

A Siren's Cage

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Axenus knew from the start when the human ship had entered their territory. He had been laying on one of the smaller rocks cliffs, watching the ship getting closer and closer as the sun was already gone behind the horizon, turning the mild evening sky in a dark purple. As the ship approached him closer, he slipped back into the water so the humans wouldn't be set alert as he swam towards them under the water's surface of the calm sea.

He didn't fear nor did he feel the cold of the water which had surrounded him since the moment he'd opened his deep blue eyes. With his strong black tail that replaced the legs of humans from the waist down he shot through the cold water of the sea, towards the ship, his prey. Besides the fact that the ship was heading into their territory, the rocky terrains surrounding his home were the ideal hunting grounds. Ships weren't just able to rush through

without slowing down, which gave sirens the perfect opportunity to strike.

He swam close up to the sides of the ship, barely remaining under the surface to observe the railing of the deck for a moment before slowly sticking his head out of the water, hiding his long sharp teeth and claws to appear as human as possible for now though he wasn't able to hide his fin like ears under his loose white hair. He listened for a moment to the buzzing sounds of the humans on deck before his lips split and began to sing...

**"Upon once summer's morning, I carefully did a
stray Down by the Walls of Wapping, where i
met a sailor gay Conversing with a bouncing
lass, who seemed to be in pain Saying William,
when you go, I feel you will never return again"**

His voice rang deep and beautiful through the air of the ship, clearly audible for every member of

the crew to hear. Axenus himself had heard this particular song many times, often sung by the sailors themselves. He did not completely understand the meaning of it, but it had to be a song of mourning, something that had to remind him of home, something familiar. Soon every human on this ship would be under the spell of his siren's song, unable to withdraw their senses from his deadly lullaby...

**"My heart is pierced by Cupid I disdain all
glittering gold There is nothing can console me
But my jolly sailor bold..."**

The rolling waves sloshing against the ship was nothing new to Will as he walked along the bottom of the ship. Neither was the utter lack of direction; he had no idea where the ship was at this point. He looked at the different beings in the cages, his heart heavy as he looked at them. He knew he was the bottom rung of the food

chain on this ship, serving as the guard of the cargo. Light, almost soundless footsteps walked along the rows of cages, his dark brown eyes examining each and every creature locked behind various cages he felt were too small, too confining. The familiar guilt washed over him in waves. He knew it wasn't fair, that these beings didn't deserve this fate. Once again, thoughts of running away at the next port came to mind, but...

No, my debt must be paid. The debt he owed, the damn debt. Coming to a new town, far from your home, never came without a price. So this was how he would repay it; guarding powerful, deadly beings until the captain deemed his debt paid. However, the other part was horrid, if not more dangerous. And it seemed he would have to play his part again. "Will! Come up here; we're supposed to be coming into the territory!" The captains' voice rang out from above, and Will's

stomach churned. This was new; usually, this part only came once they've docked. He'd never have to play this part at sea. By the time he reached the deck, the siren had already started his song. Many of the main crew had taken precautions, hiding and locking themselves away mere moments before the melodic voice had begun their deadly song. Even the captain had taken his place, leaving Will to be the only one to walk to the deck's fence. He looked at the churning sea below, his face apathetic and empty despite his emotions. The song, although sad, was breathtaking, almost hypnotizing as he felt a strong urge to go overboard. He wanted nothing more to dive in, to see who exactly was behind the soothing voice that sang out, even calling his name. The poor man had never learned about sirens, even during his time on the ship; he'd be lucky if the other crew looked at him, let alone spoke to him. Before he knew it, he was standing

on the edge of the deck, on the other side of the fence that was there to keep the crew safe.

Maybe... The voice was still calling to him, almost as if begging him to dive into the inky depths below him. He knew the role he had to play, the role that contributed to the repayment of his debt. Without even searching the watery grave below him for the source of the beautiful, mournful song, he took a step off of the security of the ship, plunging into the cold, dark grasp of both the water and whatever called his name.

**"His hair it hangs in ringlets, his eyes as black as coal
My happiness attend him wherever he may go
From Tower Hill to Blackwall, I'll wander, weep and moan
All for my jolly sailor, until he sails home"**

Axenus continued his deadly serenade, staying at the side of the ship, waiting for someone to jump. It didn't take long until he saw a young man

coming up to the railing of the ship, his expression blank, completely entranced by his siren song.

He smiled to himself a little as he sang, focusing his serenade on him as he watched the human plunge into the deep dark waters.

With a flap of his tail Axenus would swim after him, remaining out of the human sight as he approached him from behind. The human would be able to hear his song coming closer, clear even beneath the water until he would see him. With his long black shimmering tail shimmering in the water, the siren was about 7'6 his pale upper body well build with a broad chest, eyes as deep blue as the ocean smiling gently at the human once he swam in front of him, his tail still partly curled around Will. Although Axenus appeared friendly towards the human, it was all a facade, planned for the hunt to lure his prey into safety.

"My heart is pierced by Cupid I disdain all glittering gold..."

Axenus sang those words gently, his long white hair flowing and curling around him in gentle waves as he pulled the man close by his waist almost gently, tipping his chin as Axenus leaned in close, his deep blue eyes staring almost mesmerizing into those of the human.

"There is nothing can console me... their noses were almost touching now. Axenus was so close to his goal.

But my jolly sailor bold..."

The sensation of falling was brief, the wind catching the fabric of Will's clothes and hair and making both ripple before the uncaring ocean enveloped him. The cold claws of the water clutched him, stealing a few air bubbles from his lungs before he could think to hold his breath.

Despite being submerged, he could still hear the melody clearly; he faintly thought of how strange that was. The beautiful song should have been muffled, almost non-existent when competing with the churning waves, but he was delighted all the same. Even if the song seemed sad, it still seemed to fill his senses; all he cared about was the song. Out of nowhere, he felt something come toward him in the water. The faint sensation of something loosely curled around him, then a pair of the deepest blue eyes he'd ever seen were staring back at the poor sailor. Will thought he should be afraid, terrified even, but all he felt was appreciation for being able to attach a face to the serenade he heard.

His heart pounded against his chest, the sound of his own pulse competing with the sorrowful melody coming from the man in front of him. His face never revealed the fervor he felt, remaining blank even as the deadly siren pulled his prey

ever closer to himself. His pulse came to a crescendo as the siren tilted his head up, the faintest traces of a blush blooming on his face. When was the last time another being was this close to him? Years, if he had to guess. He had a vague idea of death, how he can't hold his breath forever; his lungs started to burn with a need for fresh air, but it didn't seem to matter as his eyes remained locked with the siren's. It didn't seem to matter that *this* was what his captain called on him for, that this could very well be the last time he'd *ever* have to play this role. Even if this creature killed him and left him in this inky abyss, he'd be content if the song continued and saw him out of this pathetic existence. The only reason he'd snap out of this stupor was from a harpoon crashing down, just grazing the siren's arm and leaving a trail of the concoction of the captain's making. At least, Will *assumed* it was the concoction; a tranquilizer the captain claimed

to have gotten from an old witch before capturing her as well, making her another unwilling crew member for this tradeship. Will had never met this witch, but always assumed the worst when it came to her fate. Despite his face still looking blank, there was almost a hint of an apologetic look as he continued to stare at the siren. He didn't know his true intentions, of being nothing but another meal to the being; he did know the tradeship though, and the conditions therein for the poor creatures stuck on there. He didn't have to look up to know the captain was still on the harpoon gun, taking aim once again in case he missed as other crew members readied the net. This was a song and dance he was all too familiar with by this point; he just hoped this one was almost done.

He was certain that he had the sailor in his full grasp. Axenus felt the claws on the boy's chin

already growing even sharper as he was ready to tear the human's heart out of his chest.

Until he was too slow to notice the harpune soaring through the water, even tearing his sturdy skin open. He let out a blood curdling shriek, baring his fangs in a snarl as he grabbed Will around the shoulder giving the ship one last hateful glance before he swam deeper into the ocean, dragging Will down with him.

But just after Axenus had begun to pick up the speed with the prey in his arm, he felt his head suddenly beginning to spin, feeling how he wasn't really able to swim directly forward anymore. It felt as if he'd been robbed of all his power.

His eyes grew heavier as he tried desperately to dive deeper, but he was missing all the power to do so. Yet his claws kept buried into Will's shoulder although now even his grip began to

loosen a little as Axenus began to feel even more dizzy, as if he was about to lose consciousness any second now.

Hands instinctively went to Will's ears as the siren shrieked out in pain, a slight wince on his face. Despite the pain as well as snapping out of his stupor, he didn't seem to resist being dragged deeper into the cold; although it was hard to see if that was from shock, or even a slight feeling of hope to be freed from his debt. Either way, he didn't try to fight against his fate, even as more air bubbles started to escape him. Some of the inky darkness started to surround his vision, but despite that, when a heavy splash resounded above him he looked up.

That's...new... He thought, watching a fishing net hurdle towards them. By this point, the siren had started to falter, and out of the corner of his eye, Will saw how heavy the siren's eyes were

becoming. His own head started to feel fuzzy from the lack of oxygen as well as the depths he was dragged down. The heavy chains quickly surrounded the duo, dragging them through the water back to the top. As soon as it broke the surface of the ocean, Will took in a deep gasp of air, coughing some. His lungs ached from the lack of air, and though his vision and head quickly stabilized, he shook violently from the cold. The crew dragged the net up and dropped it on the deck unceremoniously, not bothering to help Will out of the chain link net as they started to try and contain the unconscious siren. Will hunched over on all fours, still coughing and shaking as he glanced over at what exactly had caught him. Despite looking deep into his eyes, he hadn't taken in the rest of the siren while he was enchanted by his song.

Despite being soaked, the siren was picturesque; his white hair pooled around his unconscious

form, a body well toned from swimming that rose and fell with each breath. Will would've loved to examine the creature further, but he looked away, not wanting to catch the crew's attention. Despite that, he heard the captain scoff. "Get yourself cleaned up boy." The older man grumbled, bumping Will's shoulder as he went to examine their catch. Not wanting to catch his ire, Will quickly scrambled to get himself up; quite a feat while he trembled from the cold. He stumbled his way back to the bottom of the ship, ironically the only place he felt safe despite the dangerous creatures stored there. He ignored the hateful glares and growls from the beings locked away, retreating to a corner with makeshift blankets that was his to sleep in. The Captain would surely be angry, and maybe add more to the debt Will had, but the poor sailor couldn't do much more than pull one of the thin blankets over himself.

From the moment he'd tried to drag the human down deeper, everything became a blur as his body seemed to become heavier. The last thing that the siren was able to process was the sound of something heavy hitting the water before something wrapped around his body, yet at this point Axenuses world had already dipped into darkness.

When he opened his eyes later, he was laying on the hard wooden floor, his head still dizzy as he got up a groan. He blinked, noticing that his wrists were bound in a pair of heavy iron chains, an unpleasant sensation crawling over his body that made him shiver: cold. The siren felt the cold of the air, something he was not used to at all. He'd never felt the cold of the water that surrounded him and gave him strength.

He sat up with a groan, holding his head, the movement of his arms making the chains rattle a

bit. That was the first time Axenus noticed what had happened to him. When he looked down on himself, he'd expected his beautiful shimmering black tail, but it was nowhere to be found. Instead it had been replaced with a pair of human legs. Axenus slid back with his back to the wooden wall of his cell, staring at his new pair of legs. Axenus despised it letting out a low growl at how had he had now become even more human than he ever wanted to be.

After he calmed himself down a little more, Axenus had time now to look and see where he actually was. It appeared as if he was in a cell, thick bars of iron blocking the exit, with the walls on the side made out of thick bars of wood. Axenus had no chance to escape like this. He felt weak, helpless. He brought his legs up to his chest, resting his arms on his knees in an attempt to warm himself and to wait for his head to stop spinning.

Will didn't budge from his corner, not until the crew came to situate the siren into his cell. That's when they roughly yanked the blanket away from him, causing him to wake with a start as they explained it was time to "get off your lazy ass and do your job." He got to his feet, still damp and cold. They were right; he did need to get back to his job. He kept shivering, making his rounds to check on the beings trapped down there with him. He left the blankets in the corner, but did arrange them so they could dry. He would check on all the beings, his face blank as they snarled and lunged at him when he would hand them rations. Despite being hungry himself, he didn't want to take food away from the creatures; they already had enough to deal with without going hungry.

Eventually, he got to the cell for the captain's latest catch; he couldn't help but again admire the figure. He started to walk away, but heard

the chains start to rattle as the siren started to come to his senses. He glanced back over, watching as the being let out a low growl as he stared at the legs that had replaced his tail. He went back to his corner and went to just sit and hopefully stop the random shivers he was still having, but out of the corner of his eye he saw the siren curl up. A frown tugged at his blank expression; the creature was probably unused to being out of the water. Being away from familiar territory was never easy to deal with, Will knew that first hand. Looking around, he grabbed a dry blanket from the bottom of his pile, slowly walking back over to the cage. He carefully tried to slide the blanket as close to the siren as he could, while still maintaining an out in case the man tried to come after him. "...I'm sorry." A quiet, tenor voice escaped from Will's lips, brown eyes unable to meet his. "I know you won't believe me, no one down here does, but I truly

am." He didn't wait for a reply, going back to his corner. The cage that held the siren was rather close to the pile of old blankets, easily within eyeshot as Will leaned against the corner. His head went back, staring at the roof above him with that same blank, expressionless face.

Axenus knew that he wasn't the only one in this room. He could feel the presence of other beings, hear the rattles of their chains, hear them growl in discomfort as he heard footsteps approach his cell. Axenus had sunken his face into his legs.

I'm sorry

Axenus lifted his head slowly at the sound of the voice of a human. It was the human from before, the one to embrace Axenus with open arms as he'd been the first one to jump.

He watched the human slide in a piece of cloth into his cell, the siren only staring at the blanket before his gaze settled back onto the boy.

Cold, deep blue eyes were piercing through the human in a distant stare as he kept his eyes locked onto the human, watching him in silence as he kept his legs close to his chest. Axenus didn't trust his words either. Taking the blanket immediately would be a shameful gesture, admitting his weakness. That was the last thing the siren wanted to do. So he just kept staring at the human with his almost entrancing ocean blue eyes.

Will kept staring at the ceiling, humming an old song from when he was a kid. A few memories of him with his dad came to mind; hearing fantastical stories about mythological beings to pass the time as they sat in the fisherman's boat. He'd close his eyes for a moment, trying to

imagine the salty air from back home; even the faintest traces of a smile tugged at his lips as the humming continued. It wasn't often he indulged in this; more often than not, the crew would scold him, but he knew he'd have a slight window of reprieve. However, despite being used to hateful stares, the newest pair of eyes managed to prevent him to fully indulge in the distant memories.

He slowly opened his eyes, flicking them over to meet the siren's. The familiar deep blue eyes were staring him down; it didn't even seem like the creature had taken notice of the blanket. The faint smile vanished as quick as it had appeared, his face once again blank. He knew it was rude to stare, but those eyes...he hadn't seen anything like them before. He'd stare back at the siren, unmoving save for the shivering that was gradually lessening. He wasn't sure if he could

look away, even if he had wanted to. Eventually, he did find some courage enough to speak.

"...my name's Will." He said quietly; it was as if his default volume was just above a whisper. "I know you probably don't care. I know you probably want to kill me, just like everyone else here..." he took a deep breath, finally tearing his eyes away to just stare at the ceiling again. "But if you need anything, let me know okay? I can't free anyone, or the captain would kill me, but anything other than that is fair game, okay?" His voice was just as blank as his face; only a slight twinge of melancholy guilt could be gleaned from the tone. He propped one knee up, the other leg going underneath as he rested a forearm on it. He doubted the siren believed him, or even cared about what he had just said; hell, he knew he wouldn't if he were in his position. His dad didn't raise a cruel man though, and still did his best to extend kindness despite the captain.

His stare didn't falter once the human was speaking to him, even telling him his name. Even as a siren Axenus was able to understand the human language. He'd learned parts of it from listening to humans speaking on the ship.

Axenus kept his gaze resting on the human. He'd listened the human hum a little song, seemingly smiling while doing so. And so a plan came to his mind. It was risky, but in Axenus's mind it could work.

After a moment of silence a little hum could be heard coming from Axenus. A gentle hum that would slowly grow, deep vibrating through Axenus's chest. It was the melody that he'd just heard the human sing.

As his serenade began to grow just a little louder for the human to hear, Axenus slowly got off his feet, letting his deep and sultry voice resonate through his chest as his eyes were fixed on the

human. As he continued to hum this little melody, Axenus slowly stepped up to the bars, wanting to lull in the boy with his siren song. He noticed for himself that his voice held less power, seemingly taking up all his energy already to only focus on this human. The boy had already given in once, surely his voice even in this weakened state of a human would be enough to desire him and maybe even open the cage for him.

Will just kept staring at the ceiling, not noticing the humming right away as he started slipping back into old memories. Even that faint smile started making a return, but then the humming started hitting his ears. He felt captivated again by the siren's song, slowly standing up as he kept listening. The song was a familiar one this time; he was mildly surprised the siren had picked up on it so quickly. He glanced over at the cage holding the siren. When had he stood up?

Whatever the case, Will felt compelled to walk over to him.

His footsteps once again barely made any sounds, almost as if he were lighter than he looked as he made his way to the cage. His eyes met the siren's, losing himself in them again as the magic took hold once more. Before he knew it, he was standing in front of the cage. His face remained blank as usual, betraying nothing as he just stared at the siren. His eyes trailed down to the handle of the cage; when did his hand grab it? It wasn't like he'd be able to open it without...

"Boy you better not be slacking!" The captain's voice rang out from the deck, bringing Will back to his senses for a moment. His hand was in his pocket, fingers wrapped around the skeleton key for the cells. He froze, just standing there as heavy footsteps started to thud down the stairs.

He watched the boy getting up just as expected. With a hint of a smile he watched him putting his hand on the handle door to open the cell. Just as planned.

Axenus raised his voice a little more eager, trying to convince the human to open it for him while standing close to the bars. He was so close... until he heard the capitan shouting, followed by heavy footsteps.

His voice faded away, the spell already broken as the human seemed to snap out of it. With a low growl he went back to the corner of his cell, sitting back down and again glancing fiercely at the boy, dragging the blanket closer with his feet, chains rattling at every movement

Will's hand dropped from the handle as the captain made his way down the stairs, just quietly watching as the siren glared and made his way back to the furthest corner of his cell. He didn't

say anything, only letting his gaze fall to the ground when the captain marched over.

"Get yourself together Stone." The captain barked, the gruff man grabbing him by the shoulder. Will winced faintly, feeling the man's fat fingers push on the injuries from when the siren's claws dug into it. "You'll add to your debt the more you sit around with a thumb up your ass."

"Sorry sir." Will said plainly, still just staring at the ground. While he wasn't exactly talkative by himself, he was even less so in the presence of the captain. The gruff man shoved Will away from the siren's cage, prodding him to keep making his rounds to check on the beasts.

"Maybe you'd be more useful as a meal for these things." The captain growled, turning on his heel to go back up to the deck as someone called for

him. "Clean up down here boy, I refuse to let my ship smell like a damn outhouse."

With that, Will was left alone once again. He took a shaky breath, shoving his hands in his pockets. "...just a few more years." He told himself quietly, moving to the direction of some cleaning supplies. "Then the debt is paid, and I can live my life."

As the boy was scolded by his captain, it came to Axenus's realization that Will seemed to be the lowest of their ranks. He could tell by the way he looked away and from the way the captain spoke with him. Part of him almost pitied him if he weren't human.

He tilted his head slightly in curiosity. This boy had to be the weakest link in the chain. A fact that the siren could use to his advantage when used right.

"Axenus" he spoke his name in heavy accent, his eyes locked onto the pitiful human. He would seize this opportunity, trying to get into his favor, win his trust

Will started to work mopping the floors when he heard Axenus say something. He glanced over at the cage, his face still blank as he studied the siren.

"...that's new." He said quietly, but rolled a shoulder in a shrug as he went back to work. "Is that your name? No one's really talked to me down here." His eyes focused on the floor, trying to work quickly. Even if he wasn't shivering anymore, he was still tired. The sooner he cleaned the floor, the sooner he could work on trying to clean the cages. That would be a whole other problem; he already felt the soreness from when he'd finally finish.

"...hopefully we dock soon." He said quietly, mostly to himself. He was running out of cleaning supplies, not to mention rations for the creatures he was tending to. Even if they hated him, he still did his best to care for them.

He watched the human scrub the hallway of the ship belly.

"You look...tired." He noted, his voice deep, matching the voice in which he was singing in. He shifted his position a little, slowly reaching for the blanket to put the piece of cloth over his legs now that even he got cold.

Will glanced over as he spoke again, still mopping as he gave another small shrug. "Eh, yea, but it's nothing new." His voice continued to be quiet, eyes going back to the ground. "It's just a few more years of this, then I can finally live my life."

He didn't know why he felt so chatty suddenly; maybe it was hearing someone talk to him *without* the scolding attached. Either way, it was a nice change of pace, even if it didn't show on his face.

"But you are out there. You are free while I am trapped." He replied, rattling on his chains a little, feeling how his tongue got used to this language.

"What keeps you here?" He asked generally curious about the humans reasons. He didn't know why he suddenly cared for him, his back leaning against the hard wood of the ship, propping one leg up and resting his arm lazily on it.

Will took a deep breath, pondering the question as he worked. "Well," he said slowly, leaning on his mop for a second. "I owe a debt."

Again, the thought of the debt plagued his mind. He couldn't keep track of how much longer the debt would last; only that he now owed more than two years to the captain. "Dad raised me to be a man of my word; so I can't just run off. Not only that, but I don't want everyone down here to be mistreated. I know they all hate me, it's understandable; doesn't mean they deserve this."

Humans were odd to Axenus. He was talking about this debt as if he was owning the captain his life without anything happen before that. But yet Axenus knew now that this human could be his ticket off this ship.

He shifted his position slightly again, his arm leaning more against the wood when suddenly a strike of pain jolted through his body. He grit his teeth together, hissing in pain as one and

automatically his other hand went up to examine what was causing this pain.

It was the wound from the harpune of the captain, still open and now beginning to bleed again. With his head still being a little dizzy Axenus had been able to forget and ignore the pain, but now it was back. Without his contact to the ocean Axenus would not be able to get this wound to close.

The moment of silence between the two made Will think the conversation was over; by now he had finished mopping the floor, so he went to put the mop and bucket away before hearing Axenus hiss in pain. He glanced over, seeing the siren examining the wound the harpoon had left him with.

"Case in point; they always leave everyone with their injuries. They just don't seem to care." Will gave a sigh, walking over to the cage to look at

the wound from a distance. It was a pretty sizable gash, and he knew if it was left untreated could risk infection. Without saying anything, he went to the supply cabinet again, coming back with some alcohol and bandages. He reached for the key in his pocket, pausing for a moment.

Normally, the creatures in the cages would fight him; perfectly understandable, they were in pain. They never spoke to him, so he'd more often than not just go in and take care of business, usually resulting in his own injuries. However, the siren was at least willing to speak to him; he could explain himself instead of just waltzing in uninvited.

"Uh, if you don't want me in I won't," This whole day was full of firsts; first time being bait at sea, first time one of the creatures *spoke* to him, and now the first time he's had a conversation like this. "But I'd like to look at that wound; it's bound

to become infected if I don't." He stood there patiently, waiting for the siren's response. His blank expression still gave nothing away, not even the slight twinge of anxiety at the idea of entering a cage that was, in essence, filled with unknown factors.

The wound wasn't deep, but the fact that it wouldn't heal on his own was unusual for Axenus. Usually his wounds would heal within half a day without leaving a scar. The wound was now bleeding, aching and burning with pain that made him only glare towards the human who vanished for a moment to return with something to treat the wounds.

He took a moment to think. With this wound, even if the boy opened the door would be careless. He didn't know how big the ship was now if he was able to make it back to the water in this weakened state. Maybe it was the best to

let the boy get close to him. He seemed to be inexperienced with his kind. It would only lead to further curiosity. Besides, he was bored and if the pain would go away soon, even better.

"Free me of those" His gaze wandered down to the heavy metal around his wrists "And you may enter." He said calmly as a response to his offer.

"Don't worry, I will do you no harm." He reassured, his voice smooth and rich as he spoke. He was curious of what the boy would say.

"Hmm," Will thought about that for a second, biting the inside of his lip for a second. Normally, he wouldn't dare think about undoing the restraints on anyone down here; he'd learned the hard way that it was a bad idea. Some of the worst injuries he'd received were from that mistake. He went to say no, but stopped.

This wasn't a normal situation; the creatures also normally didn't talk to him to even say they

wouldn't do harm. Not only that, he'd much rather treat the wound than leave it to just remain and have it hurt. Eventually, with a slow nod, Will agreed.

"Okay," he said simply, and with that word he was gone again. Even if he kept the skeleton key to the cages in his pocket, he didn't keep the one for the restraints with him. He'd learned that it just meant more injuries, more escape attempts, and more time added to his debt. He returned with the second key, hesitating slightly at the handle.

"Are you a man of your word?" Will asked plainly, his eyes going back to Axenus. "I don't mind doing this for you while I treat that wound, but the last thing I need is more time added to my debt. Escapees have added about 9 months to my debt each."

"I am. I promise to do you no harm." Axenus said with an almost soft smile after the human would return once more. He would remain with his back leaned against the wall, calm, even if the human would enter his cell he would remain there calm, the blanket barely covering his private parts.

With that, Will gave a nod, sliding the key into the cage's lock and undoing it. He shut the door behind himself, face still blank as he felt the twinge of anxiety bubble up again. He made his way over to Axenus, setting the supplies down as he dug for the key to the restraints. The faintest traces of a blush appeared as he knelt down to undo the restraints, ignoring the peculiar placement of the blanket as they came undone with a soft *click*.

After that, he sat down so he could better work on the injury. "This'll sting, I'm sorry." He said quietly, soaking a piece of material with the

alcohol and dabbing the wound. After that, he pushed the two edges of the wound together before tightly wrapping the bandage around it. He also wrapped a little ways above and below the wound, trying to make sure the skin stayed in place. His hands felt rougher than they looked; almost like a farmer's despite looking like he never worked on a farm a day in his life. After a few minutes, he sat back up.

"There," he said, looking over the bandaging to make sure the job was done well. "That should work; just try not to overexert your arm. It doesn't feel any better doing this a second time."

He remained calm as the human entered the cell with the equipment to treat his wounds. His deep blue eyes rested on the human as Axneus watched the human open his shackles. After he was freed from the metal on his arms, he took each wrist in his hands, rubbing it while also

eyeing his long sharp nails. He wrinkled his nose lightly at the strong scent of alcohol stung his nose. It was an unpleasant smell but the sensation that followed was even worse.

He let out a loud hiss, followed by a growl as he bared his teeth in a snarl at the stinging pain from the cleansing alcohol on his wound.

Although it was painful, he kept himself from pushing Will away. With his chest still rising and falling, the siren watched the human treat his wound with a curious eye. By the time Will was finished he had calmed down again. Now that his wound was treated properly and tied away, Axenus had an idea when the human sat down beside him, finishing the explanation on his wound.

Then out of the blue, Axenus pushed his back off the wall, turning his body towards him as he bowed himself over the human on his knees. He

scooted a little closer, his blanket now laying besides them, basically forcing him to back off against the wall with his actions.

"You are a brave one. Daring to get so close to me, knowing what I am and that I could end your life within a blink of an eye." Axenus purred amused, taking the human's lower arm as he spoke to gently press it against the wooden wall, letting his hands slowly glide upwards to the palm of Will's hand to feel his human skin. As he slowly bowed into the crook of his neck to take in his scent, a low grumble in his chest. Will could feel his hot breath brushing against his skin before slowly looking back up at Will.

"Tell me human, are you not afraid?" He asked, his deep blue eyes staring into his soul, fixing the human in place.

Will hadn't winced away from Axenus when he bared his teeth, nor when he found himself

essentially pinned against the wall. Despite that, he felt his heart pound against his chest as he stared back at the siren. He knew the being was dangerous, which was all the more reason to try to hide his emotions. He'd learned by now the more fear you show, the more people take advantage of it. Swallowing it down, he gave a bit of a weak shrug.

"Well," His voice wavered slightly, causing him to clear his throat. "If you ended my life, I'd be free of this debt, and if you didn't, you'd have your arm bandaged. Win-win." The facade of bravery faltered again slightly, swallowing a bit as he felt the siren's breath on the crook of his neck. He felt some sweat bead up along his forehead, but kept doing his best to keep his face blank.

When it came to fear, he couldn't lie and say he *wasn't* afraid. When it came to all the beings down here, he was in one form or another.

Despite that, it was easier to hide it when they weren't close enough to tear out his throat. Another weak shrug pulled at his shoulder, paired with an equally weak chuckle.

"Even if I was, why would I tell you?" He asked, staring back at the siren. The dark brown eyes, once dull, had a spark of something else.

Whether fear, or excitement, or something else entirely was left to be seen. "Admitting fear here makes me as good as dead, right? I will say though, can't think of a finer way to die, so maybe I *should* tell you, huh?"

He listened to the boy explaining, feeling how despite his emotionless mask he was growing anxious.

"It doesn't matter if you admit your fear or not." He chuckled softly, his deep blue eyes locked on him with few of his white hair strings on his nose.

"I can tell by the beat of your heart, the smell of your sweat that slowly crawls down your back. Even just a little falter in your voice." He whispered those words as he came even closer, again bowing down but this time letting him feel his hot breath on the front of his throat.

"Now tell me again, do you fear me? Is it truly your wish to die by my hand?" He moved now up again to mumble those words softly into the boy's ear, his lips almost touching his ear as his voice would send shivers down the boy's spine.

"What do you want?" His voice was now barely a whisper as he pulled back to watch the boy react, a soft yet mischievous grin on his face.

As the siren spoke, the tiniest cracks started to show through the blank face Will tried to maintain. The blush had deepened slightly, and he bit the inside of his lip in a long-abandoned nervous habit. He swore eventually his heart

would pound hard enough to render his ribcage into dust as he again felt hot breath on his throat.

"I-I..." His voice broke as he scrambled, trying to find something to say. True, he wasn't afraid of death, but it didn't mean he truly *wanted* to die in this moment; part of him hoped the facade would've been enough to fool the seasoned oceanic predator. As the siren pulled away to study his reaction, he tried to take a deep breath. The breath hitched in his throat, sounding shaky as he exhaled. What *did* he want? Debt be damned at this point; it was hard to focus on anything other than Axenus and his words. *Did* he want to die? Well, he wasn't lying when he admitted he couldn't think of a finer way to die, but again, this wasn't exactly the moment he'd want to die.

A soft sigh escaped his lips before he could hold it in; he didn't know why he was sighing at all. Any words he thought to say caught in his throat, only coming out in quiet, stuttering sounds that wouldn't sound like anything to someone outside of the cage. He hadn't had someone this close to him in years, and now all of a sudden twice in one day someone had gotten so close; it was a wonder the poor sailor hadn't completely collapsed in a heart attack. Rendered essentially speechless, all he could do was stare back at the siren, still showing the cracks in his once blank face.

The rapidly beating heart of the human was music to Axenus's ears. He watched the man choke on his words, his face growing a deeper shade of red as he could see the boy's stone mask crack up. Then his nose picked up another scent as well...

Axenus only had to glance down to confirm that his smell wasn't tricking him. The bulge that had formed beneath the boy's pants was proof enough.

He looked back up at the human, giving him a small grin as a low chuckle grew in his chest. Without saying anything further, Axenus let go off the man and sat himself back into his corner, taking the blanket back over his legs to warm him up while his gaze didn't shift away from Will not only for a split second

A slight hint of confusion vaguely went through Will as the siren chuckled a bit and backed off, only to realize exactly *what* exactly he had seen. He felt his face heat up a bit more, quickly gathering the supplies he had brought with him.

"I-I should go," he said, his words a bit too quick to sound casual. He kept glancing at the siren as he made his way out of the cage, going to

continue running off before remembering to lock the door back up. He hastily pulled the key out of his pocket, locking the door with another soft *click* before making his way back to the supply cabinet. He also splashed some cool water on his face from one of the barrels for good measure, trying to calm himself down and return to normal. His movements were a bit more sloppy than before; gone was the slow, methodical way of moving around the area. He was more quick, almost clumsy as he accidentally bumped into the barrel he had just used.

Get a grip! He scolded himself, running a hand through sandy brown hair. Sure, he'd been a teenager and gotten close to people, but never *that* close. He never had someone breathing on his neck, nor whisper in his ear like that. Before lingering on that memory longer, he dunked his head in the barrel, holding his breath and hoping the cold would freeze his brain. By the time he

had resurfaced, it seemed like he was back to his old self. His face was blank again; the blush gone, though he could feel the impressions of his teeth from biting his lip. Taking another shaky breath, he started walking back to his pile of blankets. Water ran down his face as he lay down; if he had to guess, it was probably well past midnight now. Exhausted, he collapsed harshly into the blankets, pulling one over himself as he curled up.

The chuckle in his chest grew a little more once he saw the human blush and fumble in embarrassment as he quickly left his cell, almost forgetting to lock the door.

His chuckle ebbed away once he was out of sight. His gaze wandered to the pair of shackles that layed before his feet. He pushed them further away back into the corner of the cell.

Leaning his head against the wall of the cell, he watched Will return to the pile of blanket, seeing him curl up into the pile of cloth. Seeing this made Axenus shiver a little, making him instinctively pull the blanket over him as he tried to rest on the hard wooden floor. It was an odd sensation not to hover in the water but he had no other choice. As a siren Axenus wasn't in need of much sleep, yet today it didn't took long for him to fall asleep, driving off into a dreamless slumber.

Heavy footsteps above him are what woke Will up early the next morning. He sat up groggily, holding his forehead in a hand as he tried stifling a yawn. His mind trailed back to last night, but he shrugged it off, trying to chalk it up to a rather vivid dream as he stood up. Standing up, he ignored the rumble his stomach gave, knowing he'd have to wait for someone to bring down leftovers. Leaving his post was frowned upon,

and he didn't feel like getting scolded today. He nudged his blanket pile tighter to the corner, lips thinning into a line. He hated sleeping on the floor, on a pile of blankets like a forgotten dog...but he closed his eyes with a sigh. *A few more years*, he reminded himself. Yea, a few more years, then he could buy a house with a bed; maybe even start a farm. That would be...

His gaze went over to Axenus's cage, feeling his heart skip a beat as he saw the shackles on the ground. So it *wasn't* a dream after all? He felt a touch of anxiety creep up his spine; he couldn't imagine the trouble he'd be in if they noticed. He started to walk over, but noticed now he had pulled the blanket around himself. Thinking for a second, he walked over to the supply closet. He started digging for clothes, eventually finding an old makeshift tunic he'd mended, as well as an old pair of pants. He made his way back to the cage, trying to see if he was up yet.

"Hey," He said quietly, trying to grab Axenus's attention. "If you're cold, I have some clothes for you..."

He'd awoken way before he heard Will awake with a groan. He kept himself rested in a sleep position, eyes closed until he heard a soft voice whisper to him.

Axenus opened his eyes to see the boy sliding what appeared to be a set of clothing for him to wear.

"Why should I cover myself like you?" He asked, examining the clothes with furrowed eyebrows. He had never worn any clothes in the ocean. Why should he wear them now.

Will gave a bit of a shrug, his face back to stone as he looked at Axenus. "Cause if you're cold, you'll be less so if you're covered." His words are plain, back to the typical monotone rather than

the stuttering fool he made of himself.

"Plus...er..."

The sailor didn't know how to address the elephant in the room; he'd never had to tell someone they had to cover themselves due to indecency. He felt his stomach knot up slightly at the idea of saying something more, to explain the secondary part.

"N-nothing," he said quietly, shoving his hands in his pockets. "Just if you get cold, you can get sick."

"My, is it that shameful to see another being not covered up?" Axenus let out a small scoff and decided to push it even further with pushing himself off the floor to stand up and walk over to the cage, not caring to keep his blanket wrapped around him.

"Don't you like what you see?" He asked teasingly with a grin on his face as he put his arm in length over his head on the bars to lean in a little. The siren wanted to see him crack again, toying with his prey.

After a moment of staring he let out a chuckle as he stepped away from the bars and swepted the clothes off the floor to put them on. Even if he didn't like to admit it, he was a little cold, and getting sick was no such thing he wanted, especially if it would restrict his capabilities for his escape.

After a moment he now wore the shirt and pants Will had handed him. The tunic was almost a little too small, with the large v cut on the front of it exposing his broad chest for everyone to see while the pants still looked puffy around the ankles, even if the pair only reached his wades.

"Better?" Axenus asked him with a mildly annoyed but teasing glance, leaning his back standing against the walls of the cell.

Will shrugged a bit at Axenus's first question, still maintaining his stoney face. He did his best to keep it up though, despite his heartbeat quickening slightly as the siren got up to lean against the bars. He gave another weak shrug, glancing away; he didn't dare try to speak, not when he felt his heartbeat in his throat. The faintest traces of a blush once again took hold, but he let out the breath he hadn't realized he was holding as Axenus stepped away to get dressed.

He kept averting his gaze until the siren asked if it was better. Finally looking back over, he gave a bit of a nod. "At least you won't get sick now." His voice was still quieter, and almost became

drowned out as obnoxious footsteps started thudding down the stairs.

He chuckled amused at the hint of blush on the boy's face as he looked away seemingly embarrassed.

He let him be, leaning his back against the wall lazily until he heard the loud footsteps. He let out a low growl, yet remaining in his place.

"Yo Will! Got some grub for you!" A familiar voice called down, causing Will to sigh and prepare for the walking talking headache coming his way. A man a few inches taller than Will clambered down the stairs, blueish black hair hanging in his face. "I love visiting ya man, gotta come down more often!"

"...hello to you too Erik." To say Will's tone was unenthused would be an overstatement. He glanced over at the man, gently taking the plate

from him. "Don't you have a beam to drop on someone?"

"Hey! That only happened once, and I apologized!" Erik said indignantly, crossing his arms. Carmel eyes looked over to the cage, widening slightly as he looked at Axenus.

"Yoooooooooooo is *that* what we caught yesterday?"

"Yes, and don't you dare-" Before Will could finish his sentence, Erik was already trying to get the siren's attention.

"Hey, you believe in love at first sight, or should I walk by again?" Erik asked, flashing a wink to the siren as he crossed his arms. Will, watching the scene unfold, wished Axenus *had* killed him last night, if only to spare him from Erik's antics.

Axenus got himself alerted when the other human came downwards, making noise like 10 of them.

The human itself was taller than Will, but with the siren's 6'3 he was still towering over both of them. He only raised an eyebrow at the human's desperate attempt to seduce or be funny.

"And who is this?" Axenus asked rather coldly, sparing Erik only a cold glance with his deep blue eyes before shifting his attention and his question towards Will who seemed to be embarrassed about this human's odd behavior.

"That would be-"

"The name's Erik; I didn't know the captain went and caught another angel." Erik said, still trying to hit on Axenus as Will tried to shove him towards the stairs.

"And he was *just* leaving, weren't you?" Will asked, not budging the man as he gave a carefree shrug.

"Nah, I'm good! Captain didn't give me any duties outside of giving ya your food." Erik protested, flashing another wink at the siren. "I hate to break hearts, but Will here is just *infatuated* with me; I've had to turn him down before."

"For the last time, me telling you you can't flirt with the incubus was not me being 'infatuated.'" The longer the conversation continued, the more irritated Will seemed. Eventually, he gave up with a sigh, turning to walk away. "Anyway, I need to go feed everyone. Just don't get yourself killed."

Axenus only raised an eyebrow at the ridiculous behavior of the human. His attempts to seduce were pathetic, yet his foolishness seemed entertaining.

He only leaned against the side of the cell, watching the Two argue like few newborns playing. A part of him found it to be almost adorable. Few lower click sounds vibrated

through his throat as he tilted his head slightly in mild fascination.

Will took one last glance at Axenus as he walked away, giving a shrug and mouthing an apology before going to the rations bin before remembering the plate of food in his hands. He took a small portion of food, popping it in his mouth as he continued to go to work.

Erik, however, leaned against the bars of the cage, still trying to loon alluring; although, it looked far from his goal, even if he *weren't* trying to flirt with anyone non-human. "So, you make those sounds with just anyone, or just with cuties like me?" He asked, the idea that the being in front of him could easily kill him just flying over his head. "I just feel bad you're stuck with Mr. Stone Face instead of my fabulous self; the captain just says something about him owing a debt, and I shouldn't interfere with his job."

He raised an eye brow in question at Will before he left, his attention shifting to Erik again, who had propped himself against the bars in the most ridiculous way to be seductive.

This human did neither possess the charm, nor the braincells to be so. Another easy target and a potentially new toy, maybe even a way out of his misery.

He put on again his playful mask to get his entertainment from this human. "Do you like it when I make those sounds?" He asked with a mild grin on his lips as he lowered his head a little near the bars, letting few deep of his clicking rumble vibrating in his throat before pulling away again teasingly.

"What is your job then?" The siren asked rather curious.

As soon as he got a taste of his own medicine, it looked like the air got knocked out of Erik's sails. His face quickly went from over confident, to bright red and tongue tied.

"I-I mean..." He stumbled over his words, trying to think of something slick to say. "I sure do!" He eventually got those words out of his mouth, not even realizing how anticlimactic the sentence was in comparison to his previous demeanor. It took a few seconds to get his mind back on the rails, but he got there eventually, puffing his chest out.

"I-I do lots of the heavy lifting! The captain says the two braincells I have are too busy fighting for third place to do any thinkin', so he puts me in charge of lifting barrels and the like!" Despite repeating the insult verbatim, he seemed to glow with pride at it. The man was thicker than a brick it looked like. Even if it *seemed* like he pulled

himself back together, his body language was a bit different; it was less cocky, less confident. He had shifted his weight to one leg at some point, his arms uncrossed to hang loosely at his sides. "Gotta admit, sure beats being bait; kinda surprised Will is still kickin', would've thought one of these things woulda killed him by now."

He tried not to burst out laughing at the man's words. This human was clearly not the brightest one on the ship. Even he understood the insult that he had just repeated with innocent, almost naive pride. That was it. This human was naive, seemingly easy to manipulate in any way.

He pushed himself off the wall of the cell to approach the human as he talked listening to his words until he stood towering over him, only separated by the bars of his cell.

He only hesitated once he talked about Will. He quickly picked up on what Will's real role on the

ship was. A cruel role to play that was only meant for the weakest of the whole pack. A part of him pitied Will. It seemed as if his crew had already abandoned him. Yet he was the key to the siren's freedom and so was this human who stood nervously in front of Axenus. It would be a shame to waste such a given opportunity...

"That sounds like truly hard work. I have to admit, you're indeed very well built for a man like you." He purred those words softly as his hands went through the bars to slowly glide over the man's buff chest, few of his click sound rumbling teasingly in his throat as his eyes were focused on this man, so where his senses for the hunt.

"I'd like to think so! I even-" He cut himself off, freezing for a second as he felt Axenus's fingers glide over her chest. He felt his face heat up, swallowing a bit. Sure, he was a *massive* flirt, but to have someone else flirt with *him*?

Once again, the once cocky mound of muscle seemed to liquefy by the simplest of actions the siren did; blabbering like a fool as he tried desperately to get his mind back on track.

"M-my shirt is boyfriend material!" After a few moments of being a stuttering mess of a man, he finally blubbered out something at least *slightly* cohesive; even if it wasn't completely how it sounded in his mind. It didn't seem to matter he messed up the pickup line, he just seemed slightly proud of himself for saying anything at all in the moment.

He watched the boy quiver and babble away as he seemed to fumble around to be flirtatious. Yet Axenus knew this game too well and he was better by miles.

He decided to push it even a little further by letting his nails graze up the boy's neck, wandering slowly over his jawline before they

settled beneath his chin, keeping the boy's gaze fixed on him.

"What about your lips then~?" He asked, blue eyes staring deep into the boy's soul as he indirectly pulled him only a little bit closer towards the bars, his thumb grazing over the lower lip of the human slowly to let him melt further.

Erik had a brief thought about the dangers of the situation he was in. Sure, it wouldn't be the first time he'd been tricked, but the man never really cared about that. No, the fun of it all exactly *was* the danger that was presented to him. Especially now, as he felt his skin tingle where Axenus's nails touched.

A small gasp could be heard; one that would seem uncharacteristic to someone who hadn't spoken two words to the man. He felt his heart pound against his ribs as the siren grazed his

thumb along Erik's lip. His mind went completely blank at that point; he couldn't even stutter and stumble over the non-existent words. He wanted to be smooth, to give a cocky, confident answer, but he was outmatched at this point. The poor fool was little more than a sentient puddle.

Without thinking about it, he leaned in a bit closer to the siren as he stared deep into his eyes; his forehead resting against the gap between two bars of the cell. Nothing seemed to matter to him right now; not Will, not the crew, not even the slight drool on the corner of his mouth. He had no idea what was coming over him, all he could think of was how he just wanted to feel more of the man in front of him.

He had the human completely in his grasp, even without using his siren song. Erik was just too naive and too easily manipulated.

He watched the human step closer to the cell by the siren's hand, his face almost hanging at the bars to his cell.

Axenus enjoyed every moment of this. The human's blank expression, yet it was filled with desire, his soft lips beneath his thumb, he was even drooling for him. Axenus loved to see his prey like this.

Before even saying another word Axenus went forward with his head, connecting his lips with Erik's as he'd pulled the human in a kiss. It wasn't just a quick one, with the siren pressing his tongue in between the humans lips for a passionate kiss, entwining his own tongue with Erik's. Axenus had closed his eyes, savoring this sweet kiss, but moreover the accomplishment of capturing his prey like this.

After a moment, Axenus slowly parted his lips from him, staring at the human and waiting for his reaction.

At this point, the poor sailor was putty in Axenus's hands. The once proud man was completely at the siren's mercy, leaning into the kiss as he wrapped his own tongue with Axenus's. Despite lasting a few moments, he felt as though the siren had pulled back too soon. Weak in the knees, he couldn't help but buckle under his own weight. He stared up at the man in front of him, his head fuzzy with desire. His mouth opened and shut like a fish gasping for air, no sounds escaping him as they all got caught in his throat.

"R-respectfully," He mumbled, still staring at the siren, not breaking eye contact. "P-please step on me Mr. Tree Man."

Just as Axenus had parted his lips from the human, he let go of his chin, a mischievous hint

of a smirk crossing his face as the human fell on his knees in front of his cell. His gaze was fuzzy. This human was drunk with desire, completely moldable to the siren's will, addicted to the taste of his lips.

"You are adorable" Axenus chuckled faintly at the human's comment, bowing a little forward and reaching out to tip the human's chin up, looking deep into the human's eyes.

"Is there maybe something else you desire?" Axenus asked teasingly. He wanted to toy with this human. To hold him in this fragile grasp, to make Erik desire him even more to the point where he would throw his own life away for the siren.

The surroundings seemed to melt away, not muttering to the sailor as he looked up at Axenus. He hadn't felt anything this strong before; not even that incubus. Although, Will *had*

been there to shoo him away before it got too serious. Where was he anyway?

The thoughts faded into obscurity as the siren tilted his chin up, caramel eyes slightly glazed over as he looked into Axenus's eyes. The siren posed a good question; he could think of quite a few things he also desired, each thought dirtier than the last. His lips parted again, a weak noise escaping him before he cleared his throat.

"O-of course," His words were quiet, little more than a soft rumble emanating from his chest. He couldn't say much more after that, the dirty thoughts he wanted to vocalize stuck in his throat. Sweat beaded on his forehead, and even if his legs weren't working, he could feel something else getting up instead.

Erik now seemed completely hooked to Axenus, seemingly getting lost in the siren's deep blue

eyes more and more as he seemingly wasn't able to form even his dirtiest thoughts.

"Why don't you join me in here and tell, perhaps show me what those desires are then?" Axenus spoke in a smooth and convincing voice, few of his click sounds vibrating to his throat as he slowly let his fingers glide away, giving the human's chin a little last teasing push upwards with his finger.

This should've been enough for the human to convince him to join him in his cell, to carelessly give into his primal desires while it would give Axenus the opportunity to escape.

Erik gave a nod, slowly trying to get to his feet. The idea of joining Axenus in the cell was wonderful; it's all he wanted at this point. The problem was though...

There, all done. Will patted his hands, wincing slightly from the various scratches and bites he'd received. He had waited a bit too long today; everyone was starving. He ran a hand through his hair, sighing a bit as he turned to walk back to where he left Erik. *That idiot better have left or so help me-*

The sight he had in front of him was *not* what he was expecting. Erik, completely lost and stumbling to his feet like some school girl, and Axenus seemingly teasing him for his own amusement. He walked towards the two, his blank face still not revealing any of the annoyance or...jealousy? Seriously, he was *jealous* of this idiot? Didn't matter, he shook the feeling off as he stared at Erik. Erik glanced over, face redder than a ripe tomato.

"Oh hey, can I borrow that key?" Erik's voice was quiet, his words almost slurred together. Will,

completely unamused, grabbed the taller man by the ear.

"Seriously? After what happened with the incubus? You really *are* an idiot, aren't you?" Will chided, dragging Erik to the stairs. Erik kept glancing behind him, going to fight back when something changed out the corner of his eye. For a split second, it almost looked like Will had changed; at least, his arm did. It was a fraction of a second, but it looked like a farmhand's arm; at least, more muscular than the skinny twig dragging him. It was enough to shut the sailor up, and stumble up the stairs.

"And don't come back until ya gotta lick of sense in ya, ya hear?" Will said, pushing the mess of a man onto the deck. He had enough to deal with without playing babysitter to someone who couldn't pour water out of a boot, let alone Erik. Taking a deep breath, he walked back to the

bottom of the stairs, sitting on the last one. *Fuck, now I gotta make sure he doesn't cone back down for a while.* The idea of that just annoyed Will further, but the stoney face he had didn't show it. Instead, he got up after a few moments, going to the supply cabinet to start cleaning. Hopefully the task would be enough to ignore whatever feelings he was having right now.

He watched the human slowly getting back on his feet to follow his deepest desires, to follow the will of the siren just as Axenus had planned. It was only when he heard another pair of footsteps, followed by a wince as both pairs of feet seemed to distance more. From the angle of his cell he wasn't able to see what exactly what happening, but Axenus already had the assumption that his plan had failed.

On the other hand, his whole situation had been very amusing for him, despite the little feel of

internal rage inside of him which had darkened his expression for only a moment. He leaned his back against the wall of the cell lazily, crossing his arms in front of his chest.

"Where did your little friend go?" He asked with a little grin tugging on his lips.

Will paused in front of Axenus's cage, glancing over at him for a second. "He's not my friend, he's just a moron." He said plainly, turning to face the siren fully. "I dragged him out of the way so I can continue my duties as well as keep him from killing himself in a way where it could be *my* fault." He shoved his hands in his pockets.

Despite his face being as blank as ever, there was a twinge of annoyance in his tone. "Couldn't pour water out of a boot if the instructions were on the heel; not a lick of self preservation in that idiot."

Soon though, his annoyance faded into nothingness. He still had a job to do nonetheless; wallowing in frustration wouldn't be productive. "Anyway, lemme get you some rations; you're probably hungry, right?"

Once again, the whole idea of conversing with someone down here hit him. He'd never had the luxury of talking to anyone down here; they hated him too much for that, seeing him as little more than their reason for capture. They weren't wrong of course, but it wasn't like *he* enjoyed it. Ignoring the injuries he'd gotten, he walked back over to where the food was stored, coming back after a second with something for Axenus.

"It's not the greatest, but it's something." He said, handing the food over to him. "Eat it or don't, it's up to you. I just gotta do my job." Back to apathy, back to revealing nothing. It was

almost as if he wasn't annoyed just a few moments before.

As Will approached the siren to talk, Axenus couldn't but notice the hint of his change in voice. It had almost sounded like jealousy which made Axenus chuckle a little. It seemed as if he'd hit a weak spot, depending on how much Will had seen from him and Erik.

Once Will went on to get him his rations, Axenus realized that he was indeed hungry. He hadn't eaten since he had been captured.

Will handed him a bowl with some stale old bread and a reeking fish of an ridiculously small size. As a siren he was used to hunt his fish fresh while also being able to feed off dead carcasses of other living things and also humans of course. Nature had created him to survive in the ocean on top of the food chain. Although the siren was

able to survive off lots of things in the ocean, this didn't mean that he enjoyed it.

"This is a joke." Axenus looked at the bowl, a low unsatisfied growl rumbling in his chest as he picked the bad smelling fish with two fingers up by the tail.

"You want me to starve, don't you. This is not nearly enough." Axenus grumbled, swallowing the fish whole in one piece tho.

Will sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Join the club," he mumbled under his breath, not noticing what he had said right away. When he did, he took a deep breath.

"What I mean is...I'm sorry, it's all they give me." He tried to correct himself, not wanting to be rude to the siren. "They don't wanna waste resources on anyone down here, so we all get the bare minimum.

His thoughts went back to his own breakfast; just literal scraps from the crew's breakfast. He'd much rather have had something else, or at least more filling. However, he couldn't complain. It was just a few more years of this and he could finally get something of substance.

"Anyway, I should get to cleaning." He said, shoving his hands in his pockets. "I know idiocy isn't contagious, but I don't like it lingering."

With a low grumble he sat himself on the bench in his cell, tearing off a piece of his stale and rock hard bread. Despite his human looking appearance, his teeth still kept a certain length and sharpness to them as well as his ears remained a little more pointy than those of humans.

The bread was dry in his throat, scraping like sandpaper, yet the hunger made him devour it all.

"I need water." Axenus said after a moment of silence as Will had already taken a few steps away to fulfill his duties. He couldn't stand this aching feeling in his throat. Besides, keeping this pitiful human close, who was also his key to freedom, was not bad idea.

Will glanced over his shoulder, giving a nod before disappearing to the supply closet. When he came back, he had a cup with a rusty handle in one hand, and the mop bucket in the other while the mop was precariously balanced on his shoulder. He handed the cup to the siren, giving a slight shrug.

"It ain't that great," He started, letting Axenus take the cup. "It's kinda stale like everything else, but it's the best I can do." A small frown tugged at the corners of his lips, but before he could further elaborate he'd already walked off a little ways, starting to mop the floor.

"Also," he said, staring at the floor as he worked. "I'm gonna have to go back in there to clean up a bit; is that okay?"

The conundrum of if the siren said no came to mind as he asked that. Sure, he didn't wanna invade Axenus's space, but he also knew he'd get in trouble for *not* doing his job. An image of the captain also came to mind; red face underneath the mass of beard, spitting some as he tore into him and added even more time to his debt. The image made him shudder a bit, although if it was physically or internally he couldn't begin to tell as he started mopping up the floor.

He took the cup through the bars, staring at the water before taking a sip. It was sweet compared to the deep salty waters of the ocean. It tasted kinda musky, yet it helped to make his throat feel less dry.

He didn't drink all of the water, leaving a little bit at the bottom of the rusty cup. Pouring the rest of the water into his open hand, Axenus watched the light skin between his fingers slowly return and his claws growing even sharper under this prickling feeling. The sensation was odd, but Axenus couldn't resist to let his wet claw graze over his left lower arm, watching few of his scales reappear on his arm, smoothly translating from his skin to the dark scales color wise.

To the siren itself, it was fascinating. Most of the time, Axenus had spend his time in his body made for the sea. Feeling separated from it felt odd and seeing his skin return like this for only this short lasting moment made him feel odd, longing for the sea.

He looked back up to hear Will's question, watching him mop the floor.

"Are you sure you want to come back in here?" He said in a teasing voice, glancing over at the human when he referred to the previous events in the cell.

Will hadn't paid attention to Axenus while examining the effects on the water; he was too focused on the floor to really notice anything. Despite moping at least twice a day, it always seemed to have a permanent state of filth. Although, he wasn't sure if he was just projecting or not. Unwanted memories filtered in for a moment, making his stomach drop. The heat of fire surrounded him, and the smell of billowing smoke filled his nose. In the distance, he could almost hear screaming-

"Huh?" The siren's question pulled him out of his own head, looking up to stare blankly at the siren. After a few seconds, the question finally registered. It took a few more seconds to realize

what he was referencing, but when it did his gaze quickly went back to the ground.

"Well, it isn't like I have much of a choice." He mumbled, picking up the mop bucket as he continued forward. "Captain will probably add more time if I don't clean the cells today; I might already be in trouble for not doing it last night when he told me to."

The human seemed lost in his thoughts for a few seconds until he seemingly caught himself again. It amused him mildly, but also made him curious. Something about this human felt odd, but Axenus was unable to tell what. He shrugged the thought off quickly, his deep blue eyes lingering on the human.

"Come in then." Axenus replied calmly, crossing his legs as he leaned against the back of the cell, waiting for the boy to enter. He didn't really care if the boy was in trouble. The only thing he knew

that this could be his chance to be finally free again.

With a nod, Will walked over to the door again, a slight pause of hesitation as he grabbed the handle. He wasn't completely sure if Axenus would try another stunt like he did last night, but at this point he didn't have a choice. It was either this, or risk getting even more time on his growing debt. The idea of it was enough for him to grumble under his breath as he slid the key in the lock, dragging his cleaning supplies behind him.

"I'll try to be quick," His voice was still quiet as he started to mop up. "I don't like invading people's spaces." He started in the furthest corner from Axenus, doing his best to work both thoroughly and quickly.

He watched the boy enter the cell, quickly locking the door behind him. The siren noticed

the key and how the human slipped him back into his pocket, smiling to himself a little.

When Will was going at it, saying how he didn't want to interrupt peoples personal space, Axenus kept silently watching him when an idea came to his mind.

He began to hum a little tune. The one that Will had hummed once before, but this time it was different. His voice was still rich and deep, still being able to hit even higher notes without effort, but it didn't have the effect of the siren song in them. It was just an ordinary little tune, sung by a still astonishing voice. Despite Axenus being a siren, he quite enjoyed singing, even if he didn't want to admit it, still hoping to gain the boy's attention.

Will kept mopping, at first not noticing the humming. However, without realizing it, he started humming along too. After a moment, he

started to sing the words as well, albeit under his breath.

"Until the day she found her pelt and left without a farewell. She shifted back and swam away and disappeared into the ocean's sway..."

He hadn't noticed he was singing along with the humming until the song had finished. He paused, a vaguely confused look peaking through the stone mask. He glanced over to Axenus, quickly getting his face to be blank once again.

"You've heard that one?" He asked, looking back to the ground. By this point, he was rather close to Axenus. "It's kind of a nice story; the selkie gets to go back home, even after that dick steals her pelt." He was quiet again, then mumbled something under his breath.

A mild smile grazed his lips as he heard the boy beginning to sing along. He continued to hum the

melody until he was finished, delighted on the inside to make the boy's stone mask crack, even if it was for only a split second.

"I've learned many songs over all those years." He replied to his question. If the day was long, the sailors sang many songs. Axenus had heard almost all of them. It filled him with a certain pride knowing so many ways to entrance his victims, all the other sirens looking up to him at his power and skill.

"I suppose that would make sense." Will said, giving a small nod. "I know a few, but not many; my dad would sing that one a lot. He said it was my mom's favorite."

His words got a little more quiet, and it had the faintest twinge of...something. Will shook his head, quickly going back to being stone before he could question himself. He continued to work, by this point standing right next to Axenus.

"Sorry, but could you move for a sec?" He asked, glancing over to meet the siren's eyes. Despite doing his best to keep a blank face, there was some emotion in his own eyes. However, it didn't seem to register to Will, or if it did he ignored it. After all, he was an expert in burying his emotions.

Axenus chuckler internally at the mentioning of his father. Something he never had and never would.

He gave Will a glance and a hint of a mischievous smile before he got up to lean against the wall of the cell besides the bench, quietly keeping the boy in his eyes. He noticed the glint of emotions shining through his eyes. He seemed... kind of happy, relaxed even in his presence.

If Will had noticed the mischievous look on Axenus's face, he didn't say anything; rather, he just kept moving forward, eyes glued back to the

ground. He hated to admit it, but it was nice to *not* get attacked while cleaning a cell for once. Sure, it was a bit of an odd situation all around, but it was a welcome change.

"Thanks." He said quietly. While it was obvious he was thanking the siren for moving and allowing him to continue cleaning, Will couldn't help but feel the thanks went a bit deeper than that despite himself. He still was working hard to try and keep up the stony appearance; he didn't want anyone to get close, not again. He needed more guilt poured onto him like he needed concrete poured onto him.

"I think that does it." He stood up straight, looking at the floor. Giving a satisfied nod, he turned around and saw Axenus had sat back down. He gave the siren a bit of a nod, picking up the bucket and mop once again. "Lemme know if you need any-"

Before he could finish his sentence, his foot slid out from underneath him from the wet floor. It was almost as if it all happened in slow motion; Will fell backwards, slamming his head hard against the wooden floor, while the bucket sailed through the air, the contents spilling all over the siren. Will stared at the ceiling for a second, taking a deep breath. Well, that hurt like hell. He sat up after a moment, a hand going to the back of his head. "Fuck..." He hissed under his breath, blinking a few times to make his vision less blurry.

Axenus sat back down on the bench, watching the boy clean quickly while also noticing that the thanks he noted towards him was holding a deeper meaning.

He prepared to lunge himself at the human to get this key that was separating him from his home. He waited until he saw the boy suddenly

slip on the wet floor, watching his feet sail through the air along with the water bucket towards him.

The cold splash of water landed right in the middle of his chest, blocking the bucket off with his arms out of reflex. Axenus whole upper body was now soaking wet along with his face and hair.

A low growl grew in his chest at the boy's clumsiness, but then he felt it. The prickly, burning tingling feel of his transformation. He felt his slightly pointier human ears split up into longer fins, feeling his arms burn as faint black scales crawled to the surface. His hands took the shape of his familiar siren claws once more.

Beneath his white shirt that now showed parts of his well defined body, he could feel parts of the scales familiar patterns begin to form on his skin. It was accomplished by the sound of ripping fabric on his back as he could feel the tips of his

back fin tearing through the fabric with the tips of a pair of thin smaller fins additionally breaking through the skin of his outer lower arms.

The siren's growl slowly translated into low clicking sound rambling in the back of his throat and a wider grin on his lips as he felt the parts of his body return to part of their original shape. He felt some of his power return with it.

In one swift movement he lunged for the human, pinning him beneath his body, ready to tear open his throat.

"Foolish human." He laughed faintly at the human, a wide mischievous grin on his lips as it exposed his even sharper siren fangs and teeth.

"You can't stop me now." He chuckled, his one hand moving towards the boy's pocket, yet his ocean blue eyes were fixed on the human. Now they were showing even a hint of glowing

turquoise outlining his predator eyes with his pupils glaring at him in the form of slits. He was a siren, a predator, ready to kill and Will was his naive prey who helped him to his freedom without even knowing it.

Still cradling his head, Will hadn't noticed right away that Axenus had changed back to his original form. He was still a bit stunned from the fall, the back of his head still tender. It wasn't until he was pinned down that he realized just how royally he had fucked up.

"H-hang on," Will stumbled on his words a bit, meeting the siren's eyes. His heart was pounding, and despite himself, he started to struggle to get free; especially once he realized what the siren was after.

"You do realize it won't be that easy, right?" Will asked. Despite himself, he couldn't help but again admire this form; especially with the glow from

his eyes. "Even if you take my key and kill me, how far can you go? You're a fresh catch, and I hate to break it to you, but they don't trust or like me much."

His words were cold again, although maybe a bit colder than before. There was a brief flash of emotion again, but then his eyes were just as blank as his face. It was almost as though he had started to retreat further inside of himself than before. No cracks were apparent; which considering the internal whirlwind of emotions, was somewhat of a feat. He didn't know why the idea of betrayal like this hurt; he should have known better. It had been a while since a creature pulled one over on him, but he wasn't perfect.

"They'd just give you more of that tranquilizer to sedate you again, or even kill you if you put up too much of a fuss." His words were

matter-of-fact, not wasting time mincing the words. This whole time, his eyes hadn't left the siren's. They almost looked dead already in a sense. "But by all means, risk it. See what happens."

He held in for a moment as he heard the human's voice waver. He looked as if only realizing the facts now. The wound on his arm was still there. The humans had already captured him once.

His eyes were dead. This human had already given up on his life, accepted his fate. Axenus had seen it. This human was truly dead meat. He would probably do this human a favor for killing him, but... somehow he found himself unable to do so....

His expression of realization shifted into one of ever growing rage, baring his teeth at the human with a low grumble as he got off the human. As he stepped back into the cell, he dug his claw

into the wood, dragging them along as he walked through his cell, hearing the wood crack and splinter beneath his siren claws, demonstrating his frustration but also a display of his mercy, even if he didn't want to admit that Axenus as a siren couldn't bring himself to kill such easy prey.

"Leave." Axenus growled as he had let himself drop onto a bench, shoulders sunken forward, gaze looking into nothing. He was truly pissed that he couldn't accept the truth that he was stuck here in this prison with... him...

Will just kept staring up at Axenus, completely motionless as he studied the expression on his face go from one of realization to rage. He didn't even flinch as he bared his teeth, or when he started causing damage to the cage surrounding them. Instead, he just watched quietly, still looking completely numb to everything going on.

Only when Axenus demanded he leave did he get up, quietly gathering his things and leaving the cage. He slid the key into the lock once again, another soft *click* signifying the door was once again locked. He glanced back over at the siren, opening his mouth slightly as if to say something. Instead, however, he just closed his mouth, shaking his head as he went to put the supplies away. Seeing as he had completed all of his duties for the day at least, he decided to sit back down on his pile of blankets. He leaned his head back against the wall, and didn't even so much as wince as the bruised portion of his skull hit the wall unceremoniously. He just stared at the ceiling, unblinking.

It was strange how still the sailor sat; he almost appeared like a statue. His eyes kept staring at the ceiling, and for a second, it almost seemed like his skin rippled. It was only a fraction of a second, but he didn't look like a pathetic sailor,

stuck in the bowels of a ship. Rather, in that instant, he looked almost like a completely different person. That might have just been a trick of the light though, as the lantern fell off the crate next to him. The light within went out as it hit the floor, the wind from the fall snuffing the small flame out.

After the human had left, Axenus remained in this seemingly frustrated and exhausted position before he shifted to lay down. Once he heard the human returned to his spot Axenus opened his eyes to peak over to the human.

His gaze seemed lost yet steady, looking up at the ceiling almost statue like. Why wasn't he able to kill this human? Axenus wondered, the frustration about accepting the truth still in him. Yet his gaze rested on the human, somehow calming him a little down.

Then the lantern fell. His eyes caught a glimpse of the fraction that seemed to form at the illusion of the light. He had been too lost in his thoughts to see the whole picture of him, but it was enough for only a flicker to see. The siren's brows furrowed in question, wondering if it had only been an illusion of light. No. He was certain that he'd seen something, but kept it to himself. He was certain: This human was hiding something, but it had to wait. For now, Axenus closed his eyes to rest a little, drifting off into a restless slumber.

The darkness didn't seem to bother Will. He made no movements to catch the lantern, nor did he pick it up right away. Instead, he just kept staring at the ceiling; he could hear some growling from other creatures, but it didn't bother him. Rather, he was more focused on what had happened.

It was only natural for the siren to try and trick him; it's something he should've seen coming a mile away. Hell, he *had* seen it with other creatures down here. It's how he learned to never trust them, or anyone really...so why did he let his guard down that badly this time? What made him think *anyone* would want to genuinely be his friend? Taking a deep breath, he finally moved from his spot, picking up the lantern. He carried it with him back to the supply closet, digging around to try and feel for the box of matches. A few rays of light managed to filter down, and even with the minimal light, he seemed to look normal again.

Finally, the box of matches. He struck one, quickly lighting the lantern once again. The faraway look from earlier was gone, and the cold look on his face seemed to lessen, going back to a truly neutral look. He stood with the lantern for a second, trying to think of what to do next

before he heard chains above on the deck. A heavy splash hit the water on the other side of the ship wall, and Will felt his stomach drop. If they were docking, that meant one of two things. Either drop off, or...

"Get up here boy!" The captain shouted down the stairs. "You got a job while we get more supplies!"

Will stared at the stairs for a moment, already feeling some adrenaline making his heart pound. Swallowing down his fear, he set the lantern down, walking up the stairs.

A few hours later, Axenus opened his eyes, turning around from his position of sleep to see the human not being there anymore. He sat up with a groan, looking down at his hands to see his siren features gone again. Guiding one of his hands to his shoulder to touch his wound, it felt less painful. It must have begun to heal well.

It took him a moment to realize that the ship wasn't moving. It seemed as if the crew had gotten to land with him to get more supplies for sea. After all, humans weren't just able to live off fish and other things like Axenus was made to. Humans weren't made to survive on sea which made them an easy target.

Leaning his back against the wooden walls of the cell, Axenus waited in silence for the boy to return, not feeling how he was drawn to him in an odd way that he wouldn't even be able to describe.

The ship remained in place for a long time, the only signs of life being the other creatures. Some growled and gnashed their teeth, while others whimpered and wept to themselves. All of them were restless, and didn't hesitate to show it.

It wasn't until the sun had set that any signs of the crew returning to the ship were there.

Despite the hustle of footsteps on the deck, Will still hadn't come back downstairs. It'd be even longer until he'd finally stumble behind a few of the crew members. The men in front of him were carrying a giant beast; looking as though someone had mashed an eagle and horse together. It was sedated, its front claws dragging limply on the floor before the crew shoved it into an empty cage.

Will followed behind, panting a bit. The man looked as though he'd been through the wringer; gashes from the creature's talons littered his body, causing blood to drip onto the floor. His hair was a mess, and one eye was closed as to prevent blood from getting in it. He was sore, and he was tired, but he couldn't sleep yet.

The crew shoved past him, paying no mind to the injured man as they joked about this and that, slamming the basement door behind themselves.

Will stood still for a moment, just staring at the floor. His vision blurred slightly, but he did his best to shake it off. He limped to the supply cabinet, praying he'd have enough supplies to treat his wounds.

Just...just gotta patch up. He thought, trying to ignore the nausea he felt from seeing so much of his own blood. *Patch up...then I can lay down...*

His gaze wandered away from his cell when after a few hours, more footsteps were heard above deck and began to wander towards his direction. Few men came down from the deck, dragging an unconscious beast after them, another poor soul damned to be sold.

The creature got only half of his attention though once another person came into view. It was Will and he looked horrendous. He could smell his sweet blood streaming through his clothes, soaking his shirt.

Somehow, the siren felt anger dwell up in his chest. Had he been used as a bait to catch this other creature? To the siren it didn't matter. Will was his prey, his alone.

Clenching his fists he stood up from the wooden bench, walking over to the bars, a low growl in his chest to be heard.

"Who did this to you?" He asked, his voice a low growl as he looked up and down on Will, taking in all his wounds which made him even more furious.

Will was completely oblivious to Axenus's anger at first; then again, the man paid no attention to anything outside of the supply cabinet. His face was as blank as ever, autopilot guiding him to take an armful of bandages along with a bottle of alcohol before retreating to his corner.

"Hm?" The words finally registered in his head. He glanced up, a deeper gash just above his eyebrow being the first he dabbed at with alcohol. He did his best not to flinch, but the stinging was too much even for him. "Oh, I mean, you saw them bring her in." He said, motioning to the poor creature still unconscious. "Ain't her fault though; captain sent me into her nest, and she had little ones." His voice sounded a bit hoarse, and he tried to clear it so it could sound less pathetic. Undoing some length of bandages, he started wrapping his forehead at an angle; once that was done, he started systematically patting each wound with alcohol. Even if he winced, he didn't flinch away from the stinging; the way he worked, it was easy to see this wasn't a first-time venture. He glanced up again, finally noticing the anger on Axenus's face. "Besides, why does it matter?" He asked. Despite the blank face, his eyes held a bit of curiosity. "I mean, it's

just part of the debt after all; it ain't like I can do anything about it."

His gaze darkened a little more as he heard how the captain had send him away to be prey. His suspicion had been right then. His wounds were deep. Will truly had to be the weakest in their ranks if he was treated this way, reckless even as they didn't care if he was dead or not.

To be fair, amongst his kind if a siren didn't appear for a few weeks or month they just assumed that they got killed, not looking after them or anything.

"Your wounds are deep. You're gonna get yourself killed if you loose more of your blood." He scoffed angrily as if scolding a child.

"Let me help." He offered after a moment of silence and internal debating, his gaze and tone softening only a little.

It was Will's turn to scoff a bit, bandaging a particularly nasty wound on his upper arm. Some flesh was missing, looking like the hippogriff had bitten the chunk off. "Why would you want to help?" He asked, looking up at the siren for a brief moment. The curious look in his eye had spread out, causing his eyebrows to furrow slightly, despite the deeper gash above one of his eyebrows. "Weren't you the one who almost killed me to escape this morning?"

Despite pointing that out, something nagged at him. The key word he had said was *almost*. Even though the siren had pinned him down, baring his fangs, preparing to strike and steal the key...he hadn't. That was the one part Will had glossed over as he was processing the whole event.

Axenus had the opportunity and means to kill him, but he didn't. Maybe it was only because of the facts Will had spelled out for him, but it was

still worth noting as he steadily stared at the siren. "You...you didn't though." He said plainly, the slight bite of sarcasm from his previous statement gone. Will couldn't make sense of it; any other creature wouldn't have listened to reason, they would have much rather killed him purely because he was the cause of their capture. Axenus was an outlier, in more ways than one. "Why didn't you kill me?" The question escaped him before he could stop it. It was a pointless question; in the grand scheme of things, it truly didn't matter. By this point, he had stopped bandaging and cleaning his wounds, engrossed in his thoughts as well as the conversation. The blood was still flowing though, and he had the vague thought that the siren was right and he'd die if he didn't stem the bleeding. That point was made obvious as the dizziness and cold from blood loss further set in. He knew he didn't have much time to debate this; at this rate, he'd

probably die before this conversation was finished. He did his best to stand, stumbling and swaying all the while. His knees almost buckled under his weight, and he winced at the pain from almost every square inch of his body. Eventually, he made his way to the cage, limping as he did so; the way he saw it, even if it *was* another trap, it was either die being a pathetic monster, or die in a way that might at least free *someone* from this damned ship.

The truth was, Axenus didn't know why he kept the human alive. He didn't want to admit to himself that he somehow couldn't. On the inside it made the siren even a little furious.

"The look in your eyes says it all." He said, watching the human from his cell as he stopped to patch himself up.

"Why would I waste energy to kill someone who's already dead and accepts their fate without even

fighting for it." He said, his eyes showing a hint of the pity he might've felt for this human.

"Let me help you." Axenus held out his hand through the bars, his tone of voice and eyes holding not an ounce of his previously mischievous smile, showing that he was absolutely serious.

The change of demeanor from the siren threw Will off slightly as he continued to stumble to the cage. Every movement caused his breath to become more labored, blood spattering the floor, adding to the plethora of old stains the wood had soaked.

"With the work I'm forced to do, I'd be a bigger idiot than Erik to *not* accept my fate." He retorted, shaky hands reaching into his pocket for the key. It took a second, but he eventually got it out, although he almost dropped it before he could put it in the lock. "You see what

happened to me, the conditions I'm stuck under; wouldn't *you* accept your death if you knew it was looming in the corners, waiting for the opportunity to take you away from such a worthless existence?"

He opened the door, making sure to shut it again before falling to his knees. His vision blurred even more, the strength to get up failing him. It took most of his energy just to keep breathing, to continue this conversation. "Besides, I deserve it." His words were weak, quiet even compared to his normal volume. "It ain't like I have a family, no one on this damn ship respects me *or* my work."

He kept staring at the floor, seeing some water starting to mix in with the blood puddles around him. Where was it coming from? A shaky hand went to his face, rubbing his eye. He was...crying? When was the last time he'd cried? It didn't matter, he had to pull himself together. He took a

few deep breaths, struggling to calm his emotions. This wasn't good; he couldn't lose his control over the only factor he *had* control over in his life. He started blinking, fighting back the tears that betrayed him. Why was he even crying? He was right about death, his perspective of it, so why did it hurt to simply state facts? "But...it doesn't mean I want to die..." His words were barely audible now, barely even a whisper. His throat felt tight, along with his chest. The fear of death was natural, but only became apparent whenever he thought it was *actually* going to claim him. "I don't...I don't want to die..."

He stepped away from the bars, letting Will enter and lock his cell again before he broke down on his knees, seemingly all his troubled thoughts leaving his mouth until even tears started to dwell up in the human's eyes as he quietly whispered his true wish. As the human was weeping, Axenus got on his knees beside him,

seemingly all the rage and anger gone. What remained of him was a calm expression as he tilted his head lightly at the sobbing human. This human was truly to be pitied.

Without much more thinking he gently took the human's chin as he was sobbing his last words before he leaned in for a kiss, closing his eyes as he entwined his tongue with the human's and gently sucking on it for a moment as he held Will close by the chin.

"This should ease the pain for a while." He murmured softly after he'd parted his lips from him again, looking into the human's eyes before he gently took the human's arm by the wrist where a deep gash was bleeding. The siren scanned it up and down shortly before he tugged Will's arm a little more to him, closing his eyes as an almost snake like tongue slid out of his mouth, grazing upwards the deep gash and picking up

most of the trails of blood, only leaving a itchy buzzing feel behind as his wound began to close and heal slowly.

Still staring at the ground, Will kept crying quietly. He hated this; he hated looking this weak, *feeling* this weak. He truly was pathetic, wasn't he? His thoughts went around in that circle before he felt Axenus take his chin. He looked up at the siren, all pretense of his stone facade crumbled away. His eyes shone with the fear of death, and grief from events long past by now. When the siren had kissed him, he felt mild surprise through the sea of emotions; almost like a small lifeboat in the middle of a terrible storm. The clouds parted some for him, his mind becoming hazy as he leaned into the kiss some, welcoming the siren's tongue with his own. The sharp pains from the bruises and gashes seemed to dull the longer the kiss went on, and he felt gratitude for the small reprieve.

He met Axenus's eyes after the siren had pulled away, mild confusion mixed with gratitude. He gave a slow nod, wincing some from the dull ache as Axenus took his arm to examine. Stumbling, he kept watching as the siren pulled him towards himself to closer examine some of the deep gashes on his arms. He *was* startled as he saw the serpent tongue flicker out of Axenus's mouth, shooting towards the wound, but shivered some as the tongue grazed up the wound.

If he had the energy to, he'd probably go to scratch at the now itchy wound. A slight burning filled the wound, the sensation mixing with the same sort of tingling from when his limbs would fall asleep while he did. However, the gratitude in his eyes changed to a slight look of amazement as the wound slowly started to close. "Remarkable..." He breathed, watching as the siren continued his work. He hadn't seen healing like this; even the creatures they caught

specifically *for* healing didn't do it quite this...intimately. With every lick, a small shiver went up his spine, but at this point he wasn't sure if it was from the pain, the feeling of healing, or something else entirely. However, despite the healing, the inky darkness from the sea returned to try and steal away his vision. He looked back up at Axenus, eyes half lidded. The color seemed to flicker; the deep rich brown color giving way to a sky blue color every few milliseconds.

"Thank you," he muttered, half of a smile crossing his lips. "No one...no one's really helped me in years..." After that, the darkness overtook his vision, his head slumping down towards his chin as he lost consciousness from the blood loss.

His tongue caressed each wound, each gash that pierced the human skin, going carefully over Wills whole body. However, as he was just done healing his arms and shoulder, the human lost his

consciousness. But even in the human's sleep, Axenus continued his work.

The last wound he flicked was a deep bloody gash right across the human's chest. Once he was done he couldn't but rest his face on the human's soft and warm skin. Axenus wasn't sure why he did that. He could've escaped with the human now being unconscious, but somehow, all Axenus wanted was to stay close to this human, feeling kind of drawn to him.

Axenus couldn't figure out what it was, but all he felt was the warmth of Will as he was laying beneath him. Healing had cost Axenus some of his own power as well. And so he laid himself on top of the human, wanting to feel his warmth, hear his heartbeat, not being able to explain why suddenly all those things mattered to the siren. He didn't have to energy to think about it further because even Axenus now drifted off into

slumber, falling asleep with his head resting on the humans upper chest, keeping Will close.

While unconscious, Will's skin began to ripple again. Now that he was unconscious, he couldn't continue exerting the effort he had been using in maintaining the facade he'd grown used to. Pale skin gave way to a slightly tanner color, as if he spent all his days in the sun. The brown hair lightened, turning turning to the color of straw as it covered his freckled face. Muscle from years of hard work became better defined, clearly visible through the tears in his shirt. Despite the change, the man continued to lay unconscious, both the injuries and subsequent healing pushing him to the point of exhaustion.

However, he eventually opened his eyes. He stared at the ceiling, his head swimming as his brain tried to put the pieces together. He

remembered being called to the deck, going onto land...

He blinked again, taking a shakey breath. The hippogriff. The poor creature was just guarding her kids, as any good mother would do for her young. However, despite the dull ache of a sore body, he didn't *feel* any wounds. Had he died? No, he still felt warm, felt the weight of his body, but also an additional weight. He glanced down a bit, finally noticing Axenus laying on him. His heart stopped for a second, a slight spark of panic shooting up his spine. However, he also noticed the siren was asleep, watching the slow rise and fall of his shoulders as he slept. He looked back up at the ceiling, trying to think. He had no idea what time it was, and no idea if someone would come down to yell at him to get back to work. Despite these factors, he didn't make any moves to get up. As strange as it was, and as much as he didn't want to admit it, he *liked* this. Axenus had

healed him, and *hadn't* taken the opportunity to escape. Hesitantly, he put his hand on the siren's head. He was still getting his bearings, still trying to pull himself together. Because of this, he hadn't thought of changing back to the appearance everyone had seen and known.

As much as Axenus didn't like to admit it, he had slept peaceful on Will. The human warmed his cold body, his breathing going slow but he got quickly woken up by the feel of a hand on his head.

Shifting a little, Axenus took a moment until he looked up at Will, or so he thought that it was Will. His eyes widened into a little shock as his mind began to recognize that this person beneath him wasn't like Will at all. He seemed more muscular, his hair being paler yet his skin was more tanned.

A low growl resonated in his chest before he quickly put his sharp claws to the stranger's throat, his ocean blue eyes piercing through him in confusion. How could the human escape without waking the siren? Even better, how had another human been able to take Will's place? And why did this man still smell exactly like Will?

"What is this? Who are you?" He growled at the intruder.

When Axenus had put his claws to Will's throat, he felt his heart pick up the pace. This siren was confusing; why was he asking who he was.

"Hm?" The noise came out of him just as he finally noticed the blonde hair. "Oh...oh fuck." He muttered, his eyes fixating on the lock of hair before closing. He took a few deep breaths, then his skin rippled again. Back to being pale and thin, back to brown hair, and his eyes opened to reveal they were once again a deep brown. He

stared at the siren, his face blank as he debated with himself. Axenus had seen him shift, had seen his *true* form. He owed an explanation of what he was at the *least*. At the same time though, it had never gone well explaining what he was. Always seen as untrustworthy, or fetishized, it was never any fun. Despite that though, he took a deep breath.

"Well...I guess the cat's out of the bag." His words were simple, yet held a sense of defeat, or even shame. He tried to meet the siren's eyes, wanting to make eye contact as he said his next words. "I'm...not really a human; just a shapeshifter."

He kept staring at the human until Will seemed to notice a string of hair. As the human closed his eyes, Axenus felt the skin and body beneath him change.

In one way, Axenus felt somehow betrayed even? He didn't understand why it hurt but he was now even more curious, fascinated even.

"What are you doing on this ship then? Couldn't you just leave?" He asked, not taking his claws off the human's throat

Will gave a bit of a snort, looking to the wall. "It ain't that simple," he said softly. "Captain knows, and he knows what I did. When I showed up at a town he'd docked at, he said he wouldn't catch and sell me if I helped him."

His throat felt tight, his eyes glued to the wall. He hated thinking about this, about his debt, but he owed it to Axenus. Besides, if he *did* eventually die doing his job, at least one being would know. Maybe, even hopefully remember him.

"Shape-shifters are apparently a popular sale. A being who can look like your wildest fantasies. Humans are disgusting." There was some anger in his voice, his stare hardening as he kept glaring at the wall. "He said if he died by me, the crew would throw me in a cage too. Apparently there's other trade ships like this one, the crew know they're supposed to take all these creatures to a new one if he dies."

Finally, he looked back over to Axenus, the hard look in his eyes softening some. "Besides, I saw how they treated everyone down here. As much as everyone hates me and fights me, I'm a lot kinder than the captain and his crew. I can at least protect everyone from those bastards if I do my work; it's still fucked up, they still get sold, but at least it's one less moment of torture."

Humans were disgusting. Rotten creatures with his believes only seeming to prove right at the

words of this shapeshifter. It seemed as if the Two had more in common than Axenus had expected.

His cold eyes studied Will as he spoke, his words making him even more furious.

"Why don't you help me then?" He spoke after a moment, taking away the claws from his throat to place his hand on his collarbone.

"Once I am out of this prison, I will make sure that nobody on this ship will stay alive. If you let me go I will spare yours and the freedom you seek will be yours once again." His words were convincing, a small grin playing on his lips as he spoke with determination.

Will studied the siren quietly, taking in the offer. He'd only ever *dreamt* about his freedom for a long time, and now the opportunity to take it back was presenting itself. It as if his fingers

were just barely grazing something so tangible, and yet...

"I...I can't." He said simply, sighing as he looked away. The stone mask again crumbled slightly, the disappointment he felt made plain by the way his eyebrows furrowed. "If your plan fails, and they find out, I'll be sold off. Worse yet, these poor creatures would get abused again." His words softened as he spoke, closing his eyes. "I've failed a lot of people in my life, I don't want to fail anyone else."

He thought about the farm where he grew up, the fun he used to have. It felt like a lifetime ago now; it was a place he could never return to, no matter how much he wanted to. "I can't let more innocent lives get hurt or even killed, especially if I'm the only one standing in the way."

The words of the human let few low clicking sounds ramble in the back of his throat as his gaze darkened a little.

"Do I look like I care about who you failed in your past?" He asked him a bit more stern, a mild grumble in the back of his voice.

"You can't change it. Why wallowing in self pity when a changing opportunity presents itself." His hands pressure increased slightly as the human's words of stupidity seemed to spark a sort of anger in him. He never understood other creatures. Sirens were made to take care of themselves and few in their pack as a relationship of survival without showing much emotions such as pity.

"Why does it matter if I take this opportunity or not?" Will snapped back, a calm sort of frustration overtaking the disappointment.

"You're right, I can't change the past. I can,

however, try and atone for mistakes that killed people." He stared hard at the siren, trying to keep his composure.

"Not only that, but why do you care?" He asked, hardly leaving an opening for Axenus to speak up. "What makes me special enough to be spared your wrath? If you *truly* didn't give a damn about anyone else, you could've killed me and snatched the key ten times over by now. So tell me, what makes me so fucking special?"

"Because you are **mine**." He growled his last words as he bowed in further towards the human, eyes fixed on him as his own anger seemed to spark even more.

"You are my prey and I won't let anyone take you away from me or harm you because I will be the one to take your life when the time comes. And noone else." He spoke slowly, his words underlined with a growl as he kept the human

beneath himself fixed in place. His words were the truth. Will belonged to Axenus, even if he was only meant as a bait for him, but this didn't change a thing that this human was his prey. Yet he didn't mentioned, didn't want to admit that there might be more behind his reasoning.

Will stared back at the siren, taking in his words. He hated to admit, a small shiver went up his spine as Axenus growled that Will was *his* prey and no one else's, still pinning him down to the hard wooden floor. He felt his heart pound against his ribcage, trying to figure out if it was from the adrenaline, or something else entirely. Either way, he let out a shaky breath.

"So you're just waiting until I refuse to accept death, right?" He asked, recalling their earlier conversation. "Not as fun if I don't go out kicking and screaming?" He searched the siren's eyes, trying to gage his reaction. "It ain't gonna happen

Axenus. Not only cause it'll happen no matter how hard I fight, but also because the one thing I've learned on this damn ship is if you show emotions, they'll eat you alive.

He took a moment as he listened to the words of this human in a mild surprise as the human voiced his opinion.

"I will make you kick and scream, no matter how much you try to hide your emotions." He snapped back at him growling a little, determined to keep the human beneath him.

"Humans are all the same. In the end it doesn't matter if you are none of them, because you already act like them." His gaze only changed slightly as he spat those words filled with disgust.

"Well, bring it on then." A slight smirk crossed his face, as brief as the moment was. He didn't know

why he said this; he hadn't felt this cocky since he was a teen, but he couldn't help it. "If you're really gonna make me kick and scream, sounds like a fun time."

However, as soon as Axenus said he acted like humans, his expression darkened a little. Gone was the smirk, the spark in his eye. "Tough talk from the siren who fell for bait." He said flatly, trying to ignore the tension he felt in the air. "I only act like them so im not the one inside a cage." He was playing with a time bomb and he knew it; but if he was gonna go out, he might as well have fun.

He gave him a smirk back once he seemed to challenge the siren with it's power. That was the spark he wanted to see. Seemed like there was some life in him left afterall...

Yet he seemed even more amused for a moment when he saw Will's gaze darken, his own smile

vanishing as he spoke about how the siren had let himself be fooled.

A low growl rumbled in his chest as he grabbed the human by the throat, pinning his head down to the floor, his again deep blue cold eyes piercing through him.

"You will see how I can make you scream. Just listen closely..." He spoke before he leaned down to his ear as he began to gently hum a melody. It was none Will was familiar with, but it sounded sad, filled with rage as his humming grew a little in volume. Immediately, the human would be more and more entranced the more Will was forced to listen, sinking deeper into the trance where he would soon be forced to meet his worst nightmares.

The serious expression didn't falter at the growl emanating from the siren. Rather, he just kept glaring, not reacting to Axenus pinning him onto

the floor. He met his eyes without fear, not revealing anything beyond the anger he felt.

However, as the siren began to hum, he couldn't help but scoff internally. After all this, *this* was his plan? However, he quickly fell under the spell of the siren's song, feeling himself falling, falling...



When Will had opened his eyes, he was in bed. The sunlight streamed through an open window, allowing the evening summer breeze to blow through. *Huh?* His eyebrows furrowed in confusion. This room was familiar, but why?

Wait, is this... The thought trailed off, hearing the familiar sound of cows on the dairy farm. He felt his heart leap to his throat. Maybe it was all a really weird and vivid dream. Maybe he never was on a trade ship, maybe everything was still okay!

Without thinking, he ran outside, trying to find someone.

"Hey pa!" He shouted, but once he was on the porch, he froze in his tracks. No...no he wasn't home at all. It wasn't all a horrible dream. He saw this, because he saw himself sneaking to the barn with other kids from the village, the young teen snickering all the while. *No...* He thought, panic setting in. *No no no...*

He wanted to run, to stop the boy, but his legs were frozen to the ground as he saw his younger self shift into a cow and walk into the barn. He felt his chest tighten, his body began to shake as he helplessly watched the past like a horrible movie.

3...2...1... Almost as if on cue, smoke began to flow out of the windows, and quickly the barn came ablaze. He covered his ears, collapsing to his knees and squeezing his eyes shut as the

children screaming echoed through the air. Then, he felt something weird, as if something went through him. He looked up, and saw the silhouette of a man taking off to the barn, one who had deep brown eyes and hair to match. "Pa..." Will wanted to shout after him, pull him back, *something*. All he could do was whisper to him, but he knew the man didn't hear him. He watched as his pa ran into the barn, coming out with two children underneath his arms. One was a little girl, the other was Will. Pa set both children on the ground, going to run back in before the younger Will grabbed his pant leg. "Please don't pa..." Will whispered, the words matching up exactly to the lips of his younger self. However, pa shook his head, running back into the burning barn. Will squeezed his eyes shut, the sound of the barn's structure collapsing ringing in his ears.



"I'm...sorry..." While deep in his trance, Will mumbled those words. Tears were streaming down his face, his eyes vacant as he relived the trauma all over again. "I'm sorry Pa...I'm sorry..."

The man's words were small, but carried the guilt and anguish of what his mind's eye was showing him. His body replicated the trembling he felt in the trance, shaking underneath Axenus. His heartbeat was racing, and he even was hyperventilating a little. "I didn't mean to kill them...I didn't mean to kill you...Pa I'm so sorry..."

The siren was certain that the human would be confronted with his biggest nightmare by now, feeling how the human trembled beneath him as he still hummed his mesmerizing melody into the boy's ear.

While still humming the melody of his sad siren song, Axenus lifted his head to watch Will's

expression of horror with his eyes heavily diluted. The siren felt as if he was enjoying it until the boy began to mutter with lot's of tears beginning to stream from his cheeks.

It took the siren by surprise as he kept humming, his impression softening a little. Why felt it suddenly less enjoyable? He'd seen humans weep before as they begged for mercy once they saw Axenus dragging down one of them. Why did it almost sting to see Will like this.

Axenus found himself unable to continue his song as he stopped to let the human slowly awaken out of his trance and the sheer horror that came with it.

With that he pushed himself off the human, his eyes resting in a softened and pitiful glance on him for a short moment before he felt his fists clench. This human seemed to drive him crazy.

Why wasn't he himself. Why wasn't he able to kill him. It felt so frustrating to him.

Letting himself drop onto the nearby bench with his shoulders and back slumped forward, he didn't even spare the human another glance through his white silver hair. He didn't have the strength to do so.

"Leave." It was only one world, but it was a sign of his anger and his mercy. He let the human live once more, letting his prey live for another day without really knowing why.

Will was still kneeling on the porch to his childhood home, on his hands and knees, still sobbing his apologies when he felt the falling sensation again. The world around him became hazy and dark, only brightening once he woke up. He blinked a few times, not noticing the tears, nor Axenus's expression. He felt clammy and cold, sweat causing his clothes to stick to him

uncomfortably. When Axenus pushed off of him, backing off, he sat up straight. He didn't meet his eyes, still desperately trying to calm his rapid, shallow breaths.

Why did he provoke the siren? Why did he do such a stupid, *stupid* thing? Well, cause all he did was stupid things; the barn was all the proof he needed for that. It's just for once, his stupidity landed on himself instead of others.

Leave. Axenus's voice pulled Will out of his thoughts, his attention snapping back to the siren sitting on the bench. He was slumped forward, just staring ahead. Will took a couple more deep breaths, not trusting his legs quite yet. Eventually however, he managed to stand. His legs shook as he walked to the door, walking through and barely remembering to lock the door. He twisted the key in the lock, then retreated to his corner.

He didn't move when Will got up to leave the cage, not even being able to look at him. He only heard the sound of ruffled fabrics as they boy seemed to curl up on his stag of blankets.

Pa..I'm sorry...

The siren was wondering what deep dark memories had been brought back to life in the boy's mind. Axenus never had a father, nore a mother. They were gone, leaving Axenus as a young inexperienced siren in the great depths of the sea. He had learned to survive, to become a ruthless killer who was feared even amongst his kind.

Different feels were dragging him down. Human feelings he never felt... but all because of him? Axenus was confused about himself, unsure, but since when had he started to have doubts? Doubts were the thing that would get you killed in the depths in the wrong moment. Axenus had

never doubted himself. Why now? The storm of racing thoughts went on as he only stared onto the wooden floor.

Without thinking, Will backed himself tightly into the corner, hugging his knees to his chest. His forehead rested on them, his shoulders still shaking some as deep sobs wracked his body. He'd been doing good, great even, at keeping that night in a big box, far away from any conscious memories. He hadn't relived it so vividly in years. The poor man looked as though he were making an effort to be as small as possible. Not long after, sunlight started to stream through the cracks above them. Will didn't pay it any mind, just continuing to cry.

"The hell do you think you're doing boy?" The deep baritone of the captain's voice resonated in the area, causing Will to jolt upright. He quickly started to wipe his face to hide the evidence of

his tears. He quickly tried getting to his feet, feeling the panic bubble in his chest. His mind raced, quickly going over every single thing he'd done wrong.

"Sorry sir." Will said, his voice just a hair above a whisper. He didn't know why the captain was mad, but it was easier just to apologize instead of asking questions; especially when the captain was in this mood.

"These filthy fucking creatures need to be fed still! Their cages need to be cleaned! And you're sitting in the damn corner, crying like a fucking pussy." Spittle flew from the captain's lips, but Will didn't notice as he tried getting himself under control. He was already in an emotionally volatile state; the last thing he needed was to react to the captain. He went to go respond, but the captain cut him off. "If you don't knock it off, I'll add more time to your debt. I swear, I think

it'd be easier just to sell you off. Your kind are just good for nothing liars and theives, always changing forms for whenever you need something." Will didn't move after the captain finished his tirade, only giving a quiet "won't happen again sir" as the captain walked to the stairs. He didn't move until he heard the door to the basement slammed shut, and even then he still stared at the ground. He wanted to chase after him, wanted to beat the shit out of the man, but instead he went to the supply closet, getting rations for all the beasts down below.

With the sounds of deep sobs Axenus somehow found himself unable to rest. He laid down on the bench facing against the wall of the cell and closing his eyes to try and rest.

The siren opened his eyes again at the sound of heavy footsteps, hearing the captain's voice bark through the belly of the ship. He looked over his

shoulder sitting up lightly, his cold gaze studying Will with his tear stained face and the captain scolding him.

He watched Will then go off to only return with Axenus's ration. He only looked at his food for a second before his eyes settled back on Will. His gaze only seemed to soften for a split second at the false face of the shape shifter before a pissed off snarl formed on his lips, only for Axenus to turn away from him, laying back down on the bench and purposefully showing the human his back. He couldn't explain why he was feeling so weird around this human. He made him weak. Axenus wanted to avoid him but at the same time he wanted to be close. His thoughts began to spiral again in his internal confusion as he pulled his legs only an inch tighter to himself.

Will made his way around the cages, slowly calming himself down. He couldn't afford to lose

his head; not now. With every snarl or snap of jaws, he became a little more blank, suppressed his emotions a little more. By the time he'd reached Axenus's cage, it was back to its normal blank slate.

"Here," He said softly, but blinked. He thought he'd seen the expression on the siren's face soften, but it was too quick, maybe just his eyes playing tricks on him. "You...you should eat." He had to clear his throat while talking, his voice still a bit broken from the sobs. Despite doing his best to suppress his emotions, he still felt a pang as Axenus snarled and turned away from him. Sighing, Will gently placed the plate on the ground inside of the cage, then went back to the supply closet.

As he put a hand on the handle, he paused. He just...*why* did it hurt to see Axenus turn away from him? The siren just pulled up the most

painful event in his life with ease; not only that, but he'd almost killed him plenty of times now. Again, the word *almost* appeared before the fact. Almost, almost, almost. That one word always caught him off guard when thinking about Axenus. However, none of that explained why he felt that pang. They weren't friends or anything, even if they had been in close proximity. The image of Axenus pinning him to the wall by the arm came into his mind's eye, and he quickly started shaking his head. Nope, no, wasn't going down that road.

He continued to open the closet, grabbing the mop and the bucket, hoping maybe the monsters attacking him would take his mind off of such a strange topic of thought.

The hunger gnawed at the siren. His portion was small already, not coming even close to satisfy his hunger, but healing Will had made it even

worse. He could smell the reeking fish in the bowl, making his stomach growl, but at the same time, Axenus wasn't thinking about taking it.

He was determined not to take it, keeping at least this sort of pride as a siren not to be dependent on a human he was unable to kill. For a moment he forgot that Will wasn't even human. Axenus wanted to look at him again. It felt odd to turn away from him like this.

Something inside didn't want to. Some part of him wanted to keep him close as his prey, protecting him from all the other scavengers who tried to lay their hands on this man.

But Axenus didn't move, despite his stomach rumbling, despite this odd stinging feel. He felt the cold air on his lower back where the fabrics had partly been ripped open by his sharp back fin. Having human skin was nasty in Axenus's

eyes. In this state he came closer to being equal to them than he ever wanted to admit.

Taking his cleaning supplies, Will decided to start in the furthest part away from Axenus. He didn't know what his emotions were; all he knew was he didn't want to think about them. They were weird, and the fact he couldn't put a name to them frustrated him. He didn't like Axenus turning away, and didn't like the pang he felt when he did so. So, he started mopping the floor, letting the growling, snarling, and gnashing of teeth fill his head and drown out his thoughts.

He had become so focused in his cleaning, that he didn't hear it when the basement door opened again. He didn't hear the two crew members stumble down, nor smell the alcohol on their breaths from day drinking. The two were snickering, telling each other be quiet as they walked around, as if looking for something.

Finally, it seemed they found what they were looking for; the pile of blankets Will called a bed. Taking out a pocket knife, they kept giggling and hushing each other as they began tearing his blankets to shreds, mumbling about how the captain wouldn't care anyway. After all, this loser never spent time on the deck, so a harmless prank wouldn't bother him any.

"Hey, what're you doing?" After a little bit, Will had finally caught a glimpse of the duo standing over his blankets, having made his way closer to his corner. The duo looked over at him, mock surprise on their face as they said "oops." Then, they just laughed, grabbing chunks of the torn pieces before leaving. "Thanks for the material!" They called out, waving as they went up the stairs. "We needed it to mend some of our clothes!" The basement door slammed shut once again, leaving Will to stare at the damage done. He didn't say anything, nor reveal any emotion at

the action; this wasn't anything new. If anything, the captain probably put the idea in those guys' heads, a pseudo punishment for earlier. Taking a deep breath, he just gathered the remaining material, taking it to the supply closet in case he found supplies to mend the pieces together.

Keep your cool, He thought, closing the doors and walking back to his mop. *It's not much longer, then I can leave.* He picked up the handle, and just continued to clean. He knew the ramifications of if he decided to fight back, to lash out; he'd be caged and sold to whatever human decided they wanted a pet shapeshifter. The debt may be long, but being sold would be his whole life considering his luck.

Axenus had himself turned around again, sinking deeper and deeper into his spiral until he smelt the alcohol in the air. He turned around to look over his shoulder to see the two men, giggling

and shushing themselves as they took a knife to tear the blanket into pieces. Axenus didn't bother to say any, his stare only darkening as the two men continued.

Maybe Will deserved it. He made the siren weak, confusing him. Somehow the feel from his actions didn't agree once more with his guts, twisting at the thought of Will once more. He was sick of it so he decided to lay back down, still not touching his food.

Will continued to mop up, just focusing on the floor until he came close to Axenus's cage. He glanced at the uneaten food, giving a bit of a sigh as he stopped mopping.

"You need to eat," He said, running a hand through his hair. "I'm not gonna get in trouble just because you want to sit and pout." His words came out a bit harsher than he intended, and debated apologizing. However, he couldn't bring

himself to; if Axenus was going to give him the silent treatment, Will should do the same. So, he continued to mop up. Unfortunately, the exchange just brought back his confusing feelings.

Why did he even care if the siren ate? Obviously the man was upset about *something*, and it wasn't any of Will's business. He felt that pang from before, and grit his teeth. No, no he shouldn't be feeling *any* guilt over Axenus's feelings. Who cared if the siren was ignoring him now? Who cared that he might not have a friend anymore? He sure didn't, he was completely fine with it! He didn't care one single bit if the siren hated his guts now!

...But what if I do? The question popped into mind as he continued to mop the floor, but he shook it away. No, no he didn't give a single damn. The wood from the mop handle creaked as his grip

tightened, his hard gaze staring at the floor. He didn't care. He didn't care, he didn't care, he didn't care! The part of him that questioned it? That said maybe he did? It could go to hell with the rest of the crew. He didn't need any friends.

"I do not need your pity." He spoke with a low growl, not even baring himself to look at Will. Axenus was frustrated. Frustrated about his hunger. Frustrated about his situation. Frustrated about his chaos of feelings that he felt and never had before. He continued to remain in his place, not moving an inch or giving signs that he would eat his food.

Will paused as Axenus growled, then scoffed as he continued to mop; his movements a bit more aggressive than needed.

"It's not fucking pity," he grumbled, the mop handle once again creaking under his grip. "It's self preservation and just basic decency. You

aren't so important that I need to pity you." His words were filled with venom, and the wooden mop handle finally had had enough. With a loud snap, the handle finally gave in to the shapeshifter's tight grip, the top half clattering to the ground.

"Great." He mumbled, leaning down to pick up the broken piece.

Something inside the siren snapped alongside with the sound of the wooden broom snapping. Axenus had enough of this and those weird feelings.

"Don't you be be the one to start with decency!" He growled low and deeply as he sat himself up to glare at the human.

"You are the one responsible for my situation, the reason I have been captured. You are the reason why everything is a mess..." He spoke, his

growl growing louder as he approached the bars, approached Will slowly.

"You are the reason why I feel myself growing weak in your presence. I can't even bear to look at you longer without my chest tightening." He spoke with anger as he gripped onto the metal bars, spitting those words in clear frustration as his gaze seemed to not be filled with just only rage, but with a sort of sadness. Sorrow even that was barely noticeable beneath his tone of voice. Yet his presence seemed still intimidating, his glare cold and filled with rage.

"It drives me mad that I can't find myself to be able to just end your pathetic little life." He hissed his last words, yet now the tenderness in his voice and eyes was only a little more evident before it seemed to harden again, his deep blue eyes staring the human down.

While Axenus ranted, Will felt his own frustration begin to build up. However, underneath the frustration was confusing; he made the siren feel weak? He wanted to ask about that, to get some clarification, but with the last statement he had had enough.

"And have you ever stopped to think maybe I didn't *want* to be your fucking bait?" He asked, stalking towards the bars. "Maybe that I *hate* being in near death situations on a regular basis? As much as I try to think I'm not in a cage like you, I am!" The more his emotions got out of control, the more the man's eyes changed, but he didn't seem to notice or care.

"Maybe I hate how I feel about you too, you know!" He added, not giving the siren room to speak as he continued his own rant. "Maybe having someone pin me to a fucking wall, staring in my eyes and breathing on my fucking neck

makes me feel weird too! I don't give a flying damn if your eyes look like the ocean, or how strong you are, or even how I can still smell the salt of the sea in your hair; you just...ugh."

As he ranted, the volume was still low, but also seething. It was true; he hated how he felt about the siren. He hated how he felt unsure of his own feelings.

"I hate that I can't tell if you're being genuine." He added softly, looking down and turning to walk away. "You make me feel special, like I'm worth something...then the next you're betraying me, trying to kill me, or even bring up how I killed my pa."

His words grew quieter and quieter, until he just stopped talking. While his words were true, he was frustrated that he spoke so freely about his emotions. Frustrated and self loathing, the

shapeshifter curled up in his corner, shifting uncomfortably from the lack of blankets.

He listened to the human rant, dumping all his anger and feelings onto Axenus like he had done just a second ago. Will had left the siren standing behind the bars in sheer confusion. His mind had to process all of what Will had just said about him.

It was obvious now that Will felt drawn to Axenus in the same way he did. He had expressed to spark this situation in the human, to make him trust Axenus, but hearing the human say all of this into his face along with his last words pierced his chest like a harpune.

For a moment, the anger out of his face had shifted into softness, confusion and then... realization. He huffed to himself after he'd caught himself again, going back into the cell to curl up into a corner, arms pulled close to his

chest, grumbling as he tried to calm all his thoughts.

He kept himself silent for some time, uncomfortable silence. Yet his gaze always felt drawn towards this man, who had also curled up on the ground now that he had no more blankets to rest himself on.

"You look pathetic sleeping like this." He spoke quietly, looking over to Will. Again, the siren felt something he now recognized as pity for the man. He wanted to wrap him into his arms, protect him from all the danger and from everyone who dared to take him away from him.

"Come to me. Let us suffer together." He offered after another moment of silence and consideration, his hand held out towards the human, remaining seated on the ground. His blue eyes were honest, not holding a glint of mischief.

Will would be able to tell that the siren meant no harm to him.

At first, Will hadn't heard the siren's offer. He was too busy uncomfortably shifting in his spot, unable to find a single comfortable position. The first one, his hip hit the wood in an awkward way that made it ache, but then the next one strained his neck. Despite all the tossing and turning, he welcomed the discomfort. It was something to take his mind off of what had just happened. However, pretty soon the words finally clicked in his head. He readjusted for the fourth-or, was it the fifth?-time, laying on his side to look at the siren. He opened his mouth to protest, but something looked...different, in the way his eyes looked at him. They no longer looked as though they were studying him, searching for a weakness or opportunity; no, they looked...genuine. Despite noticing this, he gave a soft snort.

"Oh what? Did I graduate from prey to pet?" His mouth shot off before he could stop it, but instead of having the same bite from earlier, his tone was soft. He even found himself smirking slightly, a hint of amusement in his eyes as he kept looking at the siren. He gave a bit of a chuckle as he got to his feet, running a hand through his hair as he approached the cell door. Again with the key, and again with the soft *click* that was becoming more and more familiar to him. He stepped into the cell, quietly shutting the door behind him. Without a word, he slowly sat down next to the siren, A million questions were flying in his mind; why didn't he question this? Why did he *want* to be here? Despite the questions, he found himself slowly laying down next to the siren, his eyes heavy.

He kept quiet about the boy's statement, only chuckling at the note with a hint of a teasing smile as the man entered the cage with him,

seemingly trusting him enough to lay down besides him.

"You don't seem to bother given your reaction now, aren't you?" He chuckled a little before he went quiet again, his eyes scanning over the human as he'd laid down besides him.

"This doesn't really feel comfortable, does it?" He asked, trailing his hands over the man's side as Will's back had been facing him.

"Why won't you come closer?" He tilted his head lightly, his voice almost soft as his hand settled on the man's hip, feeling the warmth of his body radiating beneath the palm of his hand.

The faintest traces of a blush crossed Will's face when the siren pointed out the fact he didn't seem bothered, but he tried to shrug it off. "And what of it?" He asked, glancing over his shoulder.

"Would you rather me be bothered or something?"

However, the blush seemed to deepen a little as he felt Axenus's hand trace over his side, eventually resting on his hip. "I-I mean," he mumbled, his mind racing some. Even as a teen, he never spent the night next to someone. This was unfamiliar territory, and he wasn't sure how to react. Hesitantly, he scooted back a little, so his back was touching Axenus.

"Well...this is new." He said softly, trying to ignore the pounding of his heart, as well as some thoughts that cropped up uninvited.

He looked over to the human who only hesitantly had scooted closer to him, obviously a little flustered. Axenus rolled his eyes a little at the human, not understanding how he would decline his offer in such a way. He was well aware that he had threatened the human's life before, but

hadn't he made it obvious enough that he had no intention of hurting this human?

"You are still afraid of me aren't you..." Axenus looked at him, speaking softly before sighing a little. With ease he proceeded to wrap his arm around the human's stomach to scoop him up with ease into his arms, pulling Will in close to his chest, letting him rest on it.

"I will do you no harm..." He purred almost softly into the man's ear, resting his head back against the wooden wall, not letting go of the human. Somehow he felt drawn to this man in a strange way. Now Will was so close. He could smell him, hear his fluttering heart, feel his warmth. It was almost soothing to the siren to hold Will in his arms.

"I-I'm not afraid," Will protested, only to feel his heart quicken slightly more as Axenus pulled him closer. Even if this was new, it felt...good. It was

nice to feel close to someone else, especially after years of not so much as a hug. Without thinking much of it, he shifted himself a little bit, trying to settle himself a bit more comfortably.

"I just...never have been so close to someone I guess." He mumbled, finishing his statement. His eyes were getting heavier now; something about this brought him an ease that he hadn't felt before. "Even back before this hellhole, ya know? No one's ever...held me like this I guess?"

As he spoke, his voice started to trail off. The sense of comfort, even belonging perhaps...whatever he was feeling, it made him let his guard down a little for the first time since being stuck here, or even since the fire. Even if it was new, it was nice. It wasn't long after he finished his explanation that he drifted off into sleep, unconsciously snuggling closer to the siren

as his appearance changed once again to his true self.

He felt the human grow tired in his arms, Axenus keeping him close even when he watched in surprise as the human shifted in his sleep to his original form. While the human slept, Axenus felt himself being able to relax, knowing that Will was safe in his arms, but slowly things started to change.

The longer he looked at the sleeping man, the greater this feeling inside him became. It was almost like a primal instinct that made his hands shift to wander over the human's chest, slowly gliding lower before sneaking their way beneath his shirt. His fingers were now tracing over the human's bare skin.

He felt his breath growing hotter, heavier as he lowered his head, his breath against the human's neck. His eyes grew a little more hazey as he

seemed to get consumed by primal instinct of desire. He didn't know what he would do to this human, but he was his prey, so close and defenseless to devour. Axenus wanted to feel this human.

Despite not working on a farm for some time, Will's original form hadn't lost any of the tone from days of tending to animals and hauling hay. His chest was still quite muscular, as were his arms and everything else. His skin was tanned from summers working in the sun, hands still calloused from hard work. His chest rose and fell with each breath, although they seemed to speed up slightly as Axenus's hand traced over the bare skin on his chest.

He shifted slightly in his sleep, rolling a bit to be laying on his back, more of his body vulnerable to the siren. A heavy sleeper, he hadn't consciously noticed what was happening. Rather, it seemed

as though his body reacted all on its own, as if it wanted Axenus to continue on what he was doing.

Will was close... so close. With every moment Axenus felt himself get lost in this primal sense to claim this man as his prey. His breath was brushing deep and hot against Will's neck, his hands that partly regained their claws grazing over his skin, feeling over his body, his muscles and well tanned skin. His hands slowly pulled his shirt up as he felt his body grow hotter, legs closing in around the man in his arms a little.

With mild clicking sounds rambling in the back of his throat, he was determined to keep his prey close, to keep him safe, to feel him being safe in his arms.

Will's own breath hitched a bit as he felt Axenus's own breath hit his neck, once again shifting slightly as his shirt was pulled up. Despite still

sleeping, his body seemed to continue reacting on its own.

However, when Axenus had started the clicking sounds, Will's eyes opened a little, not noticing a light blush that had dusted itself on his face. Deep, green-ish blue eyes stared back up at Axenus, half lidded and still holding some tiredness. His heart thudded a bit against his ribs, feeling the siren's legs closed in around him. "What are you..." His voice was quiet, and a bit husky from the sleepiness. Despite asking him what he was doing, part of him didn't want him to stop. It felt nice; he hadn't realized how touch starved he was until now. He wanted to live in this moment for a little while longer, and made no movements to stop what was happening.

The siren promptly ignored the question of the human, being too occupied with following his desire to be close.

His one hand wandered up to settle on the man's chest, one of his fingers gliding over the man's nipple almost teasingly while his other hand rested on his abdomen. With breath hot against Wills neck, Axenus drew his tongue out to let it glide over the side of his neck slowly, savoring his taste, wanting more of him as he placed a soft kiss where he just licked across.

Further clicking sounds rumbled in the back of his throat. If Will would look into his eyes, he'd see that Axenus wasn't truly himself, seemingly twisted by desire.

"Mine..." He purred, whispering into the man's ear softly, his lips pressing against his ear lightly before he took Will's earlobe inbetween his teeth to bite on it a little

His heart continued to pound against his ribs as he stared up at the siren, trying to decipher the look in his eyes. Something was...off, and he

didn't know what. He shivered a bit as Axenus's hands continued to explore, a soft sigh resounding as the siren licked and kissed his neck.

"Mine" The siren had said, and Will shivered again as his teeth met with his earlobe. Why did such a small word cause so many emotions in Will? On one hand, he wanted to be snarky, say he wasn't property, but on the other hand...it made him feel safe. That was a feeling he hadn't had in years by this point; he'd never felt truly safe since he left his family's farm. So, instead of being snarky, he leaned further into Axenus. He brushed his hand against the siren's cheek, having it rest on the side of his jaw. A soft smile crossed his lips, as well as something else in his eyes as he stared back at the siren. He wasn't sure what direction this was going in, but he already enjoyed every moment so far.

His breath grew hot and heavy against Will's neck as his index and middle finger closed around the man's nipple, squeezing and teasing it further.

The siren's hazey ocean blue eyes settled back on Will as his hand now moved away from his nipple, gliding down a little before he took it away to place it on Will's chin. While his other hand remained on the human's abdomen, now slowly gliding beneath the line of his pants, his thumb slid over Will's soft lower and so kissable lips.

Before Axenus could stop himself, his legs tightened around Will a little as he pulled the human's chin up a little for a kiss over the shoulder. It was a hungry kiss from the siren, as if he had been starving, even sliding his tongue in between Will's lips to entwine his tongue with him. He needed this human, his little prey that only he was allowed to devour...

Will shuddered a bit, both from Axenus's breath and from him teasing his nipple. He met Axenus's eyes, his own half lidded still as his breath grew heavier. One of his hands rested on top of the siren's, both lingering underneath his pants. He gave a small, quiet moan as he felt a kiss on his shoulder, as well as the legs around him tightening a bit. He could feel something poke his back a bit, only fueling the desire that was steadily growing in him.

When the siren pulled his chin up, he didn't hesitate to kiss him back, the hunger in it being matched easily. How long had it been since he felt needed, or even wanted? He wasn't sure, but right know that itch was being scratched quite well.

Slolwy, the siren more and more lost his composure. He kissed the man as if he'd been starving, feeling the soft skin beneath the palm

of his hand while tasting him. He felt his growing hard on rubbing against this man, a clear sign of his desire. It felt so incredibly good.

After a moment of kissing, Axenus could've hold it any longer. He rolled over with this man, keeping kissing Will fiercely as he pinned him beneath him. Eyes only half lidded, he hovered now above Will like he did before, this time not an expression of coldness on his face, but hunger, desire...

"Will..." the siren whispered his name before he went in for another kiss. "Will..." He purred the human's name against his lips before going back to devouring his lips, his leg between the human's legs pressing against that human's crotch unintended. Axenus wanted this man. He needed Will...

Just as he was about to get even more passionate and about to get even further lost in

this feel of pleasure, something inside Axenus suddenly changed. It made him hold his kiss as he stopped and slowly parted his lips from Will's. Looking down at the human, it appeared as if Axenus had now only been realizing what he had done or was about to do.

A shade of pink spread across his cheeks as he tried to back off from the human in something that could've been interpreted as a feel of panic. Axenus did not understand. How could he fall for a mere human as a siren? It was unnatural, grotesque even to fall for his own prey. His once again ocean blue eyes stared at Will, yet a spark of passion remained in them.

"I- do not..." Axenus tried to form his words, but suddenly he had trouble forming the right ones, every sound of them seemingly stuck in his throat. He did not know what to say, but he also did not want to move away from Will, but he had

to. He could not show a sign his weakness in front of this human...

Will watched as Axenus pulled away from him, feeling a sort of pang hit him. He could see the slight look of shock on the siren's face, as the realization of what just happened had hit him. Despite wanting to play it cool, his insides were doing summersaults as Axenus's face turned pink.

"Ya know, I'm gonna get whiplash one of these days from all these mood changes ya do." He said, a slight, playful smirk on his lips. He could read the siren's body language pretty well, noticing the panic that seemed to fill his movements as he backed away. Will himself sat up a bit straighter, running a hand through his hair. A slight blush of his own had already appeared on his face, but either he didn't notice or care.

As Axenus tried to speak, Will gave a slight chuckle. He glanced over at the siren, rolling his shoulder into a shrug. "You're good, don't worry about it." He said, his tone light. "I know it probably was just a need to take out some sort of emotion on me; gotta say though, that was one of the more enjoyable ways someone could do that." He brought a knee to his chest, resting an arm on it as he gave a bit of a yawn. Despite how hard his heart was pumping, he was still a bit tired. Not only that, but he didn't want to reveal just *how* much he'd enjoyed their interaction. It probably was an urge that had nothing to do with him as a person after all; what's a shapeshifter to a siren other than a fancier term for "humanoid?"

Axenus didn't know what had overcome him to move him to his actions. Will just seemed so tempting, he had not been able to control his hands anymore.

The siren remained silent as he now sat up against the opposite wall of the human, watching Will as he drew his legs close to his body, burying his face half behind his arms on elbows, but soon he looked away. The siren could've bare to look at him, his gaze darkened a little. He did not know what to say to justify his actions, rather that he had just given into his deepest desires.

Will stayed still for a moment, trying to think of what the best move here would be. Sure, he didn't really *want* to leave the cage, but he knew it wouldn't be too long until the sun came up again, and someone would be down to cause shit. He rested his forehead on the heel of his hand, taking a deep breath.

"I can leave ya be if ya want," he murmured, glancing over at Axenus for a second. "You seem kinda stressed out, and I ain't one for wanting to cause stress." Despite saying this, he didn't *want*

to leave. He stood there for a moment, before sighing and letting his emotions get the better of him. Instead of leaving, he sat down next to Axenus, leaning his head back against the wall. His eyes were still heavy, and without much thought, he'd fallen asleep again. He ended up leaning against the siren a little bit, his head resting on his shoulder.

The siren had been certain that Will would leave. No human in the right mind would lay in the arms of a siren without being captivated by their song at first and then not flee at the given moment. Again, the siren did not plan to take his life in this moment, but yet he was still surprised that Will took his feelings into consideration.

Axenus only looked lowered his gaze, avoiding Will's gaze as he talked and he certainly had expected that he would leave, but instead, the human had surprised him once more by choosing

to stay, choosing to stay close to him. Once the siren felt the weight of his head on his shoulder, he did not dare to move. Axenus didn't wanted him to move. Once he heard the human's breathing ease, he glanced over to see the human asleep. As he watched Will sleep like that, only a faint hint of an almost warm smile formed on his face before he closed his eyes to get wrapped into the cozy blankets of the night next to the first person he'd ever been so close before...

Two weeks have past since then. As time went on and since Will did not get his barrel of blankets returned, he kept the siren company in his cell at night. Axenus himself grew more accustomed to him, feeling how he was able to relax a little in his presence of this human. He did not know how starved he'd been for someone to talk to him, to laugh with him, to taste his sweet lips as their hands explored each other's bodies. Soon

Axenus's perception began to form into one that could not only be described with the term 'predator and prey'...