That is, he didn't have much of an education. He didn't have any kind of special training. He didn't have any kind of clout ... or particularly good looks ... or charisma. Hell, he didn't have patience ... or grandiose plans ... or any kind of mercy in his greyish-colored soul for those who preyed on children, women, or the aged. In fact, he had none t'all.

What he did have however was a past. He'd spent most of his youth in places that he never wanted to think about again. Today, when he'd looked into Yonder's eyes something in him had broken because he knew that regardless of her being tucked up in one of the swankiest neighborhoods in the entire U.S., she'd voluntarily taken up

residence in the place he'd run from: fear. She'd lived in fear ... all because she loved him.

In all of the time that he'd known the pesky walking encyclopedia, he'd witnessed her many moods. He'd seen her resigned over the fact that her parents were who they were. He'd seen her mulish like when he made her hold his hand as she crossed the street -- he didn't care if the street that they were crossing was a dirt road on private property. Dammit, she could get hurt. He'd seen her ecstatic like when she'd finally got the footwork down and was able to drive his manual transmission truck. He'd seen her sad when other children had picked on her. Oh, if he'd only had younger siblings he would've sent them out there to give those kids a sound thrashing for hurting his Yonder's delicate feelings.

Like he said, he'd witnessed many emotions cross her visage but today he witnessed two emotions that were so pure as to be blinding. Today, he'd seen fury and then he'd seen love. Her fury was a white hot, molten thing so strong it singed all in its vicinity. Though it wasn't directed at him, her fury nevertheless burned him. The calm in which it came wrapped in gave no clue to its intensity. Nevertheless when she delivered her decree to her aunt and uncle all knew that she spoke the truth.

Never would he have guessed that he would be more perturbed by her fury than by her fear, but alas he was. Fear could be overcome but her fury would take her places that he never wanted her to visit. As much as he despised the Craigs he'd never allow Yonder to have their blood on her hands and he knew that if he didn't step in, she would, without a doubt kill them. Taking a life was a cross too heavy for any human, much less an eleven-year-old girl with a heart as beautiful as hers. It mattered not that Yonder had the mind of tenured college professor; she was a baby -- his baby.

And while he was still reeling from her fury, he'd glimpsed her love. When she looked up at him with those big, beautiful eyes and told him that she'd kept her fear hidden away because she loved him, it broke him. It broke him like no torture from rogue planetary agencies ever came close to doing. It ripped open the scars in his soul yet instead of hurting him it healed him. Her love and goodness had seeped into every wound he'd ever had and made him brand new. And somewhere in her love he saw the God that he'd ceased acknowledging and he saw the limits to which he'd go for that little girl and knew there were none. There was no place that he wasn't willing to go for his baby. No place at all and both Yonder and the Craigs were getting ready to find that out.

Interlude: Let Me 'Splain You Something

Archipiélago de Colón was the official name of the Galápagos Islands. A province of Ecuador, the islands straddled the Equator. The Galápagos Archipelago was tiny. Mostly bits of rock and small inlets with a handful of primary islands sprinkled in, the 4900 square mi (7880 sq. km.) of land was spread over an area 28000 mi (45,000 sq. km.) ... officially. Unofficially, it took up double the space. See there were the Galápagos Islands known to man and then there was Galápagos Island Proper known to no humans at all. Being that its nearest neighbors were mainland Ecuador which was 600 miles (970 km) to the east and other small islands, most of which the average human couldn't map, there was plenty of room to hide things. And being that humans were busy searching for things such as youth and gold, it wasn't all that difficult. The strong currents that surrounded the islands that made navigation weren't simply coincidence.

Due in part to its physical beauty, the Galápagos Islands known to humans was frequently referred to as 'The Enchanted Islands.' The volcanic geology of the Islands only added to its splendor. The flora and fauna of the island delight nature lovers and scientists. The few thousand humans that were blessed enough to consider the Galápagos Islands home lived in one of the most biologically diverse regions of the world. Most of the animals that inhabited the islands have only been seen by many humans on nature documentaries. Twenty-three species of land reptiles (three types of iguana, seven types of lava lizards, nine types of geckos, three types of snakes and one species of giant tortoise); and sixteen hundred species of insect and mammals including bats, rats, and sea lions roamed the islands.

The known Galápagos were no doubt glorious but the whole Galápagos Islands were truly enchanted. No humans lived there but what did live there was truly magical. Ambrosia grew wild. And along with the animals such as the magnificent giant tortoise, Galápagos sea lions and Galápagos bats lived all of the animals that had ever roamed the earth. There were Tasmanian wolfs and tigers, quagga (half zebra-half horse), Steller's sea cows, Irish deer, Caspian tigers, aurochs (large cattle), great auks (type of penguin), cave lions, dodo birds and even Tyrannosaurus Rex. They were all impressive animals and made even more so by the fact that a disproportionate amount of the animals that inhabited Galápagos were shifters.

Though it's commonly believed that there aren't any indigenous plants or species to Galápagos, that's a simply not true. Galápagos existed before most things were even thoughts. Conversely, Galápagos will continue to be long after most things cease.

Galápagos is not simply a place. Galápagos is the title given to she who rules. Since the beginning a woman has ruled Galápagos and the person who currently saw to the Islands was Galápagos Rule. Like those before her, Rule embodies justice, wisdom, strength, and beauty. But unlike those before her, Rule also embodied passion. Rule was married and not simply to any male; Rule was married to Din Eidyn.

Din Eidyn wasn't just any Selkie; he was Emperor of all Selkie, king to all magical water creatures, and democratically-elected president of all water-dwelling creatures. Born in Musselburgh, which is considered to be one of the oldest - if not the oldest-town in all of Scotland, he wasn't just a Scot; he was all of Scotland. Descended from the Votadini, people of the Iron Age in Great Britain, his family made the seven mile trek to Din Eidyn, as Edinburgh was then known, and made it theirs. And hence, they took the name of the town. Every male of their line had the same stats: height in excess of seven

feet, eyes the color of Scotland (a blue green); hair the color of sand and a will that was relentless.

Din Eidyn would have remained there but for one thing, he'd met Rule. And he'd spent years swimming all of the oceans of the world in an effort to find her. He could scent her yet he couldn't find her, so he searched. A decade later Rule took pity on him and nine months later she birthed their first children. She'd given the Emperor twelve children ... everyone of them boys. And then a full decade later, she gave him one more ... also a boy.

Like every one of his brothers, Aonghus Fulgencio Din Eidyn was beautiful. But unlike his brothers Aonghus had all of the powers of his father and all of the powers of his mother and some that they were still figuring out. And as the youngest child Aonghus also had a bad case of taintiness -- which meant that he was spoiled beyond all freaking belief. He was spoiled something fierce, and his taintiness combined with his sense of adventure and power was a potent mix. Only ten years old, Aonghus was more of a handful than all of his brothers combined.

Rule and Din Eidyn were going to address Aonghus' disposition but first they had to stop their parents from giving him everything that he wanted. Of course, like all good solutions it would take time to implement. And if they could only figure it out, they would implement it. Frustrated as they were they didn't rush a solution; they waited for it to come to them. And it would, Rule was quite certain of that fact.

Chapter Three: Are You Freaking Kidding Me? Piling on

Even though she had a beautiful cabin, Yonder was once again looking out over the railing from her perch on the upper aft deck. Her book long discarded, and Torix having long ago succumbed to sleep, she was staring up at the sky listening to his snores and the lapping of the water competing with each other for dominance. Busy getting lost in the sheer beauty of the night sky, she attempted to count the twinkling stars that decorated the sky. A futile effort to be sure, but nevertheless one she enjoyed.

“Ah, once again I find you sneaking about on the aft deck when you could be much more comfortable on the sundeck. Don’t you think you’d be more comfortable on the loungers on the sun deck?” the voice of the Captain spoke a few feet away.

She turned her head to look at the man dressed from head to toe in white as he carefully approached her. Ever since Torix had said/done whatever it was that had resulted in her being moved to a separate cabin she’d noticed that everyone approached her carefully. And most importantly none of the Craigs approached her at all. Though no one disturbed her peace, she noticed that there was always someone nearby looking after her.

“Probably not, sir,” she answered respectfully. “Too many vipers up there while it’s nothing but miles of oceans and an endless sea of stars out here.”

The Captain smiled at the young mistress of the boat he commanded. From the pile of books that she always had around her, he knew that she was intelligent way beyond her years still it was unusual to see a child so unspoiled by her intelligence and wealth. True, he didn’t exactly know a lot of children - especially eleven-year old girls - but this one ... well there was just something about her. She reached inside of your

person and stirred up the protect genes. Here he was a seasoned seaman whose mistress was any boat that would have him at the helm and yet instead of fussing over his boat he was out here worrying about her. Of course, he wasn't the only one he thought as he spotted the ever-present Mr. Torix fast asleep in a deck chair. Ms. Austin was a lovely girl and it had pained him to see her treated so shabbily by the people that masqueraded as her family.

Aware of the tragedy that surrounded the little girl's life, he thought it was a damn shame the way the "family" ignored her. Sure, they'd taken her in, or rather taken in her inheritance and reaped every benefit that was involved in being the guardians of Yonder Austin, but that was all that they'd done. Laverna and Rience Craig might be her official guardians but it was woefully apparent that they were more about usurping her lifestyle than actually caring for the little girl. Though they were only a few days into the seasonal sea journey, he hadn't yet witnessed them spending any time with her. Of course, they hadn't really spent any time with their own daughter, but at least they acknowledged her existence.

The way they ignored Ms. Austin was a damned crime if ever he'd seen one. The little girl was smart, cute, intelligent, funny and helpful. Not only had she offered to help him pilot the yacht, she'd offered to assist Chef with the meals, the wait staff with the dishes and the maids with the laundry. Of course, they'd all declined her offers of help but unlike her "family" they didn't decline her company. In fact, the staff went out of their way trying to please her. Chef took her aside every morning and made her some goody or another and dammit, even he had gotten roped in by her intelligent eyes and inquisitive nature. Before he'd known what he was about he'd found himself showing Ms. Austin how to operate the luxury yacht and damn if she didn't take in everything he

said. He wouldn't be surprised to know that she could operate the damn thing on her own should the need arise.

As he said, she was helpful. Not only was she completely without conceit (she'd repeatedly told them to call her Yonder instead of Ms. Austin), she kept her state room tidy. She changed her own sheets and made her own bed. Thinking about how she tidied up after herself caused him to simply shake his head in disbelief. *A kid who was tidy? Who would've thought it?*

He knew that she wasn't trying to win favor with the staff. Hell, she was paying their wages. No, she was merely lonely. Not counting her "family" who would only meet a sunrise if they were stumbling in from some kind of spending spree, the little girl only had Mr. Torix for company – not that she seemed to mind. Mr. Torix did an excellent job entertaining her but it was clear that the little girl was in desperate need of some female company.

Dammit, he abhorred Ms. Austin's circumstance. A male he might be, but he saw the envy in her eyes when she looked at other families. And though she concealed it well, there was something in her eyes that he couldn't place but it had disturbed him. It had disturbed him enough that he had instructed the staff to make Ms. Austin their first priority ... over every other duty that they had. Seeing that Mr. Torix was the only one that seemed to care for her on her own merits, he'd approached him and let him know that his staff was available to do whatever was necessary to make this a fun trip for her.

And they had made it fun but they couldn't change the situation. They couldn't make the Craigs include her and though they could protect her from anything untoward from the Craigs guests, they couldn't protect her from the envy of her cousin. Damn,

he'd hated what the mean-spirited girl had done to Ms. Austin but more than that he'd hated the disregard with which the Craigs had addressed it.

With every passing minute his and his staff's hatred of the Craigs grew. He was half afraid to go to sleep for fear that his crew would rise up and kill the Craigs. The moment when they'd witnessed Ms. Austin calmly deliver her swan song had been the cherry on top of their hate. They'd all hated what the Craigs had done to that little girl. It was in that moment that they realized just how bad the situation was definitely improving since that horrible day. Things were not yet as they should be and as much as he'd wished things were different, he could not change them although he had certainly enjoyed watching Mr. Torix start the process.

He couldn't help but smile recalling the sight of Mr. Torix informing Craigs' guests that they were no longer welcome aboard Ms. Austin's yacht. He'd enjoyed that but he especially enjoyed watching Mr. Torix inform Craig that while Yonder might be content to wait until she was eighteen to deal with them that he wouldn't wait past this week. Out of respect for their young daughter, Mr. Torix had informed them that he'd allow them two weeks to decide where they were going to live whilst they mooched off of Ms. Austin. Right after that he warned them that if any of them ventured anywhere near Ms. Austin that there was going to be a misunderstanding that would result in the need of their next-of-kin to hire forensics experts and a search team so they could scrape up enough DNA for a burial.

Mr. Torix had made his threats without even bothering to make eye contact with the Craigs. His voice never rose in pitch but with every word he spoke it dripped with more and more venom. Feeling dread creep down his spine with each word, he'd walked away stunned at the danger emanating from the man. He might simply be a man but he

was not a man that he'd ever want to piss off and from the look of fear that crossed the faces of the Craigs they knew that sooner or later (and probably a whole helluva lot closer to sooner than they'd wished) Mr. Torix was going to bring all manner of unpleasantness to them. He didn't need to know Mr. Torix to know that; he only had to witness the tenderness with which he treated young Yonder. Mr. Torix might not have many feelings but all that he had was reserved for that little girl.

Hearing her sigh he pulled himself away from the memories of those recent events and looked at her.

"Wouldn't you rather go to the saloon and watch television perhaps?" he asked still not understanding why she'd chosen the aft deck rather than the sun deck when she'd divvied up the yacht with the Craigs. Knowing her, she had her reasons though.

"No sir. The night is so clear it would be a waste of good star-counting time," she answered with a shrug as she turned her face back up to the sky.

"How long do you think it will take you to count all of them, Miss Austin?" he asked as he watched the little girl's forehead crinkle as she considered her answer.

Another thing that he found astounding about the little girl was the way that she truly thought about what she would say rather than simply blurting out the first thing that came to mind. Who was he kidding? There were many things that amazed him about Yonder Austin. Not only was she never demanding like most of the guests who hired the yacht; she was always thinking. She treated this vacation like it was a learning experience. Having witnessed her eyes light up when they passed through the Panama Canal had been the highlight of any voyage of which he'd been a part.

Hearing her clear her throat, he listened for her answer knowing that it was going to be a doozy.

“I think that it would take the whole of all of Creation to count the stars in the sky being that the universe is endless and alive.”

Yep, it was a doozy, he thought as he sat down beside her and Mr. Torix and enjoyed the night sky with her.

The luxury yacht floated on the peaceful warm waters of the Pacific Ocean. No one aboard suspected that anything was amiss and even if they had things probably would've played out the same. You could always prepare for things but life was guaranteed to throw you things that you simply couldn't plan for and there was no way that any of them could prepare for what happened next.

One moment the night was calm and balmy. The next a cool breeze had swept in along with a fog. Seeing Mr. Torix suddenly sit up and hook an arm around Ms. Austin before pushing her behind him, he knew that he was right to be worried. From out of nowhere, and he meant out of nowhere, he saw a sight that made his blood run cold. Surrounding them was the unmistakable sight of eighteenth century pirate ships ... flying the obligatory skull and cross bones. Counting at least four three-masted, square-rigger ships, before he and Mr. Torix pulled Ms. Austin to the wood floor of the deck, he knew they were in trouble. And they would've been in more trouble if Ms. Austin was like most people and would've selected the sun deck. They were virtually hidden on the aft deck, and even more so by lying on it.

Seeing that they were as safe as they could be for the moment, he took a moment to consider their situation and quickly concluded that their situation was totally fucked. Unlike the single-masted sloops, which were favored by pirates and smugglers alike for their agility and smallness, which allowed them to navigate shallow waters and hide in

caves, the three-masted ships, which were comparable to Navy Frigates were built for one thing: battle. The men who manned these ships weren't concerned about quick escapes or hiding because they didn't have to worry about such things. Big enough to hold two-hundred men and outfitted with a grip of swivel guns, he was more than sure they could outrun them. What he was also sure of was that the many canons that the ships were outfitted with would put more than a dent in their giddy up. And considering that there were more than one of them and they were in the Pacific, he wasn't ready to chance it. There were times to fight and times to flee and right now he could do neither. Hopefully, they only wanted valuables, but he wouldn't count on it.

Having evaluated their situation he looked over at Torix and Yonder knowing that the time for civility had passed. Right now they had to plan to get Yonder out of here. From the look in Torix's eyes he felt the same.

"We need to get her out of here," he said.

"What are our options?" Torix asked.

"We can give them a reason to blow a hole in this boat and we take our chances being shot or eaten by sharks. We can hope that this is simply coincidence and want nothing more than the jewels that they think are on board. We can think worse-case scenario and get Yonder off of this yacht."

"I'm going with any choice that gets her away from here," Torix said.

"Okay the only decision we have to make is whether we put her on the tender or one of the wave runners."

Knowing that Austin wasn't stupid, both men turned to her. "What do you think, Yonder?"

“I think that regardless of what I say that you’re going to get me off of this boat so I’m voting for the tender and I’m glad that you taught me to drive, Torix and I’m glad that you taught me to drive this yacht, Captain. And also, if I get out of this, I think that I’m going to come back and kick some pirate behind.”

Nodding at her, he and Torix worked their way forward. Using great stealth, they were able to wake the crew. They didn’t bother waking the Craigs knowing that they’d offer up Austin without even a smidgen of remorse. Careful planning allowed them to get to the tender. With kisses and hugs from everyone they settled a teary-eyed, but stoic Austin into it before indicating that the female staff should go along with her. Ah, but his female crew were as ornery as he was and refused to go. Instead they’d handed Austin their weapons and provisions and asked him where he needed them. Dammit, he loved those women and after cussing them out he told them so. So that Yonder could have a real chance at escaping, they created a series of distractions before all hell broke loose. Getting shot at with canons really wasn’t on his agenda. Being that this was a luxury yacht and he ferried around the super-rich, he had a stash of weapons and most of his crew was well-trained on how to use them even if they were using them on men riding authentic eighteenth-century boats.

Two days later -- that felt like two years, Yonder was one hundred percent lost. Still, she was alive and those on the yacht and sacrificed themselves for her so she was going to shut the fuck up and be glad that she was alive. Taking a few moments she enjoyed the beauty of the Pacific Ocean. She didn’t know where she was going; she simply knew that she was on her way. So many things could’ve gone wrong. After all, she was who knows where, out at night, with only meager provisions to sustain her and

her determination to keep her going. Not bad for an eleven year old, not bad at all she thought as she drifted off to sleep unaware that the North Pacific Ocean was getting ready to get rocked by a storm the likes of which hadn't been seen in a long, long time.

One week later

Yonder fucking hated animals. Yeah, she knew that she shouldn't cuss but you know what, she was hot, wet, hungry, thirsty, tired, and her hair looked like shit so dammit she was entitled to a cuss word here and there. And she was still lost ... with land nowhere in sight. Did she mention that? And she hated animals. She hated animals so much that she was going to have to invent new words to describe her hate. Spitting out yet another mouthful of salt water she threw back her head and screamed. Dammit, she hated animals and she hoped that they all fucking died.

Yep, she hated animals and you know what else she hated? She hated *el niño, la niña* ... you know what she hated weather and the weather channel. They didn't say jack about the sky opening up and lightning splitting the earth in two. When she'd heard the first boom of thunder she had to check to see if her eardrums still functioned but then she'd seen and felt the most frightening strike of lightning and laughed her butt off sure that was Laverna, Rience and their demon spawn bursting hell wide open just as she'd predicted.

Her laughter was short-lived though because then things had really started to suck. The weather did things she'd never seen or read about it doing. She was pretty sure she saw a tornado doing the moonwalk across the waters right before getting body-slammed by what was most assuredly a tornado from some kind of rival tornado gang. And then there was the rain drops that left dents in her skin when they hit. And then

there was the Thanksgiving turkey-sized hail ... and then the snow. And when she saw the spurt of red belching from the waters in the distance, she was pretty sure there was some kind of underwater volcanic eruption. Right after she got her wits about her, she and old El Niño were going to have words. As soon as she got access to her money she was going to build a secret lab and she was going to create an army of anti-weather things and sic it on anything even remotely resembling weather. Dammit, she was from the south where bad weather meant that either the locals ran to the store and bought up all the bread or that the baseball game was cancelled due to a rain delay.

She'd come through the storm just fine although she had no idea what was what anymore. After being attacked by pirates and seeing a weather cage match, and having jacked up hair, she was entitled to a few moments of stupidity and a minute or two of self pity. But noooooooo, the lesser animals in the Animal Kingdom just couldn't leave her alone. Birds had shit all over her, all over the boat, pretty much all over Creation. And then she'd sliced her hand open on one of the fins of the catfish that she'd caught. And then she'd found out that just as she was allergic to cats she was also allergic to catfish ... but she didn't find out that relevant bit of information until after she'd cleaned it, cut it up and cooked it over the flame of the lighter that she'd found in her little stash of tools. Oh yeah, and after her lips had swollen up along with half her face and her hand.

Then after surviving all of that, she'd sailed/limped into a territory of freaking whales who wanted to play bumper cars with her boat. Her tiny twenty-two foot boat wasn't jack in comparison to a full grown blue whale which were twenty-five feet long and six to eight tons AT BIRTH and about eighty feet long and eighty to one hundred twenty tons as adults. For a minute she was wondering if God had sent one of them to

swallow her but she was pretty sure she wasn't supposed to be a prophet. After the whales had bumped her boat one too many times, it'd finally turned over and the whales had swum off ... with her boat! Well, they didn't jack it and drive off into the sunset as much as they'd used it like a beach ball swatting it back and forth between them. She didn't speak whale but she was pretty sure that they were laughing their whale asses off and if she did speak whale she would've cussed them out good and proper. She was so adding them to her list of things that should be extinct.

She was so pissed but then the real fun had begun. The blood (hers and the catfish) had attracted sharks that'd apparently started some kind of turf war with the dolphins. She was scared but the dolphins had straight kicked ass on the sharks and run them out of Dodge. While she'd been busy cheering on the dolphins a Portuguese Man-of-War who'd floated away from its swarm had snuck up on her and stung her. Okay maybe it wasn't a Man-of-War but the red, stringy welts that covered her arms said it was. Yep, she was adding Man-of-War to her list of things to annihilate from the face of the earth.

She'd been stung, shit on, scratched up, capsized, what was left of her hair was ugly and she was lost. It was almost enough to make a girl cry. But she didn't cry because her eyeballs hurt. Oh well, at least she was no where near Aunt Laverna she thought as she let go. If she had to go, this was the way to go. She hoped she'd see Torix on the other side. She hoped there weren't any animals there because if there were she was going to go on some kind of spree.

Second Interlude: A Whole Bunch of Stuff

The great joke in the Animal Kingdom was humans' perceptions of themselves. Gifted with dominion over all creatures and entrusted with naming them, humans mistook that to mean that they were better than all other creatures. Of course this was laughable being that humans could barely govern themselves. Consider the way that they fought to control the land even though oceans covered seventy percent of the earth's surface. While humans bickered, killed, schemed, and fought to be president, prime minister, emperor, king, czar of bits of terra firma; they ruled only because the earth allowed it. Mountain, water, plains, forest, grasslands and such were the planet and though humans had conquered some of it; they didn't come close to even controlling, much less conquering the oceans. Billions of animals and plant life dwelled in the oceans and they were under the dominion of the ocean itself, and the oceans were impressive creatures indeed and similar to other living things birthed their own rulers – one male and one female.

Pacific was a beautiful specimen and how could they not be? After all they were water creatures. And they weren't just any water creature; no, Pacific was one of the elite among water creatures. Along with their siblings Atlantic, Indian, Arctic, and Southern, Pacific was the embodiment of the body of water that they were named after. And being that their ocean was so vast, their power was far-reaching. Their rule spanned both North and South America on the west and Asia and Oceania on the east and spread out over sixty-four million square miles.

Like Atlantic, Indian, Arctic, and Southern, Pacific was a set of fraternal twins. However, unlike their siblings, Pacific possessed a mercurial temper. Perhaps their

temper wouldn't have been so bad if they weren't also plagued by hyperactivity and the 'starting all kinds of shit' gene. You could always count on Pacific doing something that would entertain the world. In fact, Pacific was the proverbial drunk uncle at family reunions. Their play was unlike any other. They hurled thunderstorms at each other and countered with tropical depressions; they threw lightning and fielded hurricanes.

They did all of that but they were most famous for their pranks such as organizing the first oceanic 'Cannonball Run.' Their pranks had caused all kinds of phenomena such as the opening of other dimensions, tears in the space-time continuum, and the disappearance of entire civilizations. The King and Queen of Atlantis still gave them the cold shoulder and the temporary restraining order that they'd had taken out prevented any of them from being within a thousand miles of them. They meant everything in good fun but sometimes their pranks spilled over into the mortal world. This was why Yonder found herself in such dire straits.

Fix loved being a merman. In fact, he loved everything about it – except those damn tuna nets. More than once he'd found himself caught up in one. It wasn't that he couldn't escape them; it was merely the insult of having to do so. And he found himself having to do so because of the antics of Pacific. They'd had a damn house party that had totally gotten out of hand. There he was minding his own damn business when the thump of house music had shaken his underwater home. Getting up to tell them to turn that shit down, he'd been overtaken by a rogue wave. Now here he was, a hundred fucking miles from his home caught up in a tuna net. He was so going to have something to say to the Council about this.

His mind on revenge, he nearly missed the human that floated right by him. Well, sink-floated. If it wasn't dead it soon would be from the looks of it. He was going to let nature have its way with it when he realized that it wasn't simply a human; it was a child. Fix hated humans for the most part but he had a soft spot for any creature in need and this one was definitely in need. Clearing the seaweed from its mouth and nose, he checked it over. The human was in need of healing but being that he was a literature major not a science major and thus had received a D- in human anatomy he didn't know how it was broken; he only knew that it was broken. Being so far from his home he couldn't get his healer sister to help it.

What to do? What to do? Spying some dolphins he called them to him. After explaining the situation the dolphins agreed to take it to the nearest piece of land, which was the Galápagos. The human might not make it, but at least it wouldn't die alone he thought as he turned and swam for home.

Dolphins were beautiful creatures, and strange creatures in that they had an affinity for humans. Of course, the humans thought that they were studying them when in reality it was they who were the subject and the dolphins who were the scientists. Most of the water creatures simply shrugged at their behavior but the sharks took it personally and would attack humans given the chance. In their opinion the dolphins' behavior made them the weak link. This is why they'd gone after the human when they spotted it and this is why the dolphins had run them off. Being called by the merman who'd draped the human over their backs, they made for the nearest bit of land, which just happened to be the enchanted island of Galápagos Island Proper. Rules be

damned, this human needed help. It might be ready to die, but they weren't ready to let it die without a fight.

Chapter Four: I'll be Your Shelter

Galápagos Island Proper, in the royal castle

Rule had felt uneasy all night. Rising from her bed she ventured to the balcony that overlooked the northernmost waters surrounding Galápagos. She wasn't even out there for a minute before she felt the presence of her husband behind her. Din Eidyn might be Selkie but he knew her like no other. Wrapping her in his strong embrace, he rested his head on the top of hers. He didn't break the silence, he simply held her as they both looked out at the beauty that was Galápagos. Rule liked that about Din Eidyn; he never rushed her.

"I feel something. Something, no someone is coming but I cannot locate them."

"I am at your service," Din Eidyn whispered directly in her ear.

And he was. Though a ruler in his own right, Din Eidyn placed her needs before all else regardless of how small that need appeared to be. She truly loved this man. Turning in his arms she laid her head over his heart enjoying the fact that he was so much bigger than her own 6'6". Sighing, she reveled in the love and strength that poured from him. Leaning her head back she pulled him down for a kiss -- and then she felt it. Something was on her beach and that something was in pain.

Not even bothering with sandals, she rushed to the shore. She didn't even need to look back to know that Din Eidyn was not only behind her but that he'd summoned the guards to accompany them. He never took chances with his females. Of course, she was his only female being that he had no sisters and they had no daughters. All of the men in his family had only fathered boys and he was no different.

A few minutes later she waded through the waters watching as a pod of dolphins made their way to her shore carrying something. She was about to swim out to them when her husband's hand on waist stopped her.

"I will not risk you; allow the Selkie to serve you," he said.

Though he'd whispered it, she knew it was a command. He would not allow her to blindly swim out to whatever it was the dolphins were towing in. Nodding, she bowed to the Selkie under Din Eidyn's command and waited. Rule watched as the Selkie brought the unconscious being to shore. Not sure what it was under the bruises and swelling and seaweed, whatever it was it was a mess. Of course, few things ever looked their best when half-dead. And that hair cut didn't help. She had knowledge but she had no idea what she was looking at. She knew it was human-ish just not how much. What she didn't know about this thing was fast mounting but within all of the uncertainty was one thing she did know: she was going to save it.

Instructing the Selkie to take the thing to the healing chambers, she and Din Eidyn shooed everyone out but the guards and those she instructed to remain a goodly distance away. She knew that their first concern was for her personal safety but she trusted Din Eidyn who was at her side, to protect her. Rule wasn't careless with her safety or that of her people but something in her recoiled at the thought of anyone looking upon this broken creature as if it was a circus attraction.

Making a quick inspection, she surmised that this was definitely a human. Checking its teeth, she estimated that the boy couldn't be more than ten or eleven years of age. It was a baby – only a little bit older than her own baby. Carefully, she began removing the tattered rags that covered the baby. With each piece of the exterior that was revealed, a wealth of injury was revealed with it. Bruises, cuts, and welts covered

his thin frame. Being a mother herself and having a son who was nine, she couldn't stop the tears that fell from her eyes. It was clear that this boy had suffered greatly at the hands of the sea and the creatures that filled it. From the black eye it had, it had suffered from the humans that he was assuredly running from.

Leaving the last scrap of cloth that protected the boy's modesty; she waited while Din Eidyn picked him up and placed him into the warm, bubbly water that filled the massive tub. Gently scrubbing the filth from him, she tended to all of the hurts before removing the last scrap of cloth. And that's when Rule got the shock of her life: he was a she. The woman in her wept; the ruler in her demanded vengeance; but the mother in her celebrated. She now had a little girl.

Rule knew that she was blessed. Mated to a strapping Selkie, there wasn't a shortage of children in their home being that Selkie tended to father multiples. Though she'd only been pregnant three times, she had thirteen boys. Her first pregnancy had resulted in seven fine boys; her second in five; and her last pregnancy a decade later had resulted in Aonghus. She loved her boys but a part of her longed for a daughter. And now Fate had delivered her one. Sure, it came in the form of a human but she didn't care.

Wrapping a clean towel around her, she tenderly dried her although the tears that fell from her eyes left trails of wetness over the battered little girl. Soon enough, she finished her task and fully aware of the statement that she was making, she removed her robe and wrapped it around the little girl. She knew that her actions had the desired effect after hearing the chorus of gasps that followed. Taking a heaving breath she turned to her husband ready to fight him if need be, but even through the red haze of anger that filled his eyes, she glimpsed his approval. And when he tore a piece from his

kilt and placed it over the girl, she knew all would be well for Din Eidyn was also on her side.

This girl called to her heart and she was keeping her regardless of the upheaval that it would cause. Galápagos Island Proper was home to multitudes of species, and though it had taken millennia, it was now home to its first human. She was keeping the girl and anyone or anything that attempted to thwart her would taste banishment right before death. They might not fear her physically, but if they had even a modicum of intelligence they would know to fear Din Eidyn who regardless of his many titles was at heart a Scot and the last thing anyone needed was 8'1", 320 pounds of pissed off Scot coming after you with his army of sons who though only in their early twenties were already well over seven feet and just as ornery when it came to protecting their mother.

Din Eidyn was a man of few words (unless he was encouraging his mate to take her pleasure from his body); Din Eidyn was a man of action. Feeling his mate's distress he was prepared to protect whatever the sea had washed up as long as it wasn't a threat to his family. He felt sick to his stomach upon learning that it was indeed a human underneath the debris and multitude of injuries. However, when he discovered that it was a female child anger had overcome him. Females and children were to be protected and someone had failed miserably at protecting this one. A patient man, he was vowed to find those responsible and deal with them.

Seeing Rule wrap the little girl in her robe he knew that she worried that he'd protest the action and not simply because it left so much of her luscious body exposed. He also knew that as much as she loved him Rule would not back down from what she felt was the right and proper action. She'd fight him and all the world if need be and she

would surrender her life before she surrendered what was right. He loved that about his mate and everything that she loved in turn. Tearing a strip of his plaid he placed it atop the robe before hefting the slight bundle in his arms and reaching for his mate's hand. His plaid may've said that they he claimed the human girl but his demeanor spoke louder. His demeanor promised death to any who'd attempt to hurt either of his females.

The warm water felt absolutely heavenly to Yonder. She must be almost dead because most of the pain had disappeared from her body. The bites no longer itched. The cuts only stung a little. She could feel her tongue again and her eyeballs didn't itch. Even the pain in her head from where the boat had slammed into her was now a bearable thrum rather than a throbbing donging feeling that made it seem like her skull was going to implode. She felt so much better. Since she was better she guessed she was journeying to Heaven rather than Hell. Figuring it was a journey that one only took once, she opened her eyes to see what the road to Heaven looked like even while wondering what she'd done to warrant Heaven.

Slowly, she opened her eyes. Though she could see, something seemed to be wrong with her focus. All she could make out were the blurred figures moving around her. Judging by the soft handling of her person she guessed they were angels. Smiling at the thought of angels caring for her she closed her eyes and succumbed to unconsciousness once again.

Rule stared down into the girl's face as she slept. Half of her hair was gone and the rest hung in straggly strands on one side of her body. Though she was sure that the

girl felt some discomfort she sensed that she was at peace in her slumber and smiled. She hadn't had a lot to smile about in regards to the girl. Gently smoothing her hair from her forehead she opened her senses and had to quickly close them once she tasted bile. Every time she opened her senses she was assaulted with pain. The pain was of such magnitude that not even she, with her great power, could stand to open them for more than a few moments. She caught the fleeting images of scornful acts that had been placed upon the child by humans and lengthier, more vivid images of her recent struggle. Regardless of not having the entire picture it was clear that whatever had happened to her out there in the ocean had been a nightmare for it caused her physical pain merely to view the small snippets from her mind.

"It's ugly," Aonghus' voice crept into her musings.

Rule turned to him before responding. "No darling, she is merely sea swept," she corrected as she bent to kiss the golden cheek of her youngest. She watched as his Mediterranean-blue eyes frosted over when he looked upon the girl.

"Its hair is funny."

"Darling, you mustn't judge so harshly and especially using appearance as the only criteria. Are not all creatures great and small God's creation?"

"Maybe God was having an off day when creating this ... *thing*," he spat.

Rule's patience fled in the face of her son's meanness. "Aonghus Fulgencio Din Eidyn, you know better."

"Mate, what has this young one said or done to raise your ire?" Din Eidyn asked quietly as he stepped into the healing chambers.

"He is failing to show any of the fine rearing he has had," she spat.

"I'm sure that he will correct that. Meanwhile, how is our young charge doing?"

“I know not, husband,” Rule answered honestly. “Though cleansed and healed from the ravages of the sea, the child has yet to waken.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t touch it, Mam,” Aonghus stressed the ‘it’ part of his sentence.

“She’s a little girl, honey; not an ‘it’. And she needs caring touches especially as the seas have been so rough with her.”

“Well, it’s an ugly girl and I think we should throw it back,” Aonghus spat.

“Aonghus!” both she and Din Eidyn reprimanded simultaneously.

“What? Do you want me to lie?” he asked sulkily. “She was ugly when we didn’t even know what it was. Now that we know what she’s supposed to be she’s still ugly.”

Rule was livid. In all of his nine years she’d never had the urge to hurt her child but she was about two seconds away from snatching his lungs out through his back. She couldn’t believe the meanness emanating from her angel. As a mother she’d expected some jealousy, but what she hadn’t expected was his venom. Ever since he’d spotted the little girl wrapped in the robes of the royal family, Aonghus had decided to hate her. The soft gasp of the little girl caught her attention. She’d wished that the little girl would awaken and now that she had, Rule wished that she’d slumbered a little longer once she saw the tears that spilled from the haunted, dark eyes of the child. Though Din Eidyn, six of her sons and her personal guards occupied the room, the little girl looked directly at Aonghus.

“Apologize!” Din Eidyn roared before the first syllable fell from her tongue.

“No,” Aonghus argued petulantly looking anywhere but at the little girl.

“Aonghus, come,” she softly instructed.

She watched as he reluctantly stepped forward. Once he did, she encircled him in her arms and forced him to face the girl. Catching a tear in her hand she gently took her son's hand and dropped the little girl's tear in it.

"The sea has battered her but this is what you've done," she said. She didn't say anything more; she didn't need to. Aonghus might be jealous and distrustful but he was a Din Eidyn male and they protected; they didn't hurt.

"Sorry," Aonghus apologized half-heartedly before stomping from the healing chamber.

When Yonder first woke and felt no pain she was sure she was in Heaven. And when she opened her eyes and saw the beautiful woman sitting beside her, she was sure of it. The woman had gentle hands and a gentle voice. But then she'd seen that horrible little boy and thought for a moment that she just might be in Hell. He'd called her ugly for no reason at all. Before she could stop them tears filled her eyes and rolled down her face. Though she cried silently, the lady had known she was crying. After shaming the boy, she'd quickly pulled back the covers and lifted her onto her lap. Before she could ask if she was in Heaven or Hell, the lady pushed her face into her bosom and rocked her.

Although Yonder had been around women, and even hugged one or two, she'd never had a woman take her in her arms and hug her with such love. The lady not only hugged her, she rubbed her back and smoothed her soft hands over her messy hair. Yonder couldn't help it; she snuck her arms around her and hugged her back. She only stopped hugging when she felt the wetness on her back. Pulling back, she was surprised to glimpse the tears running down the woman's face. She was even more surprised

when the giant man next to her approached and pulled both the lady and herself into his arms.

“Crying is not allowed,” he said in an accent that reminded her of Scrooge McDuck. Though his voice boomed with authority; his touch was gentle.

“Dear heart, we mean you no harm. Aonghus is young and though it is of no use to you he will learn that his prejudice is wasted energy. In spite of my son’s ill manners will you tell us your name?” he asked.

“My name is Yonder, Yonder Austin,” she responded as she looked up at him.

“Yonder like the direction?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” she whispered waiting for him to make fun and tell her that she had an ugly name which befitted an ugly girl.

“Ach, I’m sure that there was a good reason for that but you’re too beautiful a girl for such a plain name. I’m going to call you Caraid Cridhe,” he said as he settled both he and his wife on his lap.

Did the giant just say that she was beautiful? Maybe he was too tall to see her properly or maybe he hadn’t seen the other bit of her hair. Maybe he hadn’t but the look in his eyes was friendly and she kinda liked the name. Even though she couldn’t pronounce it, the name made her feel special. And she liked the way they treated her.

“Okay,” she whispered.

“Now that you’ve tried to take her over, can I get in a word?” the beautiful lady asked.

“I am not taking her over. I’m merely seeing to her,” the giant grouched as he kissed her cheek.

“Are too,” the lady said before turning back to her.

“Now Caraid Cridhe, since my husband has taken it upon himself to rename you, without your permission I might add...”

“It’s okay,” Yonder interrupted. “I like the name even though I cannot pronounce it.”

“The English equivalent is Dear Heart. It’s probably difficult for you to wrap your tongue around Caraid Cridhe because it’s Gaelic. The Spanish equivalent is much more beautiful in my opinion but since you’re okay with being renamed by my mate, Caraid Cridhe is who you shall be. Now that we’ve got that settled, let’s do introductions. I’m Galápagos Rule and this fine man is my husband, Din Eidyn. You’ve already met Aonghus but please don’t hold his behavior against us. We have twelve more sons running around here somewhere and I promise you that they’re a lot more mature than Aonghus – a little bit anyway.”

She couldn’t help but laugh at Ms. Rule. She was funny.

“Now how are you feeling?” she asked.

“Much better, thank you,” she whispered.

“Good then. We’ve called for food and while you eat it you can tell us how you ended up in the ocean all alone.”

Not trusting anyone with all of the secrets of her heart, she’d told them the glossed over bits. She’d left out the abuse from Laverna and Rience; she’d left out her threats to kill them; she left out all the horrid details of her time in the Pacific. Even so, Mr. Rule’s visage grew cold and Mrs. Rule’s didn’t look any better. Gathering her courage she asked them if she could use the phone.

“Oh, honey, we’re already sending someone to check on your Mr. Torix and the Captain. Is there someone else you need to call?”

"I was just going to see if someone could come get me so I won't be bothering you anymore."

Mrs. Rule interrupted her before she could finish. "You're so funny. If you think that I'm allowing you to go back to whatever hell you came from you are sadly mistaken, daughter. I found you; that makes you mine. Hmm mmm, yep. It does. And though I sense you're quite intelligent I hope that you don't think that I'm buying that cleaned-up version that you told me. Now we're going to look for your Mr. Torix. Meanwhile, you're going to stay right here and relax."

"But," she began.

"No buts. You will like it here and you will love us. I have decreed it," Ms. Rule said. "Now welcome to Galápagos and to our family."

Decreed it? She actually decreed that she would love them? If only she could've seen inside of her heart she would've known that her decree wasn't necessary; she already loved them more than she'd loved everyone else except for Torix.

"Are you angels?" she asked.

Ms. Rule smiled and smoothed the back of her hand gently against her cheek before answering.

"No, dear heart, although we're different from you, we're not angels. Now, we're going to move you out of here into a room more suitable to being our daughter. And then you're going to get a little sunshine on your face. You've been cooped up for way too long."

Mam and Da, as she'd been ordered to address them, had carried her up to a huge room that had a row of French doors taking up an entire wall. Seeing it, she was overwhelmed. It wasn't the bigness of the room or the beauty of it that had

overwhelmed her; it was the fact that they thought she was worthy of such grandness. It was also the view. She'd traveled so many places and nothing, nothing had even come close to Galápagos.

Torix had been found as well as the crew off the coast of Colombia. It seems that Pacific's horseplay had caused some kind of dimensional rift, hence the pirates and hence the yacht being blown so far off course. Laverna and Rience wouldn't report Yonder missing since that would've immediately cut off their money. Not caring about the ramifications of his actions Soroka was given something shiny to play with while Torix had beaten Rience Craig to within an inch of his life and instructed the Captain and crew to head back out into the Pacific. When Laverna had dared to object, one of the female crewmembers had bitch-slapped her to sleep. After that bit of violence the Craigs had kept their mouths shut while they went about the business of finding Yonder. They'd torn up the Pacific looking for her. Of course, they never would've found her if the Selkie hadn't found them.

They all met up at the human Galápagos. Though she'd known that Torix wouldn't cease searching for her, she didn't expect him to take such drastic measures nor did she expect the Captain and the crew to help, especially when it could mean their jobs. Regardless of the ramifications all the crew was nice to her. In fact, they'd all hugged her so hard her ribs were sore. Her new family had liked Torix and the crew immediately, well, actually everyone liked Torix but as soon as he'd spied the Craigs he'd lost it. Mam had to hold him back, which had been hilarious since the entire royal guard had had to hold her back. Though they'd succeeded in stopping her mam from killing them; nothing they did or said could stop her from exacting her revenge.

“Since you like that yacht so much you can stay on it for the rest of your miserable little lives,” Mam had said.

And then they’d all watched in disbelief as Galápagos Rule demonstrated why beings didn’t fuck with her. She put on a revenge clinic. Using her great strength, she literally tossed the Craigs onto the sundeck. Closing her eyes, she fisted her hands into each other and chanted in a strange language. When she ceased chanting and opened her eyes, her eyes were solid white. They shone so brightly that none could look into them, but none wanted to. She directed a blast of energy at the water surrounding the yacht lifting it into the air. Holding out her palm, she pulled the yacht closer, shrinking it as she did so. When it could fit into the palm of her hands she stopped it mid-air. Taking sand from the shores she made a glass bowl. Then taking water from the Pacific she filled it. Tossing the boat inside of it, she sealed it, set it on a base of rock and shook it.

Yonder couldn’t help but gasp upon realizing what she was seeing. Not only had her mam had made a snow globe and put them into it. Her shaking it had made the environment a perpetual storm. Before she could wonder what her mam would do next, she watched as she hurled the globe into the Pacific. Wow, she was so never going to piss off that woman she thought as she watched Rule stomp off cussing about people daring to mistreat her daughter.

With a demonstration like that no one was about to say anything. Calls were made and justice was served. The Craigs were reported missing. Attorney McDyess was on his way to Galápagos with papers that would give custody to both Torix and Rule and Din Eidyn. The Captain and crew were given new positions on *The Wild Blue Yonder*, a 194 foot mega yacht, which was a surprise eleventh birthday gift from her

parents that they'd commissioned a year and a half ago. That was great but the best thing was that she got to stay with Torix and the Din Eidyns.

Torix breathed out a sigh of relief upon seeing the Selkie. Even though they looked like men, he knew what they were, just as he knew what particular family they belonged to. They were Din Eidyn Selkie. A Scottish clan of Selkie in the middle of the South Pacific meant one thing: they were in the service of Galápagos Rule and his baby Yonder was safe. In fact, she couldn't be any safer. Galápagos Rule was one being that he didn't want to cross and her mate Din Eidyn was kind of son-of-a-bitch that you crossed continents to avoid.

He'd crossed many realms in his many lifetimes, but the realm of Galápagos Rule was one that he could not cross without an invitation. Like many beings, he knew of the realm, but not how to access it. Atlantis was easier to access despite the fact that it changed location every few hours after that unfortunate incident back in the day.

Seeing his baby had caused him to do something he hadn't done in a long, long time: he smiled. Even beneath the fading bruises, the messy hair, and the haircut, his baby was so beautiful. Holding her on his lap, he listened as she whispered to him about how pretty Rule was and how nice Din Eidyn was. It was clear that she had no idea how powerful Galápagos Rule was and how deadly Din Eidyn was. She didn't see their power, their wealth, or their legacy. Yonder had no idea that no humans had ever set foot in the place that she raved about. Nope, all his baby saw was the fact that they loved and accepted her. And he knew that they accepted her by witnessing the tenderness with which Galápagos Rule touched her and the softness in Din Eidyn's eyes when he looked upon her.

Though the bulk of his attention was on Yonder, Torix hadn't failed to notice the fact that the royal guard also guarded Yonder. He also hadn't missed the fact that the twelve grown sons of Galápagos Rule and Din Eidyn surreptitiously watched his every move. The thirteenth son, who'd one day be the most powerful Selkie known to history, wasn't even being discreet about his watching. He'd settled himself right in front of him and stared a hole in him whilst holding on tightly to his dagger. Ah, yes, he liked this young Selkie. He liked him a lot. And given time, the youngest Din Eidyn would understand that Yonder Austin was the only female in the world for him.

Looking down at the precious baby in his arms, he took a moment and sifted through her memories. Though he was powerful in his own right, only his extensive training allowed him to hold back the fire in his eyes and the growl in his heart. Yonder was safe he reminded himself of that fact over and over and over. She was safe, and more than that she was finally at the place where she belonged. Still, later he was going to have a word with those fucking Portuguese-Man-of-Wars ... and the sharks ... and Pacific, especially Pacific.

Twelve years ago, he'd wondered why in all of Creation he'd ended up in Atlanta, Georgia. And then he'd met Frontier and Meridian Austin. And a year later, he'd met Yonder Austin and known. Oh, he'd tried to deny it. He'd come and gone, but try as he might, he wasn't able to stay apart from Yonder for very long and Yonder wouldn't let him. She'd gotten to him despite all of the shields around his heart. Before he knew it, he was hanging streamers for her birthday parties that only he and the staff attended; he was in the home improvement stores with an armful of laughing Yonder and her favorite toys matching paint; he was sewing throw pillows in Carolina blue, her favorite color, to decorate the custom-made king-sized canopied bed that he'd spent months in his

woodshop making for her. Even though her sadness had made his heart bleed, even though duty had made it impossible for him to guard her twenty-four hours a day, even though her admission of love had made him painfully aware of the vulnerable parts of himself, it had all been worth it.

After witnessing Galápagos Rule's vengeance on his baby's behalf, Torix exhaled. And before he was done exhaling, Din Eidyn's thirteenth son approached him.

"Are you coming to live with us, too?"

Before he could tell the spunky young Selkie that he was not, Din Eidyn himself stepped forward and clasped his hand in the way of warriors.

"Of course he is," he answered right before Galápagos Rule raised her arms above her head and transported them all to the royal estate on Galápagos Island Proper.

"Welcome to Galápagos, Overlord Vercingetorix. Though I have read about your kind, until now I have never met one of you. We are honored by your presence."

"Thank you for having me," he said overwhelmed, although not altogether surprised that Galápagos Rule knew what he was.

"We could do nothing else but welcome you; the rest of your destiny is here."

"What?" he asked and before it was out of his mouth good, the royal chef walked out. He could do nothing but stare at the Polynesian woman that had haunted his dreams every night ever since his pride had allowed him to let her go. No wonder he couldn't find her for she'd been tucked up in a place that was unfindable.

Before he could speak his baby jumped up. "Torix, you're smiling and not just with your lips but with the entirety of your soul." Then turning to the woman who'd lit up his heart, she asked. "You should marry my Torix. He's a good man. Do you have a

husband? I can make him extinct if you do because I want you to marry Torix. Ooh, then you can cook for me too. Torix, ask her to marry you, quick.”

And before he could stop himself he dropped to his knees before that woman and did just that. Of course it meant travelling to her queendom, which meant crossing galaxies and sifting through realms and such. Doing the calculations in his head, he estimated that his journey would take years but seeing Yonder’s double thumbs up, he knew that it was a journey that he was going to take. And that’s how Torix found himself sharing a baby with Galápagos Rule and Din Eidyn.

Chapter Five: Tell Me What I Did to Deserve This

Aonghus Fulgencio Din Eidyn swam like a Selkie possessed. He was tearing up the Pacific in order to get home. It wasn't that he hadn't been home in a long time; it was that he hadn't been home when Yonder Austin – now Yonder Austin Din Eidyn – was present. Yonder was due home today and he was anxious to see her- not that he'd admit that.

As always he crinkled his nose upon thinking of her name – not that any except for him called her that. The only name his mam and da called her was *Caraid Cridhe*; pretty much everyone else called Yonder Din Eidyn's daughter. And she was. Da loved her just as fiercely as his mam, though he was under the misguided impression that he was "hiding" his feelings for the human.

Yonder had da and every Din Eidyn male – except for him - wrapped around her little finger. While his da and brothers had accepted Yonder straight away, he'd had a hard time doing that. It wasn't that he disliked her in particular; it was that he'd disliked humans that much. And despite being a vulnerable little girl, she was human.

Though only a boy of nine summers when he'd met her, he was far wiser than his years. Having Din Eidyn and Rule as parents he'd always had a wealth of knowledge at his fingertips. Even at such a tender age he was already well-versed in mathematics, languages, astronomy, oceanography, and history. That is why he knew all about humans. Humans were dangerous. Even before they'd discovered fire they'd been dangerous and once they got their science humans had become deadly.

He'd scoffed at the fact that they'd actually dubbed one of their periods 'the Age of Reason' as he saw very little reasoning in the things that they did. In fact, their ignorance increased in direct proportion to their technological gains. They got a little

bit of knowledge and suddenly they thought that they were equal to God. They considered the earth and everything in it a thing. Hell, many of them considered each other things, thus they looked upon the earth as something to conquer and each other as commodities. They maimed for amusement; they enslaved each other to build up their egos; they killed simply because they could; they destroyed entire cultures for their convenience. Human history was filled with great sorrow and tragedy, the overwhelming majority which had been self-inflicted.

The dolphins spoke of the many decent human beings. They'd pointed out all of the good things that they did; all of the good fights they'd fought, but Aonghus couldn't see the good past the great mountains of pain that they'd constructed. No, he couldn't see the good; he merely saw the dangers that humans had represented to his kind.

That is why he'd hated Yonder. It wasn't because she was African-American; it wasn't because she was a girl; it wasn't because of her southernness -- the horrible accent, her affinity for a drink called sweet tea, the way she inserted y'all in every other sentence. He'd hated her simply because she was human. Thinking back on his first sight of her had caused him to turn up his nose. He could do nothing but stare distastefully at the thing that was brought onto the majestic island he called home. Whatever the bedraggled, kelp-covered mess was, it had been decidedly out of place here. Its ugliness was in stark contrast to what was most assuredly the most beautiful Island in all of the world.

When it'd been cleaned up and he'd found out the thing was not only human but not even a full grown human, he was horrified -- and scared. If humans would do this to a little girl surely they'd destroy his kind given half a chance. He'd been thinking of a way to get rid of that thing when he saw it wrapped in the family robe and had a bit of

his da's tartan draped over it. He knew what that gesture meant: it meant claiming. The only other thing that came close was a male Selkie presenting his mate with his pelt.

"What are you doing?" he'd asked.

"Protecting her, son," his parents had answered.

"It's a *human*," he'd said the word with such venom you would've thought that he was speaking of a pile of whale feces.

"Yes, she is," they'd said in that way that let him know it'd be best for him to hush. He had hushed and he'd also stomped from the healing chamber disgusted with the both of them. *How dare they put their family in danger for something that not even the humans had wanted?*

Being that his mam had spent the bulk of her time in the healing chamber with that thing, he'd of course gone down to sneak peeks at it and to make sure that it didn't harm his mam. He'd taken his dagger along just in case. The thing might be a good deal taller than he was but he was wiry and stealthy, and he wasn't going to let his mam's soft heart put her in danger. Of course, neither was his da or the royal guard going to let her be in any danger. Then there was the fact that his mam was an impressive fighter herself. He'd seen her sparring and was glad that he'd never have reason to be her opponent. Galápagos Rule Din Eidyn might not be as scary as her mate, Din Eidyn, but his mother was meaner and carried a grudge far longer than any ruler he knew.

He'd continued to sneak peeks into the chamber on and off for two weeks and nothing had changed except the worry in his mam's eyes. The thing still hadn't awakened. He didn't know much about healing but he knew that the longer it slept the more messed up it was. At this point the human would either wake up or it would never wake again. It would pain his mam but it would keep the whole of Galápagos safe.

He didn't recall what had made him fully enter the chamber but he soon found himself at his mam's side. Standing close to the human he'd taken his time looking it over. Its face was covered in bruises and scratches as was every bit of exposed skin, which wasn't much being that his mam had tucked the covers tightly around it. And its hair was funny, which he'd said right after informing his mam that it was ugly. His mam of course wouldn't hear of such thing and he'd grown increasingly frustrated seeing his mam touch that strange thing with gentleness and love. So like the spoiled nine-year old that he was, he'd amped up his insults ending with a dissertation on its ugliness.

He'd only stopped when he'd seen the look on his mam and da's (who'd walked in during his tirade) faces. Although his parents had never raised a hand to him they'd both looked like they'd wanted to give him a good hiding. But as frightening as the looks of anger and impatience was on his parents' faces nothing had affected him like the look of hurt and pain that was on the human's face. It physically hurt him to look at her and when his mam had dropped one of its tears in his palm the human's hurt had burned his very soul.

That tear had connected them in a way that he'd told no one about. Every time he even thought about being mean to her a glimmer of her past would float into his subconscious. In the past thirteen years he'd spent a little bit of each day in the nightmare that was her reality before arriving at Galápagos. He was there with her in the Pacific. He was there with her on the yacht. He was there in the mirror when she'd first glimpsed her ruined hair. Funnily enough he was only able to travel back to the moment on that yacht and no further. It'd taken him years to figure out why he couldn't go back further: it was because there was nothing for her to go back to. Despite whatever else Yonder had been, she'd been first and foremost lonely.

He'd changed his mind about her even before his da had come to him. At first, he was going to tell his da that he'd changed his mind but then his da had started talking and he'd been too in awe of what his hero had said to interrupt.

"The day your mother gave birth to you was one of the greatest days of my life," Din Eidyn said and the truth of his words was echoed by the joy on his face and the love in his voice. His father's thick Scottish brogue was always pronounced when he was emotional.

"Your mother and I were so nervous. Aye, we already had twelve boys but you were the first bairn that was a single birth and we wanted to be the right parents for you. The love a father feels for his child is uncompromising and never ending but t's frightening also. When I first held you, you were so tiny, barely as big as my forearm but you had the strength to bring tears to my eyes and joy to my heart. And nothing about that has changed. Though my body will deteriorate with time, the part of me that loves you can never be broken. Aonghus, I will love you forever, son no matter how many bairn we have.

Aye, we have thirteen fine boys, but now the Creator has seen fit to bless us with Caraid Cridhe and though she is human, she is meant to be ours. I know that I have always taught you to be wary of humans as they are destructive; but they are also fragile - more fragile than you or I or any of those that live amongst us.

I think I have done you a disservice. In trying to teach you to be wary, it seems that I have taught you how to hate. Hate is wrong, Aonghus. Hate is what allows all sentient beings to destroy -- if not others, then themselves. Be wary, yes; but do not waste your time or your life hating. It hurts me and your mother to hear you speak ill of Caraid Cridhe. I know that she has some strange ways, and I'm guessing that if she

is anything like your mam, then she will be able to throw some sharp barbs your way, but the fact remains son, that she is a little girl. She's a human little girl who was abandoned in the worst way when all she needed was love and safety, which is something you have always had.

Son, I am about to ask an important task of you. I can think of no other that would be better able to do what I am about to ask of you being that you are closest in age to Caraid Cridhe, but you must be of clear heart and mind when you agree or everything will be for naught, Do you understand?

Son, I need your pledge to help keep little Caraid Cridhe safe. I need to know that when your mother and I are not present that you will stand in our stead and protect her from anything that would harm her -- even herself. Can I depend upon you, my son?"

He'd said yes. There was simply no other answer. Aonghus had felt such guilt at hurting her that he'd pledged to protect the human even before his da had asked.

A lot had happened during those first seven years. Of course there was the constant bickering between them. Never had he met any being who could find new ways to insult him so fully. In all that time he'd never won an argument; never had a better comeback. He couldn't even pick on her name for the one time he'd tried she'd put her hand on her non-existent hip, thrust out her non-existent chest and laughed her non-existent ass off after pointing out how jacked up his name pairing was. Okay, it wasn't everyday that you met a man with a stereotypical Scottish first name paired with a Spanish middle name. Still, it hadn't been *that* funny.

Other than the bickering, there were the constant "adventures". Having somehow been dubbed her unofficial bodyguard by his father, which meant that he was

her official bodyguard, he'd been dragged any and everywhere by her. Most mornings she'd wakened him by diving on his bed and singing '*The Name Game*' or '*The Banana Song*' over and over until he got up. After realizing that she wouldn't stop until he did get up, she'd never made it past 'bo bangus' before he dragged himself out of bed.

Getting into stuff had pretty much filled her agenda being that she hadn't attended school. Being as smart as she was, she hadn't needed to. The private tutor on the human Galápagos had nothing more she could teach her. Then there was the unfortunate incident that had led the principal to suggesting that Yonder never come back, which was fine by everyone in their family, especially Yonder. Yonder got to hang out with his-their mam and da and do all kinds of fun things until he got out of school. After that, it was him and her having fun.

If you saw one of them; you saw both of them. Everyone expected to see Yonder and Aonghus together. And of course everyone expected to hear them arguing about something or another. That's how it'd been for the first seven years and then she'd been sent off to human university when she'd turned eighteen. Being that he was sixteen he'd been sent off to Scotland for Selkie Boot Camp. Though she'd come home during breaks and for summer; he'd spent the whole of the last six years in Scotland learning his duties.

Training was intense for Selkies and even more so for Selkies who served as protectors. And then there was the training that the Din Eidyn Selkies underwent. There was no 'good enough', there was only perfection. You got an A plus or you repeated every lesson until you attained an A plus. With Galápagos Rule as his mam and Din Eidyn as his da he could do nothing less than excel.

He'd spent six intense years training and in that time a lot had happened. First and foremost, he'd hit his Selkie growth spurt. Unless Yonder had grown another foot in height, he'd finally be taller than her so there would be no more hearing her call him 'shrimp'. The last time he'd seen her she was 6'4" and still bone thin even though eating was like her second-favorite thing to do. Though he still had some growing left to do, currently he stood 7'9 1/2" and weighed 295 pounds. Yep, now he was going to call her 'shrimp'.

Chapter Six: Are We There Yet?

June 2008

Yonder was going home, for good this time. She'd busted her ass and overloaded on classes and had shaved a year off of the amassing of her degrees. Now after a long journey, she'd had all of the degrees that she was going to get. Loving a challenge and needing to get back into school shape, she'd chosen the Landing School in Arundel, Maine where she'd earned her diploma in boatbuilding. Right after that she'd trekked to MIT and earned her Bachelors as well as her Masters in Mechanical and Ocean Engineering.

And now it was done, finished, over.

It wasn't that she hadn't liked university; it was that she hadn't appreciated being away from Galápagos and all that it entailed. Sure she'd spent all of her vacations and every summer in Galápagos. And sure her mam and da came to see her at least once a month while she was away at school, but it wasn't the same. As beautiful as they were, neither Maine nor Massachusetts was home, and neither was Atlanta after the past thirteen years. She'd packed up her parent's house saddened a bit by the fact that it had really never been her home nor Frontier and Meridian Austin's for that matter. It was a beautiful home and it deserved to be loved. The closest it had come to love was when the Craigs had coveted it. Giving it a final walkthrough she said a prayer to the house hoping that one day it would be filled with the laughter and love of a family. Her wish might come true for not even a month later she'd sold it to a nice man from Liechtenstein of all places. Wulf Altenöder coached soccer, but she forgave him for that being that he'd bought her some Teuscher Champagne truffles. It was love at first bite and the first thing she'd done was to make a standing order for those things.

Saying bye to Atlanta hadn't been hard. It was a great place, but she was a different person now. So saying, she'd talked to Mr. McDyess and bought properties in the human part of Galápagos and in Hawaii. And then she'd done something really crazy: she counted up all of those zeroes that had grown into more zeroes and she'd bought up tracts of land. She'd bought a forest in Africa; some rainforest in South America; thousands upon thousands of acres in Alaska; some wetlands in Florida, even a few islands in the Atlantic. All of that for some freaking animals, which, for the record, she still hated. Still, humans had poached on their territory and it was the right thing to do. Even after all of those purchases, she still had a few hundred million.

She'd changed a lot in thirteen years. Not only had she grown a few more inches in height, she'd grown some hips and booty to match it. Soroka had said it was due to that diet of soul food. As always, she smiled thinking of Soroka. Damn, she'd hated her, but later when she'd had the benefit of having a loving family, she couldn't help but feel sorry for Soroka. All she had was Laverna and Rience and they damn sure didn't love her; they showed her off like an apple pie at a state fair. Going to her mam and da she'd asked them to let Soroka out of the snow globe. As she expected, that request was met with all kinds of 'hell no's' and 'you must have lost your minds' from her fiery mam and a frown from her fiery da, but she'd reasoned with them. After all, it wasn't as if they couldn't put Soroka back into the snow globe if she acted the damn fool.

There'd been no need to even threaten to put Soroka into that globe. Soroka had come out of that globe apologizing and she hadn't stopped since. After finishing up her GED, she'd gone to community college and then attended Georgia State before joining her at MIT. Soroka was brainy and fierce and could do the shit out of some hair, thus her hair was always looking tight. Right now, she sported braids. It had taken Soroka a

full day to put them in but dammit it had been worth it. Along with the hairstyle, Soroka had dragged her shopping for some clothes that befitted a young, hot woman. At first, she thought Soroka was talking about herself when she said 'hot' woman, being that Soroka was freaking 'start a Greek civil war' beautiful, but she'd soon learned different. Soroka had meant her.

Before she could protest her, sweat pants, jeans, bulky sweaters and the like had been washed, pressed and donated to good will. Her plain white bras and the men's tighty-whitey's that she preferred had been set ablaze with wayyyyyy too much glee on Soroka's part. She'd cussed Soroka out and threatened her with all kinds of things but when Soroka had told her that she'd rather spend more time in the snow globe than to see her in any more 'Old Man and the Sea' attire, she knew it was time for a wardrobe change. Due to Soroka's meddling, she had a brand new wardrobe full of booty shorts, feminine spaghetti-strapped tops, sundresses, feminine sandals, ass-hugging jeans, and suitcases and suitcases full of silky lingerie. Walking out in one of her new outfits, Soroka had said whistled and made catcalls. Smacking her ass, Soroka had pronounced her 'bootylicious.' Though she wasn't exactly sure what that had entailed it must've been good because her brother had taken one look at her, threw a '*I will fuck you up*' scowl on his face, grabbed her hand, and stayed closer to her than her own shadow. Maybe she did look better, she thought as she boarded the yacht that was taking her home.

Eochaid Din Eidyn looked at his baby sister -- his only sister -- and growled. When the hell had she started wearing clothes that fit? And where in the hell did those *things* and that other *thing* come from? She couldn't prance around in shorts and a t-shirt that actually fit. Nope, she needed the old shorts she used to wear that came down

past her knees and were two sizes too big and she needed to go back to wearing the oversized t-shirts. This wearing clothes that fit and showed that she was a female had to come to a quick end lest he or his brothers be forced to kill a whole bunch of these human males. Dammit, here he was holding her hand and looking like the dangerous, protective older brother and males were still looking. If he wouldn't have had to let go of her hand he would've battled them all right then and there. He couldn't get off of the plane and onto the yacht fast enough. It was a good thing it belonged to his sister else he would've had to beat the shit out of the male passengers. He didn't have to worry about the crew because they knew their parents and they weren't trying to do anything to garner his mam's wrath.

He looked down at the sleeping Caraid Cridhe and smiled. He couldn't help but smile when looking at her. She was a welcomed blessing in a household full of males. Though they'd all grumbled at the thought of a girl coming in and disrupting their lives, she'd managed to sneak into the hearts of every Din Eidyn male. Caraid Cridhe was so loved, that guarding her was a privilege that it had become routine for Selkie to request the privilege – years in advance. And they should for Caraid Cridhe was a being who had the power to sneak into almost anyone's heart. Closing, his eyes he thought of the moment when he realized that she'd snuck into his.

He'd been standing quietly by his father's side watching the little girl play with the Tyrannosaurus Rex that she'd decided was going to be her best friend because he looked lonely. Well, of course he'd look lonely. He was a carnivorous beast, which he'd told her. Of course the beast being a carnivore hadn't fazed her any more than his being over fifteen feet and height and thirty feet in length. She'd merely kissed the dinosaur on what would be its cheek and announced that she was calling him Meatballs. The

dinosaur looked like he might've objected but one look from his father had nixed any protest that the dinosaur might've formed. Apparently having the mate of Galápagos Rule gesture that he was going to slit your throat in your sleep would do that.

"She is strong like Mam," he'd remarked as he watched her wrestle the dinosaur. Of course, she pinned Meatballs every single time.

"Aye, and reckless like you boys which scares years off my life," Din Eidyn said as he'd dramatically placed a hand over his heart causing him to laugh out loud.

His laughter had gained her attention and instead of running after her best friend, Meatballs, she'd switched directions and ran to him throwing herself into his arms which he'd held open to her.

"ECHO!" she'd screamed loud enough to deafen him. Still, all he could do was smile as he caught her in his arms and threw her above his head before snatching her out of mid-air. Her giggling was infectious and he'd soon found himself giggling with her.

"Ah, Caraid Cridhe, what mischief are you making that's making Da sweat as such?" he'd asked the beautiful vibrant little girl he loved like he'd known her all of his life instead of four weeks.

"Nothing," she'd sing-songed, which loosely translated meant that she'd gotten into way too much mischief to keep track of.

Before he could question her on her answer she'd wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him on both cheeks. "Do you want to come exploring with us?"

"And what are we exploring?" he'd asked.

"I want to go to the cliffs," she'd said with eyes wide with mischief.

Of course he'd shaken his head 'no' straight away but he made the mistake of looking into her eyes as he did it. It was as if the sun dipped behind the clouds as her smile disappeared. Immediately Eochaid had felt him change the direction of his nod. His change of heart was rewarded by beauty. She smiled and the sun came out again. Before he could wonder what happened he'd set his little enchantress back on her feet and she skipped off to get her dinosaur.

He'd had no idea what had happened; he was just glad that she wasn't an enemy.

"Get used to it, son," his father had said.

He hadn't gotten used to it and after thirteen years he doubted he ever would.

His little sister was so beautiful and had no idea. Hell, most of the time she didn't realize that she was a girl, or a fragile human. She'd damn near given them all full heads of grey hair with her stunts. She was always trying to jump off of something, climb something, and try something. She was a true adventurer, and though they liked her spunk, it gave them all heart problems. Half the royal guard had come back with a case of the shakes after being out guarding her. It was a good thing that she didn't swim very well or no telling what kind of trouble she would've gotten into. Of course she didn't swim because of that awful time in the Pacific. A growl filled his chest whenever he thought back on how she'd looked. His mam had given them an abbreviated version of what had happened and that had been enough to sicken him. He and his brothers had personally gone to the Portuguese-Man-of-War and run them out of most of the Pacific not caring about where they were to go. They'd recommended hell but they hadn't been too fond of that idea so they'd suggested Portugal being that was part of their name. Of course the Portuguese Selkie and the Atlantic Selkie had protested the

entire Portuguese-Man-of-War population relocating there, especially when the Pacific Ocean was by far the largest. They still hadn't cared but in fairness to other water creatures they'd allowed them back as long as they kept a thousand miles away from Galápagos and never, never touched Caraid Cridhe again. If they did, they wouldn't have to worry about where they'd live as they'd hunt those motherfuckers to extinction.

When Caraid Cridhe had first come to Galápagos she had no idea that her very presence had the entire nation up in arms. All she knew was that someone loved her. And there were things that he doubted but one thing that he didn't doubt was his parent's love for the strange-looking and strange-acting human girl. She'd been taken into the ruling family of Galapagos without any discussion whatsoever and though rulers from around the whole of the world may wish to 'discuss' the situation of the human presence on the mythical isle, Eochaid knew that they would be wasting their time. Galápagos Rule and Din Eidyn had found and claimed the human child and there would be a whole lot of pain involved if anyone/thing decided to mess with that decree. And he would help deliver that pain.

He was pulled from his memories by her soft voice. "You're growling again."

"I never growl; I'm merely trying to wake you up, lazy bones as we're nearly home."

"Yessssssssssssssssssssss!" she'd whooped with joy as she pushed her hair out of her eyes and ran to the connecting master bath to freshen up.

Once again, Eochain was goaded into growling. Males were looking. What the fuck was wrong with them? Hadn't they ever seen a beautiful woman before? Dammit, she'd been beautiful the entire time but her habit of wearing oversized clothes had

blinded them all to the fact that she was becoming a woman. She might be a woman, but first and foremost, she was their sister and any male thinking he could point his eyeballs in her direction had better get that thought out of his head with the quickness. The only male that was going to be looking at her was Aonghus. Caraid Cridhe was going to be Aonghus' mate, just as soon as they both realized that they were too ornery for anyone else. Though Caraid Cridhe and Aonghus had both acknowledged that they shared the exact same parents and the exact twelve brothers, they'd never looked upon each other as siblings. As far as his little sister was concerned Aonghus was simply that other Din Eidyn boy that no one except for her better try and mess with. It was the same with Aonghus.

They'd both been too young to question why and even if they had figured it out, they were still too young to do anything about it. Caraid Cridhe had to go to human university and Aonghus had to go to Selkie Boot Camp. They'd seen neither hide nor hair of each other for close to six years. He wondered if they'd recognize each other. Being that his brother had grown about two feet in height and his little sister had grown into her height, he was putting his clams on no.

"Stop fussing. We have a meeting tomorrow involving rulers from all over the universe and yet you aren't the least concerned about that."

"Because I know that you can handle it. After all, you are Galápagos Rule, and I hear that you have that handsome, virile Din Eidyn as a mate."

"That is true," she smiled. "Although I don't see why the great Emperor of all Selkie, king to all magical water creatures, and democratically-elected president of all water-dwelling creatures is in a tizzy simply because our children are coming home."

You act as if it hasn't been four weeks since you've last seen Caraid Cridhe or three since you've last seen Aonghus," Rule admonished her husband as he once again paced to the balcony and stared out over the waters.

Walking up behind her man she wrapped her arms around him and laid her head against his heavily-muscled back. Sighing, she thought about the moment she'd decided that she was keeping Caraid Cridhe. Din Eidyn had supported her decision without asking for even the first word of explanation. In truth, she'd expected his support, but when he'd torn off a piece of his plaid, she'd nearly cried from joy. What for him had been a sense of protectiveness for the child had quickly turned into love. She couldn't help the smile that spread over her face upon recalling Din Eidyn's admission of loving the little girl. *You feel as a father of a little girl should*, she'd said right before making gentle love to him.

"I just want everything to be perfect for our little ones," he said unapologetically.

Though he included Aonghus in the reason that he was worrying, Rule knew his anxiety was all due to their baby girl. Like all of the Din Eidyn men, he worried something fierce over their daughter, as he should. As strong as she may be, when it came down to it, Caraid Cridhe was first a female, and then human.

"And it is. Our daughter wants for nothing especially when her Da and brothers are always spoiling her," Rule said without heat in her voice.

Din Eidyn chuckled before bending his head to press his lips gently to hers.

"Says the woman who does more spoiling than all of us put together," Din Eidyn teased.

Rule simply laughed at that and held her husband tighter.

"She's coming home for good, husband, and won't be leaving us again," Rule sighed happily. "It will be a race to see which of our children arrives first: Caraid Cridhe or Aonghus."

Din Eidyn smiled then went right back to scoring the horizon for signs of the yacht that was bringing his baby girl back to Galápagos where she belonged. Rule couldn't wait to see her, especially as Soroka had called and told her what she'd done to Caraid Cridhe's wardrobe. Apparently her daughter was looking 'bootylicious' and her brother Echo hadn't liked that one bit, even going so far as to offer to purchase her a coat even though it was June. Oh, this was going to be so much fun. She couldn't wait to witness the moment when her daughter and her son locked eyes on each other for that first time.

Home at last, home at last, thank God All Mighty, she was home at last. And she did thank God. Though she was quite comfortable in America, like that chick with the glittery, red shoes in that one movie about tornados had said, there was no place like home. Stretching her arms above her head, she thanked God and only then did she allow her arms to drop. Turning, she took a good look at the mystical island-nation that she was blessed enough to call home. There was no place like this. Not even the known Galápagos, which was just over the way, came close to being this beautiful, this perfect, this amazing. God had brought the freaking amazing stuff when making Galápagos Island Proper. Here, the sky was bluer; the grass was greener, the mountains more majestic, the clouds fluffier, the sun more lemony in color, the air sweeter. As always, she felt a tingling whenever she was close to home and when she was home she felt -- buzzed all over her body.

Standing on the shore, Yonder couldn't believe that it'd been almost thirteen years to the day since she was first dragged upon the shores. She couldn't believe it, but she was oh so glad. Shaking her head full of braids, she smiled feeling the ends brush the top of her generous ass. How the hell had she gone from a size "biology classroom skeleton" to a nice size twelve in just under six years? Oh well, she might've put on some weight but truth be known, she liked the way her breasts filled out her top and the way her ass jiggled. Before she'd left the States, Soroka had shown her three things. First, she'd shown her how to make her booty clap. She wasn't sure why she'd ever need that bit of knowledge but it didn't stop her from grinning her ass off once she'd done it. Then, Soroka had shown her the clip from *The Queens of Comedy* where the comedian Sommore talked about the hula hoop ... and then she'd shown her how to use it. She'd been going around making that shh-shh sound all fucking week but damn if she couldn't work the shit out of a hula hoop, which is why she'd bought a whole grip of them home with her.

As soon as she saw Aonghus, she was going to challenge him to a hula-hoop off. Later, when she convinced her mam that she needed a secret lab she was going to make one big enough for Meatballs. A breeze came in and tickled her nose and she smiled knowing that it was a greeting from her mam and da.

Ah, her parents spoiled her. Her mam had taken her over and cared for her. She'd taken care of her femaleness. That is, her mam had made sure that she'd had the softest robes, the softest sheets, the sweetest-smelling bath salts, and that everyone treated her like spun glass. It was a new experience for her but she'd loved it. Of course, she'd go out and play rougher than all of the boys combined according to all of Galápagos, but Yonder was sure that they were exaggerating.

Then there was her da. Her da loved and spoiled her just as much as her mam but where her mam took care of her femaleness, her da took care of her protection. Nobody protected like Din Eidyn. Not only had he doubled the royal guard and relegated half of it to protect her, he'd made it clear that there was always to be a Din Eidyn male with her at all times. Most of the time that Din Eidyn male was Aonghus as they were closest in age but many times he himself or several of her older brothers accompanied them on their adventures.

She recalled the time when her mam had decided that she needed to go to school. That had been a Lucy and Ethel stunt-gone-awry episode in the extreme. She'd only been at school for half an hour when she'd spotted her da hiding in the bushes outside of the school. Of course, he might've been more successful at hiding if he'd selected a bush that was higher than his ankles to hide behind. Shortly after, all of the foliage surrounding the beautiful school had seemed to come alive with Din Eidyn males. It might not have been so bad if she'd been the only one to notice but they weren't exactly easy to hide being that the shortest of them was 7'6". Before she could groan in embarrassment, Aonghus had repelled down from the roof. She had twelve Din Eidyn brothers hiding in the foliage on one side of her classroom, and that other Din Eidyn -- who was the brother to her brothers but not her brother -- with his face plastered against the glass looking all crazy on the other side of the classroom.

And then the real fun had begun. Thinking that no one had seen them, each of her older brothers had sauntered into the classroom on the pretense that she'd forgotten her lunch. Aonghus had simply walked in and plopped down beside her saying that he was there to bust some skulls if needed. And then he'd rummaged around in her stack of lunch bags and helped himself to cake. A few minutes later her father came in and

simply scooped her up saying that she didn't feel well and wouldn't be back until he decided she was well enough. Apparently, she'd been too sick to attend school for seven years because she hadn't gone back although she'd gotten a shiny diploma from her tutor that said that she was qualified to go to college.

After the school fiasco, she thought for sure that there was no way in all of Creation that her da would be able to handle that, but then she forgot what he was like. Encouraging her to go, she hadn't been surprised when no less than two of her brothers moved in with her. On top of that, she had a contingent of Selkie who just hung out, which hadn't been all that bad, especially in the boatbuilding class as there were times that they'd had to go out on the water. Those times her brothers had been in the water, just waiting in case she needed them. Though she could dog paddle, she still sucked at swimming. Now that she was home there would be no need for the amped-up security, then again the very fact that she was home meant that she had amped-up security.

Wow, she loved her crazy-assed family. She even loved Aonghus, even though he wasn't her brother. She'd see them in a few minutes but first she had to see Meatballs because once she got into the castle her parents wouldn't be letting her go in a hurry, as if they hadn't just seen her last month.

Hearing the chirping of birds nearby caused her to think about animals. Though she had a long list of animals she was planning on making extinct, starting with those fucking Portuguese Man-of-War, and ending with guppies, she loved her Tyrannosaurus Rex. Meatballs may be one of the most-feared animals, but he was simply misunderstood. Smiling, she threw her head back and whistled for her best friend.

“MEATBALLS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

Finally arriving on Galápagos, Aonghus changed back into human form, slipped into the castle and donned clothes. By clothes, he meant that he donned the Din Eidyn kilt. Being that it was always warm on Galápagos there was no need for anything else although he'd have to adopt formal dress for tomorrow afternoon's meeting of rulers.

Aonghus knew that he should've greeted his mam and da but he'd wanted to see Yonder first. He didn't have anything to prove to his parents as they loved him unconditionally. Yonder, on the other hand, liked him more than Portuguese-Man-of-War, but less than food. He might not have anything to prove to his parents, but he damn sure had something to prove to Yonder.

"Who is *that*?" Aonghus asked Oron, his hand-to-hand combat instructor, best friend, and partner in all mischief. Though Oron was a powerful being, he was quite casual about it. The big man of African descent had a smile upon his lips that managed to be both mysterious and smirky all at once. It was a smile that others had attempted to imitate but to no avail. That smile belonged to Oron and Oron only. Oron's trademark, it was a smile that tended to piss others off -- Aonghus included.

"Of whom do you speak, Aonghus?" Oron asked with a raised eyebrow as he turned just his head to look at him.

"Her!" Aonghus exclaimed as he pointed to the full-figured woman who stood with her toes in the sea and her head and muscled-arms raised to the sky. A riot of braids fell down her back but he couldn't make out her face as she was looking in the opposite direction. Oh well, he still had plenty to look at. The beauty was wearing a delicate blue spaghetti-strapped shirt that outlined breasts the size of cantaloupes and blue denim shorts that hugged hips that he longed to hold onto, and an ass that was

begging to be spanked. Damn, she was beautiful, so beautiful that he didn't know where to look first.

"Before I start lusting too hard over her, she's not one of your females is she?" he asked.

"No," Oron said being all helpful with the information as was customary for the man of few words.

"Is she one of the mermaids that are coming to the meeting?" he asked.

"Ah, no, that is not a mermaiden," Oron answered with a chuckle.

He was about to stalk off and discreetly inquire who the woman was when she leaned her head back and hollered for all to hear:

"MEATBALLS!!!!!!!"

Oh fuck, he thought as Oron threw his head back and laughed his ass off.

Stomping off to confront the woman that had the unmitigated gall to a) look so fucking beautiful; b) look soooooooooo unbelievably fucking beautiful; c) fucking ignore him, the thirteenth son of Galápagos Rule and Din Eidyn; and d) act like she could just prance about wearing such revealing attire. It wasn't that Yonder was dressed inappropriately; she was simply too fucking beautiful to be wearing that. Either she was going to have to go back to her old style of dressing or they were simply going to have to move Galápagos Island Proper closer to one of the poles so that she'd be forced to cover up that beauty.

Yonder laughed as her pet T-Rex gently tackled her to the ground and wrestled with her. Even though she had a master's degree, suddenly, she was eleven years old again. Having a T-Rex as a best friend was just one of the perks of being the adopted child of Galápagos Rule and Din Eidyn.

She was playing hard out when she heard her da's booming voice.

"Where's your Da's hug, young lady?"

Dropping a kiss onto Meatballs cheek before scrambling to her feet, she made her way over to her da who was flanked by two men she didn't recognize. Ah well, if they were that close to her da and hadn't been killed then they were obviously okay. She immediately put them in the 'things to consider much, much later pile and jumped into her da's arms. Enveloped in one of the biggest, tightest hugs of all time, she hugged her da back just as hard. Of course, her da didn't simply put her down when he was finished hugging her, he swung her about like a wee bairn. Laughing, she encouraged him to swing her faster, which he did. Only when they were both breathless did he put her down.

"Welcome home, Daughter," Din Eidyn said softly. "And by the way, you're never allowed to leave your old da again."

"Thank you, da, and by the way, I don't plan on going anywhere else without you and mam," she said as she laid her head against his chest.

"Speaking of mam, where is she?"

"She's inside waiting to welcome her only daughter home properly. I got a little anxious," her da admitted.

"That's because you know that I brought you treats," she smiled as she took her da's hand and skipped right between the two men who stood silently behind the King without so much as a 'hello.'

Yonder had laughed so much in the last few hours that her face hurt. Ah, but if you had to have pain this was the way to go about it. Both she and Aonghus had been

passed between their relatives for hugs, kisses and pats on the back. Her ribs had hurt being hugged so much and she was sure that Aonghus' back had hurt from the hearty thumps their brothers had placed upon his back. They'd both made many trips around the room before mam had finally put her foot down and demanded her daughter.

"Hold, hold, pass, dammit. It's my turn," she said sounding all ruler-like.

Yonder had simply smiled and dived into her mam's and da's arms and been hugged damn near to death, and as always, she felt as if she was encompassed by love.

I love yous were said over and over until it seemed that their breaths were in time with the waves that rolled onto the spun sugar beaches that surrounded their home.

It was a long time before she'd left the comfort of her parent's embrace and even then her mam kept her and Aonghus tucked between them for the longest while.

She'd enjoyed those hours with her family even though it had been difficult to sit next to Aonghus. Damn, it was a good thing that he wasn't her brother else she'd need all kinds of therapy with the way she was lusting after him. She'd changed, but mercy, Aonghus wasn't looking all kinds of fine ... not that she cared about that.

Aonghus had just spent six years learning discipline yet a few moments around Yonder and all of that discipline went straight to hell. He would definitely have something to say to her but it'd be later. Right now their family was busy taking turns hugging and kissing them both. He appreciated the congratulations and well wishes but dammit, they all acted like they didn't see that Yonder was half-fucking-naked. He was sure that his da would have something to say about that, but so far nothing. And his brothers were just sitting there like ... well, he didn't know what the hell they were sitting there like, but it was pissing him off. If no one was going to do anything then he

was. And sitting next to her was killing him. You'd think that they didn't have a sprawling palace the way that mam and da were squeezing them together. They were so close together that he wasn't sure that there was room for air between them. Waiting until his family was distracted with something or another; he calmly leaned over and spread some of his plaid atop her lap.

"You look chilled," he said proud of the way he managed to sound all nonchalant. No one else noticed his agitation, but of course Yonder just couldn't let it be. Grabbing his plaid, she pulled him even closer to her.

"How is that you think that I'm chilled, yet you're walking around here all shirtless."

"Perhaps because I'm me and you're you."

"You fuck seals. By the way does seal pussy taste like chicken?" she asked.

"Once again, I am a Selkie, and I do not fuck seals."

Okay, but do you eat chicken?"

"You're insane," he said.

"Oh, like you're not?"

"No, I'm not insane, but I'll tell you what I am, and that's taller than you, *Shrimp*," he smirked as he stressed that last word.

"Well great, you're finally taller than me but guess what Aonghus Fulgencio Din Eidyn? I'm way more bootylicious than you," she said before getting up and walking her fine ass out of the room, which was a good thing because his cock had never been harder.

Gritting his teeth, he stalked off in the opposite direction. He wasn't really going anywhere; he simply needed to put some distance between him and Yonder. He also

needed to convince his cock to settle down. Though Yonder was exasperating as always, at least he'd kept his feelings concealed.

Though Aonghus might've thought that he'd kept his feelings concealed, he was so wrong. All of his brothers knew that he harbored a strong passion for Caraid Cridhe, as did Oron. And of course his parents suspected ... as did Meatballs, the entire royal guard, and everyone all of aforementioned knew. The only person who had no clue at all was Caraid Cridhe.

Chapter Seven: No, You Motherfuckers Didn't

Although everyone else was busy gussying up for the big meeting involving pretty much everybody, Yonder simply threw on a t-shirt and pair of shorts and raced downstairs. Having almost fallen down the last flight of stairs, she decided to lace up her running shoes before continuing on her adventure. Stopping by the kitchen, she grabbed food to go before heading outside to find Meatballs.

Galápagos Rule was becoming agitated and when she became agitated Din Eidyn tended to start fucking beings up. It was his way, and she loved him for it. This gathering had been set for over a year and everything was running as planned. That is, security, hospitality, medical, translation services ... all of it was running like clockwork. What wasn't running like clockwork however was this meeting. There were various items of concern on the agenda but from listening to her fellow rulers speak, she suspected that it was a ruse. And though Rule didn't mind disagreement; what she did mind were fucking lies. They had all come here -- to her realm -- to complain about her daughter. While she would listen to legitimate concerns she would not listen to anyone or anything speaking of her daughter thusly. She tuned out their wild accusations, their suppositions, and their sneers. It wasn't that she didn't care; it was that she was busy plotting revenge. *How dare they concern themselves with who or what she allowed in her realm -- especially when the who that they were speaking of was her beloved daughter.*

Galápagos Rule kept things simple. That was why she was such an effective leader. There were, however three things that she would not tolerate: treason, fucking

with what she considered hers, and the wasting of her time. Right now, almost everyone present was guilty of at least two of these things.

Din Eidyn listened to the various rulers and representatives with half an ear. None of them concerned him, unless they fucked with his family. In spite of the status of most present he wasn't all that concerned about what they'd do. If he hadn't witnessed Rule's power over the decades, he might be concerned about how they were going to dispose of so many bodies once Rule decided to eliminate them all, but being that he was her mate for over two glorious decades he'd had a while to grow accustomed to her eradicating enemies from the face of the earth. While it might bother many males that their mates were more powerful; it had never bothered him for he wasn't interested in her power. He was only interested in her. That is why he'd left his beloved Scotland and made Galápagos Island Proper his home. There was nothing that he wouldn't do for his mate regardless of who or what became his enemy as a result. It was clear he was getting ready to have many more enemies at the end of this day than he'd had at the beginning of it.

Feeling his mate stiffen beside him, he brought the soft hand that he'd been holding up to his mouth. Prying her hand open he dropped a kiss in her palm before closing it and pressing it against his heart. He felt, rather than saw Rule smile and he smiled in return.

Hearing the accusation of 'animal hater' yelled out, he stiffened. While it was true that Caraid Cridhe did not care for most animals, the venom with which the accusations were hurled pissed him off. While it was unfortunate that though his daughter would not permit any other animal within her space, with the exception of

Meatballs, that in itself was not a crime. Caraid Cridhe knew what she liked and what she didn't like and what she didn't like, for whatever reason, was animals. He knew this to be a bona fide fact because it was one of the two things that she'd made perfectly clear when she'd arrived.

"I hate animals – all animals," she'd said. And then she'd said it again just to make sure that they'd understood.

And she'd meant it. She didn't spare puppies a glance. She completely despised house cats. She ignored the beautiful birds that inhabited the island, as well as the species that were unknown or extinct in the human realm. Even the dolphins that had saved her and brought her to Galápagos were barely spared a glance but that was her right. Their only rule was that she was not to harm animals and as far as he knew, Caraid Cridhe had abided by that rule.

Standing up, he fixed the room with a 'try me at your own peril' look.

"When has my daughter harmed any of you or your kind?" he asked. "Tell me."

"Well, it isn't that she has harmed anything *per se*; it is the danger that she represents," a quetzal shifter spoke.

"Tell me what danger she represents then," he countered.

"She's oft been overheard threatening to extinct entire species," one of the sea creatures spoke. "So far she's threatened to extinct butterflies, guppies, white-tailed deer, bunny rabbits, pretty much all birds, sharks, and of course the Portuguese Man-of-War."

"And she does have the knowledge," one of the big cat shifters threw in.

"So you would condemn my daughter because she hurts your little feelings by not liking you? You would condemn my daughter because she has knowledge? You would

condemn my daughter because you are scared of her?" he asked. "Did you ever consider that she might be scared of you? And with good reason? What about the fact that many of you have the knowledge to bring humans to extinction?"

"We wouldn't need to use such knowledge, Din Eidyn. Humans are fast facing extinction from their own actions."

"That may be but Caraid Cridhe is not one of those humans. She is my daughter. This is her home and this is where she shall stay," he said. The rest of his speech was interrupted by a high-pierced squeal. Before anyone could move, his daughter came swinging by the window -- hanging upside down off of the wing of a giant raptor.

"Woo hoo!" she screamed in what was pure joy. "Daddy, look at me," she said right before she somersaulted off of the back of that thing that was about to be extinct as soon as he found his heart and put it back into his chest.

"Caraid Cridhe!" he roared. "Present yourself now!"

He sat down hard in his chair scared at his baby's antics. His sons had never scared him thusly, but his daughter scared years off of his life every day.

"Din Eidyn, clearly it is out of control. The human has run completely amok," something said.

"Perhaps you should marry her off," another said.

"Yeah, marry her off to something far, far, far away from Galápagos," another said.

"Who in all of Creation would want to marry that?" a dove asked.

Hearing her da's roar, Yonder made her way into the palace with the quickness. She was so quick that she beat the palace guards in. She was proud of her trick, having

been practicing it in her head. Of course, she'd had to wait until she got home to put it into action. Sure, it may have seemed dangerous but Meatballs was on the ground, threatening to extinct the giant raptor should it allow her to fall. Even if she had fallen, Meatballs would've caught her. Worst case scenario she would've broken a few bones.

She was sure that as soon as she explained that to her da all would be forgiven and she could go right back to playing.

Skipping into the meeting room she slowed her steps upon hearing the yelling and carrying on. She was about to slip in and take a seat when she saw the ruckus. Representatives were standing, pointing and making accusations. At first, she was overwhelmed by the noise and then she heard her name -- well, her species.

The word 'human' was said with such malice that it may as well have been a racial slur. And in the next few moments she heard herself called every kind of thing, most of it revolving around her humanity and her hatred towards animals. It seemed that calling her an 'animal hater' was popular, which was fine by her because yeah, she totally hated animals, except for Meatballs and he really wasn't an animal. He was her best friend. Being called a human in such a mean tone had stung but it was the dove's comment that had hurt. The dove had called her an 'it' and then asked who in the entirety of Creation would want to marry her. Unbidden, tears filled her eyes and tracked down her face. Despite having a masters degree; despite being all bootylicious now, despite her hair being long and thick, despite having a family who loved her, suddenly she was ten years old in a classroom of kids all pointing at her and hurling insults at her.

Aonghus was going to kill all of them. How dare they even intimate that Yonder did not belong on Galápagos? How dare they strum their vocal cords to even speak her name? How dare they breathe the same air as her? Growing angrier by the second, he breathed deeply in an attempt to keep from jumping up and killing rulers, especially as he saw his mam and da struggling to keep from doing the same. His mam's eyes were going white, and his da's hand was clenched so tightly that his knuckles were white. None of his brothers looked to be faring any better. All of them wore looks of rage. He took another breath in an attempt to calm down but then the dove had to go and break his control. The dove called Yonder an 'it'. Remembering the pain that had sliced through him upon seeing her face when he'd called her that thirteen years ago a rage had blossomed through him such as he'd never felt before.

Standing up, he threw back his shoulders and called out the dove. "War! I declare war on your kind. How dare you refer to Yonder Din Eidyn, daughter of the house of Galápagos Rule and Din Eidyn as anything other than beautiful? How dare you speak of her with anything but reverence? Gather your army doves because I, Aonghus Fulgencio Din Eidyn, demand justice for Yonder."

He would've said more but his palm starting burning and he had a vision of Yonder's past pain. Turning to the door he saw her there and before he could consider his next actions, he grabbed her hand and stomped from the room.

One moment Yonder's heart was breaking; the next moment Aonghus had her hand and had dragged her from the room. Walking at a fast clip and now being much taller, Yonder was sort of dragged along behind him. Up and down stairs, around corners, through seldom-used passageways they walked. She wasn't sure if he was

walking so fast because he was angry or because they were running from something but she kept her mouth shut and kept up with Aonghus the best that she could. Though in truth it felt as if they'd walked the whole of Galápagos, in truth they'd only walked to a more secluded part of the palace. She wasn't sure where they were going, but fuck it; she was always up for an adventure. Perhaps they were going to the battlements to plan their siege. That'd be fun; she'd never besieged anything before. A moment later Aonghus was dragging her into an empty sitting room.

As soon as the door was closed Yonder found herself being walked backwards. Before she could ask what was going on she found her back up against the wall and Aonghus' big body up against hers. Wow, that felt good she thought right before he bent towards her and buried his face in the curve of her neck. She waited for him to do ... something, but he just leaned over her sniffing her. The whisper of his minty breath on her skin sensitized it.

Though she was rarely at a loss of words, for once Yonder couldn't think of anything to say because Aonghus finally broke the silence.

"So good, you smell so good," he growled against her skin.

Yonder frowned. Of all of the things she could've guessed that he'd say that wasn't it. "Well, I showered—"

"No," Aonghus shook his head. The movement caused his lips to brush against her skin. Yonder shivered, never having felt like this before. Just the touch of Aonghus' lips and the feel of his big, hard body against her made her hot all over. She felt so many things all at once and she couldn't explain it.

"You're fertile," Aonghus said as he squeezed her ass. Moaning, she arched into his body.

"I'm sure your sperm are strong swimmers," she said thinking that they were about to embark on a discussion about reproduction. She wasn't a science major, but she could handle herself in most academic discussions, although why Aonghus was concerned about fertility was beyond her.

Aonghus was in the process of kissing her neck when she commented. She felt him smile then heard his chuckle before he leaned back and looked into her eyes. His eyes were swirling with emotions. There was wonder and lust and something else that she couldn't identify, but nevertheless it was that unidentified thing that made her smile. When he brushed his lips against hers she closed her eyes and reveled in the sensation that was like none other she'd ever felt.

"Oh, *anam seis*, you are my everything," Aonghus said as he looked into her eyes.

Yonder didn't know what he'd called her nor at that particular moment did she care. She simply wanted Aonghus to continue holding her like to him as if he was never going to let her go. Right now, there was nowhere else she wanted to be. Standing on her tiptoes so that she could touch her lips to his, she was snatched even closer right before Aonghus ground against her. The feel of his cock against her caused her to emit a moan. Aonghus was big all over.

"Aonghus," Yonder sighed as he groaned and dropped kisses over her lips and along her jaw and neck.

"Yes, *anam seis*?" he questioned as he continued grinding into her.

"I think someone's coming--"

Both Galápagos Rule and Din Eidyn stood at the same time. Galápagos addressed the crowd. Din Eidyn had her back.

“How dare you? How dare you come here to my home and accuse my daughter, especially when it is the very creatures you’ve listed who’ve harmed her? Portuguese Man-of-War is lucky to be alive and the rest of you are getting precariously close to death every moment you remain in my presence. You want to know about threats? You all are a threat to her. You want to bandy about accusations, then allow me to bandy about my own,” she said as she raised her hand to the ceiling and filled everyone’s mind with the horrors of Yonder’s memories from her week spent in the sea. It had taken Rule thirteen years to be able to withstand the onslaught of pain that her daughter had suffered but she’d done it. She had to, especially when she realized that her baby was still suffering.

Everyone had wanted to look away but she filled their eyes with the sight of her daughter’s battered body. All in attendance had wanted to shut off the part of them that made them feel but she made them feel every bit of agony that her daughter had felt. They’d wanted her to make it stop but she didn’t. She let fear, hunger, thirst, desperation, desolation, defeat, and anger fill them equal to what her baby had felt. And to make it seem real, she’d made them feel it like an eleven-year old would feel it. She made them endure it all. Using her power she made one minute feel like one day and at the end of her presentation she made her decree.

“It has been you that have attacked her without cause and without revenge on her part. What has she done besides make threats? I’ll tell you what she’s done. She’s purchased forests, wetlands, and rainforests. She’s bankrolled nature preserves and respected your boundaries. In turn none of you’ve respected her but you will before the

end of this day else I will not only take your power; I will take your realms. And then, the real fun will begin. I'm going to find my baby, meanwhile consider the bounty that you are to pledge to my daughter and then consider the consequences if you fail to deliver."

And with that, she took Din Eidyn's hand and left the room.

Before Yonder could complete her sentence, the doors to the sitting room were kicked open and her da strode through followed by his guards. Her da's wild eyes swept the room finally locking in on them. The look on his face clearly stated his displeasure at finding her and Aonghus locked in an intimate embrace. Pulling them apart, he thrust her behind him moments before punching Aonghus so hard that he went sprawling across the room.

"How dare you!?" Din Eidyn bellowed.

Aonghus got to his feet whilst fingering his jaw and stared at his father. "She is mine," Aonghus growled.

"Then you damn well approach my daughter with the respect that is her due!" Din Eidyn yelled.

"Um ... Da," Yonder attempted to interrupt.

Aonghus and her father ignored everything except each other. Everyone else ignored everything else except for them. Taking their battle-ready stances as a sign that she should leave, she spoke.

"I promised the mer-dudes that I'd meet them for a drink so I'll just be going then," she said as he scurried out of the room.

Not about to break her ankle running about the palace, Rule took her time getting there. Rounding the corner, she heard the commotion that was occurring in the sitting room and winced. That didn't sound good. Hearing her mate and her youngest son roaring at each other she amended her statement. That sounded like some shit was broken or about to be broken. Considering the brouhaha taking place in the sitting room she was surprised to find her daughter striding calmly out of the actual room.

"Where are you going, Caraid Cridhe?" she asked her daughter as she came to a stop in front of her.

"I promised the mermen that I'd meet up with them for drinks," Yonder answered happily.

Rule was momentarily stunned. Her youngest son had declared that Yonder was his for claiming but here Yonder was about to 'meet' with the studs of the sea world? She didn't know what had gotten mis-communicated or how but it was obvious that these kids needed help.

Already forming a plan, she smiled a smile that made her adversaries shiver. But of course neither of her children were her adversaries -- per se. Still, they were holding up her plans to have some grandbabies. Linking her arm with her daughter's, she began walking in the direction of Yonder's bed chambers.

"Well, being that you promised to meet the mermen, let's get you ready then, *eh?*" Rule said.

Oron had watched the exchange between Aonghus and Din Eidyn but he had to admit that the exchange between Galápagos Rule and her daughter far outshined the prior. Even considering the consequences, he couldn't prevent the mirth from lighting

his dark eyes. Returning to the sitting room where father and son were facing off, he wondered how long it would take for either man to notice that Yonder was no longer present.

"She's mine, and I refuse to give her up," Aonghus said.

Din Eidyn eyed his youngest son. Aonghus wasn't a bairn but a formidable Selkie entering his first prime. Shaking his head he wondered how he'd missed that. Aonghus excelled at all he tried his hand at, he possessed intelligence, respect, and manners. True young Aonghus was all of those things and more, however his youngest son was still a male who was wanting his daughter.

"Caraid Cridhe is not the type of female with which you simply dally," Din Eidyn said softly.

He said nothing more; he simply anticipated his son's answer, knowing that if it wasn't good enough he would be forced to hurt his boy.

"That she is not. She is my *anam seis* like Mam is yours. Yonder Din Eidyn is mine to treasure, to love, and to protect and I will do anything for her, even fight you, Da."

Though neither man spoke loudly, it was their powerful words that spoke volumes.

"You'll not win against me, son," Din Eidyn goaded. He was not trying to be mean; he was merely stating a fact. Though Aonghus was strong; he was nowhere near his full power. Even though a Din Eidyn, he was young and would face many challenges.

"Then I will battle until I do. Yonder is mine, Da, and nothing is going to change my mind."

"Do you love her?" Din Eidyn asked quietly.

"Of course. Is that not what I am saying to you here, now?"

"Does she return the sentiment?"

Aonghus nodded. "I believe that she does and if she doesn't I will dedicate my life to doing whatever it takes to make her return it."

"Caraid Cridhe..." Din Eidyn called for his daughter. Turning around he found that she had disappeared.

Oron watched as Father and son both looked through the crowd for Yonder. Of course, they both came up empty. Taking pity on them he spoke up.

"I believe she is meeting with the mermen."

Wearing identical looks of confusion, Din Eidyn and Aonghus turned to him. Though it took a moment for his words to sink in as soon as they did the looks on both father and son's face changed from confusion to danger. Before Din Eidyn could call out any further orders Aonghus bolted from the room yelling for the entire royal guard.

"To arms, we have fish men to deal with!"

Oron hurried after them. This was going to be good and he wanted to be sure that he had a good view of the goings on. He had a feeling that this was a story that he'd be telling his great grandchildren years from now.

Chapter Eight: That's One Way to Go About It

Aonghus was going to kill a whole bunch of people and right after that he was going to have a “discussion” with Yonder’s royal guard. Yes, his woman warranted an entire royal guard by herself. Not even his mam required such a thing but then his mam had Din Eidyn by her side so an entire royal guard wasn’t necessary. As similar as Yonder was to his mam in strength, determination and intelligence, Yonder was not his mam; and as similar to his da as he was in strength, power, and sheer wily bastardness, he had a long way to go until he was close to being the legend that his da was. Yonder would never possess even an inkling of his mam’s power but one day he would be equal to his da and anyone who dared speak ill of his woman would be made extinct.

Being in Yonder’s royal guard had become a bit of a rite of passage. Only the best of the best and sometimes even they weren’t good enough, which is why his brothers had interrupted their training to watch over her. Even a half-trained Din Eidyn was better protection than a fully-trained anything else. He and his brothers had watched over her and damn near growled anything down that even looked like it was going to hurt Yonder. It didn’t matter who or what it was that posed the threat. Low-hanging tree branches, thunderstorms, bunnies darting in and out of the meadow, mountains that grew too tall, they didn’t care; they’d fuck it up. Tree branches could grow elsewhere, thunderstorms could move over some other area where Yonder was not, bunnies could find other meadows and mountains that she wanted to climb could just kneel the fuck down. And if any living thing didn’t know all they had to do was to ask the Portuguese Man-of-War -- if they could find them. Yeah, they’d run those bitches out of town.

Yonder was too adventurous and too beautiful to not have an entire guard. So far, they'd kept her alive but that was only half their job. The other half of their job was to keep the rest of the known world safe. The day was nowhere near over and already he'd had to declare war on those fucking doves and now he was going to have to decimate the world's supply of mermen simply because the guard had allowed his woman traipse off and have "drinks" with the pretty boys of the water. After that, he was still going to have to extinct whatever the hell it was that she'd been hanging off of as she sailed past the window. While he was at it he might go ahead and destroy the entire cotton crop for daring being spun into garments that showcased her loveliness. Scenting his woman, and scenting the many males surrounding her, he knew that he was definitely going to have to have a talk with her personal guard. But first, he had to go grab his woman from the clutches of the mer.

With his superb hearing he could hear his woman cussing. He could also hear the pleas of her best friend Meatballs, which could only mean one thing: Yonder was doing something dangerous. Despite what the Council had intimated and outright said, he knew plenty of males that would enjoy marrying his woman. Of course, they wouldn't live long enough to enjoy it. Yonder was his and her quirks only made her more desirable to him. Well, all of them except for the ones involving other males. She might cuss like an entire army. She might act like a lunatic but dammit to hell she was his cussing, crazy woman and if those fucking mermen thought any different they could get the hell over it -- while they were recuperating from their various injuries, he thought as he grabbed the island priest by the scruff of the neck and headed outside.

“Stay behind me,” he ordered as he let the priest go and began cutting a swath through Galápagos bigger and wider than the one than Attila had cut through the Balkans.

Yonder couldn't help but rub her long legs against each other as she sat on the poolside table. Her mam, who was like the Houdini of making one's self extra bootylicious in like twenty minutes flat had her freshly waxed, buffed, scented and dressed lickity-split. Of course, she hadn't appreciated the waxing when she had a perfectly-good razor but now that felt just how smooth her legs was she totally appreciated it. She'd worried that she was going to be late for her lunch date with the mer-dudes but her mam had assured her that they would wait for a princess such as herself as she finished wrapping her in a sarong. Paired with a white off-the-shoulder Caribbean style top that showed a bit of her midriff, the silky, short sarong was knotted to the left making a tantalizing split in the already scandalous sarong. Though it covered everything, it tantalized. The royal print saved the sarong from being x-rated, but the way her hips and ass fit into it took it real close. The sarong was so airy that even her lacy underwear was too thick. Smiling like it was an everyday thing to send your daughter out looking vamp, her mam had handed her the tiniest and thinnest pair of underwear that she'd ever seen. Still, she'd put them on and did a practice booty clap just to make sure that everything would remain in place. It had, and so with her braids brushing the top of her ass, she threw on her sneakers and skipped off to see the mer, confident that she looked every bit as good as they did.

Oh fuck, mermen were boring. Sitting at the beautiful outdoor dining area, she tuned out merman number six and enjoyed the natural beauty of the area. Damn,

Galápagos was beautiful. Though there was never a time when its beauty failed to move her, today it was like it was showing off extra. The beauty of the island was interesting unlike the merman who were getting on her last freaking nerve. Were all mermen in love with themselves? Sure, they were a good-looking species but they were shallower than a kiddie pool. She'd spent the last half hour listening to them talk and had yet to hear anything of interest. Not able to stand one more long-winded dissertation on how beautiful they were, she was about to brain merman number twelve or six or whatever the hell he was. I mean damn, who could tell them apart being that they all wore that same look that hinted that they had a dream car and a dream house and a boyfriend named Ken – not that there was anything wrong with that.

They were so overly-dressed that she couldn't look at them anymore so she looked everywhere else. She looked behind her to see if anyone else noticed this shit. She looked in the forest to see if Meatballs was about. She looked over the ocean for the pink dream yacht that would hopefully come and spirit the vapid bits of fluff away. Sure they were buff, cut, and tanned, but they didn't have blue-green eyes and hair the color of wet sand like Aonghus. Oh shit, where the hell did that come from? Who cares, her body asked. Aonghus was lighting us up in the sitting room. Yes, he was.

She was just getting into her fantasy when merman number three interrupted her.

"Um, Princess, are you looking for something? You keep looking around," he whined.

Thoroughly fed up with them, her manners completely fled her. Almost blinded by the sheer number of jewels upon their persons, she snapped. "Yeah, I'm looking around for a nine-foot Baldwin grand piano and candelabra. Look, unless you're

getting ready to bust out “An Impossible Dream” or “Love Letters in the Sand”, you need to drop the Liberace routine because you’re nowhere near as talented or entertaining.”

Seeing their mouths drop open from what she assumed was shock, she continued her tirade now that she was good and pissed off about them interrupting her Aonghus-laced fantasies. How dare they not be Aonghus?

“Look, you know what? You guys need to talk about something other than yourselves because you’re really not that interesting. You basically sit around and look pretty and any inanimate object can do that but at least most inanimate objects have a function. Take a hula hoop for instance. Hula hoops come in pretty colors and they’re fun.” As always, when she thought about something hard, it appeared as if out of thin air. She liked to think that she was powerful but she knew that it was the magic of the island. Snatching her hula hoop out of the air, she wondered briefly that if she thought of Aonghus and his big, hard body, if he too would appear.

Jumping up on the table she clapped her hands to get their attention (completely unaware that she already had it). See this is a hula hoop and see what it does,” she said as she demonstrated it. She thought of more hula hoops and like magic they appeared. Before long, she had all of the mer in a hula hoop off. Of course, she was straight kicking their ass being that she had the best hips. She was really into it when she spotted Meatballs.

“Meatballs!” she called. “Come here, hurry,” she said whilst tossing a hula hoop around his neck.

“Come on, Meatballs, work it,” she encouraged as she worked hers suddenly aware of the silence.

Looking over her shoulder she noticed the mermen all back up.

"Princess ... that is a dinosaur," Merman number five said helpfully.

"Yes, to be precise Meatballs is a Tyrannosaurus Rex, and my best friend so you better not even think about insulting him," she warned.

Wow, what pussies scared of one little twenty foot tall, forty-foot long carnivore. Meatballs was the best. Sure, he was a carnivore but dammit people shouldn't make judgments. Still the mermen had completely stopped hula-hooping and had backed up as far away from Meatballs as possible. Meanwhile, Meatballs was doing nothing more than watching them with a look of boredom. Or maybe he was sizing them up for a snack, but she didn't think that he ate fish.

Turning her back on the mermen, she concentrated on Meatballs while she hula-hooped in time to that the funky beat playing. Damn, she loved that song. So caught up in it that she almost missed the commotion down the beach. Something was definitely going on but being that Meatballs hadn't moved, she supposed it wasn't dangerous and didn't concern her so she went right back to hula-hooping not even realizing that the mermen went right back to watching her hips and ass.

Yonder didn't become interested until she realized that it seemed that things were being thrown bodily into whatever was nearest them be it a giant redwood or the side of the palace. From the chorus of groans lots of things were being tossed about. It wasn't until she saw the first Merman picked up and tossed into the water -- which was a good hundred paces from where they were sitting- that she realized who was doing the battering.

"Oh my," Yonder gasped as she watched Aonghus, who was at the front of a battalion of men wearing nothing but kilts and pissed off looks, handing any and everything in his way its ass. Wondering what had his panties in a bunch, she simply

looked on as he hefted merman after merman out of his path. Though her father and her brothers smilingly flanked him and kicked just as much mer-ass, for some reason her eyes kept straying to Aonghus. He was fucking magnificent. A scowl on his face, sweat dripping down his rock hard chest, biceps bulging, lips pulled back in a snarl, he looked *hottttt*. Maybe it was just her but it seemed that he was making his way to where she was ... *and wait, was that a priest in the midst of the battle?* Oh, they were going to be in so much trouble later, she thought right before going back to her ogling of Aonghus.

Not realizing that she was holding her breath, she simply watched Aonghus. And dammit, if even in the middle of battle Aonghus wasn't watching her back. Heaving any male he came upon to the side, into the ocean, wherever he could heft them, his eyes were boring into hers. He didn't take his eyes off of her even when one of the mermen punched him in the ribs. The punch didn't even slow his steps. He merely lifted the merman with one bulging arm and threw him away from him. Feeling a rush of moisture flow from her, she finally stopped hula-hooping so that she could press her thighs together.

Never before had she ever been excited by violence. As much as she talked it up, she'd never actually carried it out. Watching Aonghus however had rendered her speechless. Her mouth was dry but her panties were wet -- very, very wet! Aonghus looked wild and untamed. He looked good but never had he looked so amazing. Completely turned on, Yonder hugged herself. Her skin felt like it was stretched too tightly over her entire body. Aonghus had never looked so amazing.

Aonghus finally reached his woman. He was breathing hard but not from exertion; he was breathing hard from fear. His heart was beating so hard against his ribs that he worried that it might beat out of his chest. Seeing Yonder surrounded by mermen had snapped something inside of him. She was his *anam seis*. They were made for each other so if the sea world's ultimate flirts thought that they were going to take his woman, they'd better think again.

He felt no guilt as he took out anything male that was in his path. His woman was fertile, she was in the midst of too many men, wearing too little clothes and shaking those glorious hips and ass that belonged to him. Anything with a dick that stood in his way, that attempted to keep him from Yonder would be felled. Nothing was going to keep him away from her. Running full speed from the palace, he focused on nothing else but Yonder. After many minutes of battle, he finally stood before his woman. And irony of ironies, he found that he didn't know what to say ... so he didn't say anything at all. He merely reached behind him and grabbed a hold of the priest's collar and dragged him forward.

Having secured the priest, he then snatched his mate into his arms and kissed her breathless.

"Mine, Yonder. You're mine," he breathed as he fisted his great hands into her mass of hair and took her lips so hard that he also took her breath.

Widening his stance, he bent her over one arm as his other hand settled on her hip and pulled one of her long, muscled legs around his waist.

Though he could speak to his da or his brothers telepathically now that he'd undergone Selkie training, he didn't for it would require him to open his senses and he wasn't about to let any other male feel what he was feeling with Yonder. It was private

and it was his. Sure, he might be ravishing her in the middle of the palace grounds but the way she made him feel, the way she set his body on fire, the way she took his control was between them and no one else.

Lifting his lips from hers in order to get some air, he didn't even bother to turn around as he addressed his da. "Is mam here?"

"Yes, son, I am here," she answered.

"Priest, begin," he ordered as he once again took Yonder's lips.

He heard the priest babbling but he couldn't even bother to pretend to listen when his arms were full of his future. With his family present as witnesses he was sure that the priest wouldn't say anything amiss, just as he was sure that his da would alert him when it was time to pay attention. Aonghus didn't know how far they were into the service; he only knew that the priest had better hurry or he would be in danger of consummating this marriage right here. Hefting Yonder fully into his arms he fitted her sex atop his raging, hard cock ... and his knees damn near buckled.

His mam cleared her throat so he backed off a little and listened to the priest.

"Do you forsake all others," the priest asked.

"I have since the moment that I met her," he answered.

The priest then posed the same question to Yonder. Pulling her down tighter to him whilst rocking his hips into her, her answer was a gasp and then a cry to the Creator. Though it pleased him mightily he needed her to respond properly. Pulling his lips from hers, he whispered against her ear. "Say yes, *anam seis*."

"I've been saying 'yes'. Yes, dammit, yes," she screamed as she dug her nails into his arms and attacked his mouth with hers.

Aonghus was once again lost in the gloriousness of her body when he heard the priest yell. “Do you take this woman?”

“Damn straight I do,” he interrupted.

“And do you take this man?” the priest asked Yonder.

“Yonder, baby. Do you?” he asked as he gently bit her ear and squeezed her ass.

He watched as his *anam seis* raised her head. Fire shot from her eyes but she answered. “Yes, motherfucker yes, and if you ask me one more fucking thing before your cock is stuffed into me so deep that I can feel you in my throat, I’m going to extinct you. Now shut the fuck up and get back to kissing me.”

He did just that but first he had to hand over his pelt. Calling it from his body, he held out his hand and draped the sleek pelt over her.

“For you, *anam seis*,” he said.

“Great, throw it on the ground, lay me on it and fuck me.”

Yonder didn’t know what the fuck Aonghus was doing but she knew that he had about two seconds to get her on her back. Oh goodness, the way his body was rocking into hers. He felt so good, so good, so ... right. Never had she been so turned on by anything ... well maybe those champagne truffles, but as good as they were they didn’t compare to the taste of Aonghus. How in the hell did this fine motherfucker taste like sweet potato pie and iced tea? She felt like singing that singing that Jill Scott song about the soul food because damn she wanted to eat Aonghus up and then she wanted to put it on him. She felt like such a wanton slut and never had she felt better. Though she wasn’t sure why she was wearing a coat when he was running full speed into the palace with her, she simply held onto it and ground her pussy harder into his big, hard cock.

Hearing the couple make their way into the palace, everyone waited a few moments until they heard the definite clanging of the great palace doors before breathing. Finally, eyes were raised and bodies were turned in the proper direction. Though none of them could block their hearing as they had to actually hear the couple exchange their vows, very early on into the ceremony people averted their eyes when it became clear that the couple was engaging in foreplay. The priest had sprinted through that ceremony with the speed of a big cat. He'd spoken the sacred words so fast that he sounded a bit like an auctioneer.

Galápagos Rule finally looked at her mate and emitted the laugh that she'd been holding back. Doubling over from mirth, she held onto her husband and continued laughing until she was out of breaths. It was several moments before she could regain her composure and when she did, she smoothed her hair back, straightened her shoulders and looked Din Eidyn right in his astounded eyes. "That is your son," she said before flouncing off.

Carrying his mate in his arms, Aonghus stepped over the threshold of the room that would share from now on. Staggering to the huge bed, Aonghus slowly set his precious *anam seis* onto her feet before taking a step back. He was breathing hard and not simply from the pre-wedding battle, the mad dash up the stairs or the foreplay; he was breathing hard because he'd waited so long for this moment.

He might've remained in that spot simply staring at his gift if Yonder hadn't held out her hands to him. Going to her, he knelt so that she could reach him. He sighed feeling her thread her fingers through his hair knowing that she was about to kiss him.

Yonder's kisses were like sweet water and he was dying of thirst. She brought his head down to hers and although she kissed him gently, their desire quickly rose as their bodies melded together. Though they touched from breast to chest, the clothes that separated them bothered him. He needed to be skin-to-skin.

"Let me undress you," he whispered as he pulled back from the drugging kiss that he shared with his woman. He watched as Yonder smiled and nodded her consent.

Though his hands were shaking, he made quick work of her top and the strapless bra that she wore underneath before untying the sarong that was held together by a knot and a promise and watched in rapt attention as it fell. It reached her feet only moments before he did. Naked, save for a pair of scant panties he gazed upon the wonder that was his woman. Yonder was a sight to behold he thought as he knelt at his woman's feet and slowly raked his eyes up her thick legs that would hold his body in a few moments.

He stared at the skimpy barrier of her panties before pressing his face into her stomach and breathing in the scent of her arousal. The scent sent a message to his cock and he felt it pulse, demanding her body. Though he wanted nothing more than to spread her beneath him and spear her body with his thick cock he held off as he wanted their first time to be what legends were made of. He needed his woman to know how their lovemaking would always be.

"Ah, is everything okay Aonghus?" Yonder asked him softly.

Aonghus raised his eyes to meet those of his future and smiled.

"Anam seis, everything is as it should be," he said as he hooked his fingers into the waistband of her panties and ripped them from her body rendering her completely naked before him.

"Thank you, oh Creator, thank you," he whispered as he kissed Yonder's stomach. With his eyes still closed, he leaned his cheek against her belly and sighed knowing that their children would soon rest there. Their daughters would be as beautiful as their mother; their sons would have the strength of the Din Eidyn males. Ah, and they'd love them all in this palace that was always just the right size for their family.

"Don't I need to do something?" Yonder asked Aonghus, worried that she wasn't doing anything except running her fingers through his thick hair.

Glimpsing the heated look that he directed to her once he raised his head had her wanting to fan herself.

"You're doing everything that I need you to do," he said softly as he got to his feet.

"But I'm not doing anything," she protested.

"Yes, you are. You're here, now hush," he said as he stepped away from her.

Okay, away from her is not what she wanted. She wanted Aonghus right up on her, all up in her personal space ... now. Before she could voice her objections his hands went to the waistband of his kilt and he began to undo. He watched her the entire time. When the material fell to the bedroom floor she gasped. Aonghus was one beautiful specimen.

"Tell me what you want, Aonghus," Yonder pleaded wanting something, everything, all at once.

"I want you to show me what makes you feel good. Touch yourself for me," he requested.

Yonder smiled. If he wanted to watch her get herself off, she could do nothing but comply. Raising her hands to her breasts, she cupped their fullness in her hands and gasped at the pleasure that coursed through her body.

"That's it, baby..." Aonghus's voice rasped along her tense nerves.

Yonder closed her eyes as she pinched her nipples.

"Keep your eyes open," Aonghus commanded.

Immediately, she opened her eyes and what she saw tore a moan from her throat. With his feet slightly spread, Aonghus had his big, hard cock in his hand and was priming himself as she pleased herself. They devoured each other with their eyes even as they slowly stroked themselves. Yonder bit her lip almost hypnotized at the sight of Aonghus slowly stroking his hand up and down his rigid flesh.

"Damn," she whispered as she continued to squeeze and pinch her breasts and nipples. Feeling a fresh flood of moisture between her thighs, she arched her hips and threw her head back.

"Run your hands down your body, baby," he whispered hoarsely.

Yonder slowly slid her hands down her body. Trailing her fingers over her stomach, she stopped at the nest of soft curls that were practically drowning in her cream.

"Dip a finger inside for me," Aonghus said in a strained voice.

She immediately obeyed and was rewarded with the growl that was torn from his throat. Feeling the pulsing heat of her pussy envelope her finger, she grazed her finger over her clit and gasped from the pleasure.

"That's it, baby," Aonghus whispered.

Yonder watched in wonder as his cock seemed to grow even larger in his hand. She wanted it and she wanted it now.

"I can't..." she whispered brokenly.

"Trust me, *anam seis*. Our time is so soon; just give me this gift ... please," he pleaded.

Yonder smiled as he once again took hold of the cock that now belonged to her and began stroking, and handing out instructions. She liked this side of Aonghus. And her body really liked it.

"Add another finger, baby," Aonghus ordered and then just about choked as his sassy woman did just that. Hearing her moaned in pleasure as she thrust her fingers inside of her dripping pussy almost had him throw caution to the wind and throw himself on his woman, but he held off; he had to. He'd learned discipline whilst away in Scotland and he'd be damned if he threw away all of his training and simply rutted away at the woman he loved before insuring that she was as out of her mind for him as he was for her.

"Slow it down. That's it. Circle your clit, baby," he whispered as his eyes remained riveted to the nest of curls that would welcome him home really soon.

He watched as Yonder moaned and threw her head back and knew that she was close to coming again.

"I'm going to come," she gasped as she circled her clit like he'd ordered.

"Then come for me, baby. Show me how beautiful you are when you find your pleasure."

Yonder shook her head, "I want you with me this time," she whispered.

"Oh baby," Aonghus groaned even as he walked towards her with his thick cock jutting out from between his thighs. Looking down into her eyes he saw love there.

"I'm yours, Aonghus," Yonder whispered.

It was as if she'd opened the floodgates with those three words. His heart skipped a beat and offering up a prayer he covered her soft, silky body with his bigger, heavier and rougher one. Bending down, he proceeded to kiss her, slowly, languidly as if they had all the time in the world. Though Yonder was doing everything she could to make him hurry, he took his time knowing that they'd only have one first time. Still, he teased her by brushing the head of his cock against her pussy.

"Aonghus!" Yonder gasped as his hard cock brushed against her clit. Feeling her response to the small gesture Aonghus began to slide his cock to and fro against his woman's clit. He listened as her gasps became deeper and her panting became louder, yet he still didn't let up. He gasped feeling Yonder's fingers dig into the muscles of his forearms she sang out her climax. Hearing her sing a chorus of his name made him smirk like the Din Eidyn male that he was. Leaning down closer to her he told her how much he loved her, needed her, cherished her, and still he did nothing more than tease her with his cock. She'd found her pleasure but he was waiting for her to want all of him, not simply his cock.

Yonder didn't know why Aonghus was torturing her like this. All she knew was that ever since, you know before, she'd been turned on by him and she couldn't turn it off. He'd had the fucking nerve to go around looking all hot and in turn getting her hot and bothered. She'd never needed a male like she'd needed him and yet here he was being the biggest fucking clit tease in most likely world history. Later, she'd look it up

but she was pretty fucking sure that she was right. Looking up into his eyes, something in her settled. Any other man would've just thrust that big cock into her pussy with the way she'd been begging and demanding; yet it suddenly became clear that Aonghus was not any man. Hell, he wasn't even a man; he was Selkie, and not simply Selkie but a Din Eidyn Selkie.

As hard as his cock was and as much as she knew that he wanted her, Aonghus took his time. He'd given her a flood of orgasms yet he hadn't claimed his own. It was as if didn't rush because he knew that they had all of the time in the world. Settling down, she removed her hands from his hair and touched him the same way that he was touching her. That is, she touched him with gentleness and reverence instead of with impatience. Looking into his eyes, she pulled him to her and pressed gentle kisses to his mouth and peppered his jaw with kisses and his neck with gentle nips. Working her way back up, she pulled his head down but she didn't demand his lips, she simply tucked his head into the space between her neck and shoulder and caressed him.

Running her fingers along his heavily-muscled back, she twined her legs around his and simply reveled in the moment. Using her hips she pushed him to his side and she faced him. Never ceasing her stroking she looked at this male and closed her eyes thanking the Creator for him, for this moment, for his gentleness. Brushing his shoulder-length hair back from his face, she looked him in the eye.

"Did you have many lovers, Aonghus?"

She wasn't sure why she wanted to know; suddenly she just did. And though just moments before she was begging for him to fuck her, she needed to know the answer to this.

She was surprised when Aonghus pushed her onto his back and settled himself between her thighs, but she was even more surprised by his response.

Aonghus smiled at Yonder's question. Now that he knew that they were in the same place, he could give in to his body's demands. Rolling his woman onto her back, he settled himself between her thighs. Holding his weight on his thick forearms he made sure that he had her full attention before answering.

"I would never dishonor the woman that I love by making love to another woman," he said before slowly entering her made-for-him body.

Aonghus was harder than titanium and he was positive that he could crush boulders with his hard cock but he held back knowing that Yonder had known no other male. How could she with his brothers and his da – and of course him- as her protectors? The gift of her virginity was not something that he would take lightly just as the gift of his virginity was not something that he gave lightly, which is why he'd saved it for her. Together, they would learn the ways in which to pleasure each other and if the Creator was willing they'd have many years in which to learn those lessons.

"I need to be inside you," he whispered against her succulent mouth.

"Then come home to me," Yonder whispered back.

"It will hurt, *anam seis* but pleasure will come to you soon after. Do you trust me?" he asked softly as his cock lay poised at the barrier to her innocence, her heat already scorching him.

"Always," Yonder whispered as she arched her hips up to meet his forward thrust.

Aonghus was as gentle as he could be as he tore through the fragile membrane that signified her innocence. When he was finally seated to the hilt, he held himself still and simply kissed his woman.

"Breathe baby," Aonghus begged as he rested his forehead against Yonder's. The tearing of her hymen had brought tears to both of their eyes, but he kissed away the salty remnants from her eyelids, holding his body still in order to give her time to accustom herself to the intrusion.

"I'm okay, Aonghus," she finally whispered as she opened her eyes and gazed up at him.

He gave her a smile that he hoped showed her all of the love that he had for her.

"Thank you, baby," he said as he slowly slid from her body. Hearing the little gasps were testaments to pleasure, he thrust forward again seating his body deeply inside of his woman, going slowly to insure her pleasure.

"Yes! Yes! Aonghus!" Yonder lifted her hips to him.

Thrusting slowly but deeply into her gripping pussy, they both gave into their pleasure and pushed their bodies closer.

"So tight ... so very ... tight," Aonghus muttered as he kept up the measured strokes of his cock.

"Harder, Aonghus. Oh, I'm nearly there," she said as she gored grooves into his forearms with her nails. Feeling her inner muscles flutter and clutch at his cock, turned him on, but still he continued with his steady strokes. Only when her words turned base, when she moved from pleading to outright demanding, did he power into her like his body demanded.

"Harder, Aonghus! Yes, yes, yessssssssss!" she screamed out her pleasure and came all over his cock.

Though the heat from her pussy felt so good he was not through. He continued to pound into his woman so fast that his hips were almost a blur. Lifting one of her amazing legs over his shoulder, he dug deeper with his cock and Yonder came again. Still, he didn't let up. Ramming his cock harder and faster inside of her, he didn't let up until finally, her pussy gripped him in a strangle hold and the muscles inside of his woman's body demanded his release. Gritting his teeth at the pleasure, he threw back his head and roared his pleasure as he filled his soul mate with his seed.

I love you," he whispered as the final shudders of his climax rocked his body. Kissing Yonder, he rolled onto his back and pulled her atop him. He gave her a kiss that left them both gasping for breath. Stroking her back, he watched as she gave him a weak smile before promptly passing out.

Yonder slowly floated back down to earth. The words that Aonghus had whispered to her had pleased her as much as his magnificent body. Opening her eyes, she looked into Aonghus's smirking face and immediately wanted to smack that smirk right off. She didn't being that he'd given her such pleasure.

"You are so beautiful," he whispered.

"That's not what you said the first time we met."

Aonghus looked pained for a brief moment and Yonder wrapped her arms around his waist and held him tightly to her.

"If I could take back that moment from time I would. As much as my hurtful words pained you, know that they pained me as well. I pray that we are blessed with

many days so that I may show you the love that I have for you. I offer you my soul, my heart and all of my tomorrows until the end of time. I give you my body that has known no other woman and yet has craved for you through these years. Will you accept this, *anam seis?*"

Yonder felt tears prickling her eyelids. "Yes, Aonghus, yes," she said as she took his lips in a gentle kiss.

Epilogue

The sun shone brightly in the clear blue sky over the Island of a gentle warm breeze stirring the palm trees the colorful birds twittered and sang softly as the heavily-pregnant daughter of Galápagos

Rule and Din Eidyn waddled into the dining room where her family sat eating breakfast. As was customary, every male stood upon her entrance. Seeing the sad look on her face, however prompted a growl to spill from the throat of every male. None took their seats, instead waiting for her to give them the name of the motherfucker who was about to be extinct.

"Come here, Caraid Cridhe," Din Eidyn said as he opened his arms to his only daughter. She moved as fast as her distended belly would allow, which wasn't very fast at all. Once in the circle of her da's arms she sighed and made a production out of laying her head on his massive chest. Her da smoothed the tiny braids off of her face and made her look at him.

"Tell da what has brought this sadness to you?" he demanded softly.

"I'm fat, really, really fat," Yonder spoke on a whisper.

"Nay! Who dared to insult you, Caraid Cridhe?"

"That man that everyone insists is my husband even though I don't recall getting married," Yonder said.

"Can I marry someone else, please?" she asked.

"No, you may not marry someone else. You are my mate," Aonghus Din Eidyn said as he walked into the dining room.

Every eye in the room went straight to him and if he wasn't mistaken, every one of those eyes looked angry.

"What?" he asked confused.

"How dare you call Caraid Cridhe fat!" Eochaid yelled from across the table.

Aonghus shook his head in denial but witnessing the sight of his mate in the arms of their da he knew what had transpired, especially considering the look of pure anger on his da's face. Luckily for him their mam sat beside Din Eidyn. Ever watchful of her children, she wouldn't let his da kill him.

"Mam, Da I have never, nor would I even think to call my mate fat. She positively glows. Her beauty is unsurpassed by any, and I love her more today than ever," Aonghus spoke quickly as he made his way to the side of his parents and mate.

"It's his fault I'm fat anyway," Yonder groused as she rubbed her cheek against their da's chest and snuggled as far as she could into his embrace. She felt Din Eidyn kiss her forehead and smiled.

"You are not fat; you are full with my darling grandbabies," Rule said firmly as she kissed her cheek.

Yonder sighed dramatically. "And I'm a freak. Who the hell gets pregnant the first time with five babies?"

"Mates of Din Eidyn males," the entire room said in unison.

Yonder couldn't help but laugh. It was the standard answer for the question she'd been asking ever since finding out that she was pregnant. Of course, she'd discovered that she was pregnant long before she found out that she was married. It was only after

her mam and da had found her crying in Meatballs' arms about being pregnant and unwed that she'd discovered the truth.

Since no one had bothered to tell her that she was mated, she wasn't telling anyone that Aonghus had broken the pattern of Din Eidyn males fathering only sons. Not only did she carry girls, all five bairn were female. She couldn't wait to see the reaction of the Din Eidyn males. She wondered how many more royal guards they would acquire after that.

"I'll take my mate, thanks Da," Aonghus said firmly as he plucked her out of her da's lap.

She protested like mad, but eventually allowed herself to be moved to her customary seat – a whole foot away- from her da. Eating her breakfast, she was thinking of some new shit to get into. Perhaps she'd set Soroka up with that hot ass Oron. She was already knee deep into her plans when Aonghus leaned over and whispered into her ear.

"Whatever you're thinking, no. You'd be wise to conserve your energy being that I plan to spank that beautiful ass of your raw before I fuck you so good and proper that our kids could be born early," he said with a nip on her earlobe.

*** J&J ***

Thank you for reading. We hope that you enjoyed the tale as much as we enjoyed writing it. Jeanie & Jayha

Praises, compliments, adulation and the like for Jeanie and Jayha can be left at:

jeanieandjayha@gmail.com

Jeanie Johnson and Jayha Leigh

Besides being intelligent divas who pen kickass prose, Jeanie (the shagalicious wordslinger) and her momma, Jayha (the ninja master of prose), are dessert-eating, take-no-shit, tell-it-like-they-feel instead of tell-it-like-people-want-to-hear-it women. They are women who have brains and aren't afraid to use them; feelings and aren't afraid to express them; and, middle fingers which they'll happily use to salute out of line peeps. Independently, both are forces of nature that leave you begging for mercy or begging for more.

A kickass tag team duo bound together by the pen, they plan on ruling the world side-by-side. Jeanie will be ruling in her favorite hoodie and her Chuck Taylors; Jayha will be wearing her Crocs, a blue t-shirt along with her halo. Of course, all ruling will be done swiftly as Jeanie is always out getting into sh*t and Jayha is busy indulging in her torrid affair with ESPN.

See people, this is the kind of praise you get when you have Yvonne as your MMFIC and Rolanda as MNWIC. Thanks Von and Rolanda.