"Things were getting better, they really were. The girls had just graduated a few weeks ago, Lewis was home, and Sophie finally accepted Bella. To top it all off, Emma was coming home and they were all going to celebrate her return tonight at Rikki’s Place. In the meantime, Rikki was dealing."

When an old secret of Zane’s, a secret only Rikki truly knew, is revealed at Emma’s welcome home party, Zane and Rikki are forced to confront their relationship, past, present, and future.
The Party

Things were getting better, they really were. The girls had just graduated a few weeks ago, Lewis was home, and Sophie finally accepted Bella. To top it all off, Emma was coming home and they were all going to celebrate her return tonight at Rikki’s Place.

In the meantime, Rikki was dealing. She was still mad at Zane, and every misguided attempt he made to win her back was making her more and more frustrated with him. They were still business partners because she knew he’d be lost without her and she wasn’t going to give Sophie the satisfaction of “stealing” her ex.

Everything would be easier if she wasn’t around her present company:

1. Zane: Annoying ex-boyfriend who she co-owned a business with and who knew Emma for longer than anyone
2. Sophie: Home wrecking bitch who Will delightfully describes as “strong willed” and “ambitious.”
3. Will: Probably the closest friend she had but she was getting tired of him defending everything his sister did.
4. Bella: Friend and fellow mermaid but also Will’s girlfriend who is thrilled to finally have Sophie’s approval.
5. Nate: Some how simultaneously the least anger inducing but most annoying.

While they were all setting up for the party, Cleo, Lewis, and Ash were luring Emma to the party. How Rikki envied them.

“Rikki.” Zane called her out of her daze. “Rikki?”

“What, Zane?” she glared at him, she gave it a 3 out of 10 on her death glare scale, a “1” being a fleeting look of annoyance while a “10” made the recipient wish that they were never born.

“I just finished putting together the slideshow for Emma, I added the pictures from her trip.”

“Great.”

“Don’t you want to look at it? Make sure there’s enough pictures of her and her friends?”

“Did you add the pictures that Cleo picked out?”

“Well, yeah.”

“It should be fine then.”

“So this Emma, she was your other friend who you turned into mermaids with?” Bella asked while hanging up some balloons.

“Yeah, she Cleo and I.” Rikki said, setting up the punch bowl and wishing she could spike it. Emma would hate that. Oh, how she missed Emma.

“There are more of you?!” asked Sophie, who was setting up tables with Will.

Rikki rolled her eyes, happy her back was turned so Sophie couldn’t see. “Only one more.”
“Does she have any special powers?”

“She can talk to fish and sing under water.”

“Really?”

“No, she can freeze liquid and create snow.”

“Nice. Makes your powers look a little lame, huh Bella?”

Bella cringed at the harsh words but went back to her usual sweet self. “Maybe, but you did like the mermaid figurine I helped make for Rikki.” She said.

“Right, I did. Who needs snow when you’ve got the more marketable talent?” Sophie went back to setting up tables.

“Why do you let her talk to you like that?” Rikki asked Bella.

“I really don’t think she can help it. It’s her personality.” Bella whispered to Rikki over the punch bowl.

“Doesn’t make it right.”

“She’s Will’s sister and she’s trying to come around to all of us. It’s a lot to take in, and I know I certainly didn’t make the best first impression when I met her, and you-”

“You better not be implying that it’s my fault that she thought it was okay to play tonsil hockey with my boyfriend.”

“Of course not. I’m just saying there’s a lot to work through.”

“Let me know when she’s worked through it. I have a party to set up.” With that, Rikki walked away to greet the guests who were lining up outside the door.

A little while later a car pulled up and Cleo hurriedly got out of it.

“They’re here everyone!” Rikki yelled to the guests as she went outside to greet Cleo.

“Hide!”

“There you are!” greeted Rikki. “It’s about time! Do you see what I’ve had to deal with?”

“Sorry! And about the whole, you and Zane situation, I briefed Emma on it before we came. I just thought she should know before she saw you.”

“It’s fine.”

“Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I will be.”

“Rikki?” said Emma as Ash helped her out of the car.

“Emma!” Rikki ran over with Cleo and the three girls hugged. “I never thought I’d be this excited to see you.”

“I’m choosing to take that as a compliment.” Emma looked up at the Rikki’s Place sign. “So
“this is the famous Rikki’s Place?” She said as the group started walking into the restaurant. “Why’s it so dark in here?”

The lights flicked on and reveal Emma’s high school friends: Byron, the girls from the swim team, and her former coworkers at JuiceNet. “Surprise! Welcome home Emma!” they all shouted out.

Emma smiled. “Really? Thank you all so much.”

“We just hope you like it!” said Cleo, absolutely beaming.

“It’s perfect! I love it!”

The party got into full swing and Emma was happily mingling with her guests, Ash at her side. Bella and Nate were performing with the rest of the band and Will was watching Bella. Sophie was following Zane around, joining him in whatever party activity he decided on.

Rikki wanted to spend time with Emma, but she knew she couldn’t expect guest of honor’s complete attention so she busied herself with making sure they had plenty of snacks.

“Having fun?” asked Zane bringing her a drink which she didn’t take.

“Tons. I’m just making sure the party goes well.” Said Rikki who opened a chip bag and dumped it into a bowl on the table.

“Need any help?”

“I’ve got it covered.”

“Zane!” Called Emma. “When were you planning on saying hi to me? Mum and Dad are always asking about you, I need something to tell them.” she said, dragging him away from Rikki and towards the employee room. “What did you do?” she looked at him seriously.

“If this is about Rikki-“

“Of course it’s about Rikki! How could you screw up this bad?”

“I’m sure Cleo and your little mermaid club have told you all about it already. Just take their word for it."

“Zane Bennett, we’ve known each other since we were three years old, I want to hear it from you.”

“Fine. Rikki didn’t like her friend Will’s sister, Sophie. I thought she was okay. She started working here and she really helped out, but Rikki still didn’t like her. She kissed me, it was the heat of the moment and I didn’t push her away, Rikki saw, she broke up with me. I tried to get her back-“

“By stealing her necklace and threatening to reveal our secret.”

“You know I would never actually do it.”

“Well I know that! That’s too low, even for you.”

“Thanks for the pep talk.” Zane rolled his eyes and started walking away.

“Get back here. I’m telling you this because you need to fix things, you two should try to stop being so hostile to each other.”
“I haven’t been hostile, it’s all her. She won’t give me a break.”

“Then give yourself a break. Leave her alone for a while. When she needs you, she’ll come back. That’s how you two work.”

“Why do you care so much?”

“I don’t know how much has changed since I left but the Zane and Rikki I know could work through it. If I’m wrong, I’m sorry, but I do care about you two.”

“Thanks Em. I really am happy you’re home.”

“Having a good time Emma?” asked Cleo, cutting into their conversation.

“Yep, just catching up with the Bennett family.” she smiled at Cleo.

“Well, I hope Zane hasn’t taken up *too* much of your time.” Cleo said, putting her arm around Emma to drag her away.

Just then, the door opened revealing a voluptuous blonde woman who looked like she was sneaking into the party.

“Miriam!” gasped Cleo, turning to glare at Zane. “What’s she doing here?”

“I swear I didn’t invite her!” he defended.

“You-“

“Hey Miriam! Glad you could make it!” said Byron waving her over.

“Byron? Why is Miriam here?” Cleo asked him through gritted teeth.

“Well, it’s a welcome home party for Emma. I thought it would be fun to have all of our friends back in one place.” Answered Byron nonchalantly.

“Hello Emma, it appears my invitation got lost. Again.” Said Miriam as she joined the group.

“Well, I’m glad Byron so…thoughtfully… remembered to call you. Great to see you.” Smiled Emma.

“Yes it is. Hello Zane, pity about the break-up. Just know I’m here if you need a shoulder to cry on.” Miriam responded before she walked away to dance with Byron.

Emma rolled her eyes.

“I thought you didn’t like that girl.” said Ash, walking over and handing Emma a drink.

“One typically doesn’t care much for her high school bully.” Said Emma, taking the drink from Ash.

“So why’s she here?”

“Byron invited her. He’s never been able to read the room. He’s cute, but he’s clueless.” Cleo answered.

“Didn’t you have a crush on him before me? You really traded up.” Said Ash nudging her playfully.
“Yeah, yeah. Anyway, I’m feeling generous. What’s the worse that could happen?” Said Emma, shrugging it off and returning to mingle with her guests.

On the other side of the room, Rikki found herself sitting alone and playing with a candle that sat on the table in front of her.

“Hey misery, want some company?” asked Will pulling up a chair to join Rikki at the table.

“I’m fine Will. Go back to watching Bella, I know you love hearing her sing.” She was happy for the company but she didn’t want to bring Will down with her.

“The band is in the kitchen taking a water break. I want to know how you’re doing.”

“I’m better. The party’s a big hit and Emma looks like she’s having a great time which is the most important thing—”

“Have you gotten a chance to talk to her?”

“Not really. We invited a lot of people tonight and they deserve her attention too. It’s kind of an overwhelming place to have a deep conversation in.”


“What’s upppppp?” sang out Nate who was now shirtless.

Rikki rolled her eyes at Nate. “Hey Bella, Nate. You sounded really good Bella, I can tell you’ve all been working really hard.”

“Yeah, Sophie thought so too. She told us to take a break and mingle with people at the party.” Smiled Bella. “Emma introduced herself to me, she’s really nice, a little intense though.”

“I didn’t think it was possible, but Emma got even hotter!” said Nate, complete with making a sizzling sound effect with his mouth.

“Nate, what happened to your shirt?” asked Will, raising an eyebrow.

“Since, the Nate man is on a break he can finally give the ladies the attention they deserve.”

“I’m sure that will be an…overwhelming…experience for them.” Rikki fake smiled.

“Don’t think I’ve forgotten about you Rikki. You’re single and ready to mingle.”

“Sorry, I can’t. I have to go do literally anything else.” She walked toward the punch bowl, which had become noticeably empty.

Nate shrugged and went off to the dance floor to hit on every girl at the party.

Rikki filled the punch bowl and sat sipping her punch and people watching. Emma was talking to some girls from the swim team, Will and Bella were dancing, Ash was having an animated conversation with Lewis and Byron, and Miriam and Sophie were both vying for Zane’s attention.

Rikki had to do a double take. Were Miriam and Sophie really both there desperately competing for Zane’s attention? Rikki let out a laugh, it was the funniest thing she’d seen in a while and Zane truly looked miserable.

“This is a disaster!” said Cleo, getting a cup of punch for herself. “Miriam wasn’t supposed to
come, and now she’s trying to hook up with Zane, and Sophie’s here, and what if it ruins Emma’s Party?”

“What are you talking about?” Laughed Rikki, this is the funniest thing I’ve seen all night. “Those two look ridiculous and Zane is clearly miserable.”

“You’re not worried about them at all?”

“No, this is exactly what I needed. Let’s dance!” said Rikki dragging Cleo onto the dance floor, twirling her around.

“Yeah! Now that’s the Rikki I know!” applauded Lewis.

“She’s glad to be back!” called Rikki, continuing to spin around with a giggling Cleo.

“Ladies!” cut in Nate.

“Go away, Nate.” Cleo and Rikki said in unison and went back to their dance.

Nate shrugged and walked over to Zane. “Zane, I don’t know what’s going on, the ladies are just not into the Nate tonight.”

“Sorry about that, mate.” Said Zane, Sophie and Miriam still vying for his attention.

“So how about you? You’re going stag these days, any luck finding anyone?” Zane sighed and glanced at Sophie and Miriam who were passive aggressively trying to get the other one to leave the party. “Not exactly.”

“Well, why don’t you take off your shirt? I’ve been getting a couple glances my way, I think these girls are just too shy to approach me.”

“I’m good.”

“Nah, come on Zane! Give the ladies what they want!”

“Really Nate, I don’t want to.”

“Don’t be shy!” said Nate as he attempted to take off Zane’s shirt.

“Nate, stop!”

Nate was successful. He tore open the front of Zane’s button up shirt, buttons flying everywhere. His eyes widened at the sight of Zane’s chest and soon all eyes were on them.

“What is-“ started Nate.

“What is that?” Miriam shrieked.

“Zane?” said Sophie.

“Oh no.” Emma put her hand over her mouth.

Zane looked around. All eyes were on him, specifically on the large scar that ran down his chest, a scar that he never let anyone see. He brought the sides of his torn shirt together and walked briskly to his office, locking the door behind him.
“You idiot!” Rikki shouted at Nate. “You know how he feels about his scar!”

“I didn’t even know he had one.” Said Nate, still shocked to learn this about his best friend.

Rikki let out an exasperated sigh and walked towards the door. “Sophie, I can’t believe I’m saying this but, you’re in charge.” Rikki said as she unlocked the door with her own key and then locked it behind her.
“Go away, Sophie.” Said Zane, his head down on his desk.

“Seriously? You gave Sophie a key to our office?” Said Rikki, an exasperated look on her face.

At the sound of Rikki’s voice Zane raised his head. “No, It just wouldn’t surprise me that she found a way to weasel herself in here.”

Rikki let out the beginning of a laugh but stopped herself. “Well, I’m not her. So do you want to talk about what happened?”

“Not unless it involves you telling me that your mermaid powers have progressed to the point that you can erase peoples memories.”

“Sorry,” said Rikki taking a seat. “That would be really cool though.”

“It’s just…”

“It’s okay, I know how you feel about your scar.”

Zane’s parents were in love, or at least they were when the first got married. Harrison was a promising young doctor and Christine was a talented photographer, the very same that did the story on him windsurfing around Mako Island. After a few years of marital bliss, Harrison started to change. He became arrogant and obsessed with getting ahead in his career. It worried his wife Christine who missed the Harrison she knew, smart, compassionate, and a little cocky.

Zane was born shortly after, with a heart murmur that the doctor said, “was nothing to worry about” but if it did get worse they could manage it. Zane’s birth did bring about changes in his father; he worked shorter hours to spend time with Zane, took him on play dates to the Gilbert household, and enjoyed life’s simpler pleasures. When Zane entered school, Harrison reverted back to being arrogant and working all the time, telling his wife that he was only doing it so that Zane could have the best future money could buy. Zane’s parents always fought about money, sometimes not realizing he was listening.

On the other side of the door guests were quickly leaving the party. It was late and the aftermath of discovering Zane’s scar was incredibly awkward.

“Goodbye Emma! Let us know if you want to go swimming sometime.” Said Elizabeth, Emma’s old swim captain.

“Thank you, Elizabeth. Keep up the good work, I saw those videos on Facebook, your backstroke has improved so much!”

Elizabeth led herself and the swim team out the door.

Miriam was trying her best to leave with Byron. “Did you see his scar? I always knew he was hiding something, of course I always thought it was just a horrible taste in women. You’d never hide something like that would you Byron?”

“I guess not. I don’t have any scars like that. I have a few on my legs though.” He responded, dense as ever.
“Why don’t you tell me about it over some ice cream. I know a great place that’s still open.” She practically dragged Byron out the door, turning her attention to Emma. “Nice party Emma, hate to leave so soon.”

“Have a nice night, Miriam.” Said Emma, not in the mood to fight.

With all the guests clearing out, Sophie was trying to hear Zane and Rikki’s conversation through the closed door.

Bella and Nate’s band stood awkwardly in the corner, muttering to themselves. Nate was uncharacteristically quiet and he refused to meet anyone’s eyes. Finally, Bella came over to Sophie. “The band wants to know if it’s okay to leave.”

Sophie jumped at the sudden noise. “I don’t see why not. This party is dead. I just wish I knew what they were talking about.”

“We should probably all head out, if I know Zane, he won’t want to face anyone immediately.” Suggested Emma.

“Sounds like a good idea to me.” Agreed Lewis.

“Excuse me? Where have you two been for the last six months? How do you know what Zane wants-“ started Sophie.

“Sophie, not now. Let’s just go home and get some sleep. You have work tomorrow morning, you can ask him then.” Said Will sternly, sticking up for his friends.

“If you say so.”

Nate got up, looking down at his feet. “If you guys think we should all leave now, I will. But, if one of you sees Zane before I have a chance to apologize. Let him know I’m sorry.” Nate went to the hostess’ station and wrote “sorry” on a seating chart. He slid it under the office door and left without another word.

The office was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. Rikki and Zane weren’t really talking. She was the love of his life. He was her worst enemy (and his own for that matter.)

They noticed the note as soon as Nate slid it under the door.

“Nate wrote you a note.” Said Rikki, holding up the seating chart. “I hope you won’t be too hard on him. He didn’t mean it.”

“I know that.” Said Zane. “Nate is an idiot but he’s loyal.” His mouth formed a half smile when he said the last word.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“You already know the story.”

“Would it help you to talk about it again?”

“Maybe.”

At age six, Zane was having trouble breathing, his parents rushed him to the hospital to find out that his heart murmur was lethal and that surgery was needed. Christine tried to calm down her frightened son while Harrison cursed the doctor for not catching it sooner. Christine finally calmed
Zane down enough for surgery and they put him under. When Zane woke up he felt like he was floating, but more importantly he woke up to his parents smiling down and him and holding him in their arms.

“You’re so brave.” His father said. It stuck with him for the rest of his life.

Zane’s parents took him home to recover and everyone got along again. Harrison worked fewer hours and spent more time with his wife and son. Zane liked having his father’s attention again, but what he didn’t like was his scar. He would stare in the mirror and trace the long scar that ran down his chest and think about when it wasn’t there. His dad was a plastic surgeon, he knew what scars were, they were ugly, and they were something that you needed to get fixed, ironically it would give you more scars, but at least those would be less visible. What would his friends say when they saw it? Would people stare? Would they make fun of him? He never wanted people to see his chest again.

Emma, Cleo, Lewis and Ash sat around Ash’s apartment sharing a bottle of wine.

Ash poured Emma a big glass. “Good?” he asked her.

“Yes. Thank you.” She sighed as she took a big gulp.

“So how long has Zane had that scar?” asked Lewis who had lost the ability to filter what he was saying after two glasses of wine.

“Since we were kids. He had a heart murmur and he was always very self-conscious about it. He got special permission to wear a shirt to our swim meets.” Answered Emma.

“So, you knew about it?” asked Cleo, pouring herself another glass.

“I knew about it. I never saw it though. None of us wanted to push him, except for Mr. Bennett of course.”

When the incision had finally healed enough, his parents took him to the Gilbert household so that he could go swimming in their pool.

“Hello, Zane!” greeted Mr. Gilbert. “Your dad told me how brave you were these past few weeks.”

Zane was silent; he didn’t like people knowing about the surgery because then they would know about the scar.

“Zane, honey, what do we say when someone pays us a compliment?” asked Christine.

“Thank you.” Mumbled Zane half-heartedly.

Naturally, Emma was already in the pool, she was wearing a black one-piece swimsuit with a white swim cap. Zane jumped into the pool, wearing his trunks and a t-shirt. “Hello Zane!” she greeted happily.

“Why are you wearing that silly thing on your head?”

“I’m going to be a competitive swimmer. Why is your shirt still on? That’s not the kind you’re supposed to swim in.”

“Whatever. I still look less silly than you.”
“Zane! Why did you jump in the pool with your shirt on? You have to wear it home in the car and we don’t need to get the seats all wet.” Scolded Harrison.

“No problem,” started Mrs. Gilbert “It’s a warm day, we can just hang it up to dry. Come here Zane, I’ll hang it up for you.”

Zane got out of the pool but instead of walking over to Mrs. Gilbert he walked to his own mother, whispering in her ear.

“I think it’s best if we just let him swim in it. It’s already wet.” Said Christine waving him back into the pool. She lowered her voice and directed her attention to the other adults, “He’s a little shy about his scar, I don’t want to rush him into accepting it. He’s a little boy and it’s a big change.”

Shortly after the incision healed, Zane’s parents started fighting again. They grew careless with it and would bicker in front of him. One night, his parents were fighting at the dinner table; they hadn’t even got up to get the soup that Christine had made for dinner that night. Zane got up and made them both a bowl of soup, he carefully started walking across the kitchen back to his parents but slipped, pouring the hot soup on himself in the process. He cried out and his parents immediately came over to take care of him. His mother took off his shirt, which was soaked with the scalding liquid and his father brought him an icepack. The two both apologized for fighting and ate the three ate dinner in silence. The house was uncharacteristically quiet that night. Zane snuck downstairs to find his parents sitting on the couch, embracing each other.

“I can’t believe we let Zane get hurt over our problems with each other.” Christine said.

“I know, this is not the kind of parent I wanted to be.” Harrison agreed.

“Seeing him like that, looking at the scar, it just reminds me how scared we were of loosing him the day of his surgery.”

“We got through that, and we’ll get through this.”

Zane smiled to himself. From then on, whenever his parents fought he would find an excuse to take his shirt off and remind them that he was a product of their love. They would stop fighting and for a while things were okay.

Unfortunately, Zane’s trick only worked for a couple of more years. When Zane turned ten his father told him that he needed to grow up and accept his scar.

“You can’t keep hiding like some coward, son.” Were Harrison’s damning words.

Naturally, Christine disagreed and told Zane that he should accept the scar in his own time.

In his father’s eyes, he was no longer a little boy who needed protection. Zane was old enough to accept the facts of life and he would fight with Christine about raising Zane constantly.

“You’re too soft on him!”

“You’re too hard on him!”

“He’s going to act like a baby if you keep treating him like one!”

“You’re never around! How do you know what he acts like?”
“I make money to support this family.”
“All I do is support this family! I cook, I clean, I take care of you and Zane, and I know what he needs.”
“What he needs is some discipline.”
“*He needs understanding.*”

“They shouldn’t have fought that way in front of you.” Rikki said, now sitting next to Zane with her head on his shoulder.

“Your parents did the same thing.” He smiled at her.

“Yeah, and look at how I turned out.” She smiled back.

“Better than me…” his smile faded.

*When he was eight, Zane’s parents separated. Zane and his mother moved a few minutes away into his grandmother’s house and Harrison lived alone. For the next two years everything was fine, the arrangement worked out well and he was able to see his father whenever he wasn’t busy.*

*On September 8, 2003 Zane and Christine were hit by a distracted driver while on the way to school. Zane survived with a few broken bones. Christine wasn’t so lucky.*

*Her funeral took place that Sunday. Christine and Harrison had never formally separated. They both hoped that some day the other would understand reason and admit that they were wrong about the best way to raise Zane. Harrison had full custody of his son and Zane was moved out of his grandmother’s house within the week.*

*While Harrison was hard on Zane, there were two things that he never brought up: Zane’s scar, and any problems he and Christine had. Harrison wanted Zane’s sainted mother, his beautiful wife, to be untouched by imperfection in Zane’s memory.*
“Feeling any better?” asked Rikki.

“A little. It’s been a while since I had someone to talk about her with, Other than Gran that is. It’s not like I can talk about this with Nate. It would be weird.” Zane smiled.

They spent sometime looking at each other with awkward smiles on their faces. Zane never wanted to let her out of his sight again. Rikki wanted to escape.

“It’s getting late.” Rikki stood up and started walking toward the office door.

“How do you want me to walk you home?” Zane stood up as quickly as she did, coming after her. He put his hand on her arm.

“I think I’m going to go for a swim, actually.”

“Oh.” Zane removed his hand. “Should I come with you? Isn’t it dangerous alone? With your secret and all?”

“No, it’s late. There shouldn’t be anyone around Mako right now and I really need to clear my head.”

“Okay. I’ll see you around.”

“Yeah. See you around.”

They stood two feet away from each other, not touching. Rikki’s arms, which were previously held against her chest, came down by her sides. Her fists were balled with tension.

Zane took a step toward Rikki. She stepped back. He looked down at her, eyes full of sadness.

Rikki gave a little eye roll to herself and gave Zane a tense hug.

Zane tried to wrap his arms around her, but it was over as soon as it began.

“I’ll see you later, Zane.” Said Rikki.

“Okay.” Zane responded, looking down at Rikki.

“I mean it Zane. We’ll meet up later, I promise.”

Zane’s eyes lit up, glimmering with hope. Rikki was never one to break a promise. “Have a nice swim.”

“I will.”

One of Rikki’s favorite things about her job was the proximity to the ocean. She walked down the dock and breathed in the salty air. She looked around her, there was no one to be seen, she could just jump in the water.

But something kept her there. Rikki sat down, wishing she could just stick her toes in, and for the first time in a long time she wished that she wasn’t a mermaid. She gave up half of her body for a
tail every time she got wet. There were the big trade offs like never being able to swim around others or not being able to go out in the rain. But there were little things too, she’d never again feel wet sand between her toes, she’d never run through a sprinkler, or participate in a water gun fight, a favorite childhood activity she shared with her father.

It was at this very dock Rikki started her journey to become a mermaid. A cheeky year ten with a vendetta against Zane Bennett, and a desire to help one Cleo Sertori. She stole that asshole’s boat and took a joyride to Mako Island. It was a simpler time.

The second time Rikki and Zane met on that dock was a full 180° from the first. She consoled him over the embarrassing video Lewis shot of him at Mako Island. She was the only one who knew the sharks were really there but she could do nothing to help him without revealing her secret. Talking to him that night felt like she entered a parallel universe, a universe in which Zane was human and she actually cared about his feelings. The whole altercation felt like a dream.

The third time they walked down the dock as a couple. Zane and Rikki stormed after Miriam in pursuit of Julia’s old locket. Zane surprised her and jumped off the dock after Miriam threw the locket into the ocean. He came out, soaking wet, with the locket in his hand and smile on his face. She wanted nothing more than to hold him and tell him thank you, but her powers stopped that from ever happening.

The fourth, she didn’t know what to expect. He wanted her, that much was clear, but he wanted a girl he thought was human. Nate splashed them and she was forced to reveal her secret to him once more. That year, he learned one secret about her after another and took them all in stride. He grew more than she ever thought he would.

The last was when she got tired of Charlotte and blew off Lewis’s party. It was nice to have someone to go to who would support her that fully. He was the perfect boyfriend that day, always asking if she was happy, being able to tell when she wasn’t, getting along with her friends.

For the past year, the majority of her altercations with Zane had been inside their crowded little office. She always hated small, closed in spaces. Even as a little girl she would only return to her mobile home to eat and sleep, the rest of the day she spent playing with the other kids or more likely off on her own adventures. Her father was the same way so it worked well.

Rikki was convinced that small places did nothing but make people fight and resent each other. That’s what happened to her parents, after all. And now it was happening to her.

She shook her head. The dock was starting to feel small now. She plunged into the water, feeling the cool, fathomless embrace of the infinite ocean and started to swim.

She made it to the moon pool in about an hour, as she reached the surface she thought she heard a voice. She ignored it, no one should be up at this hour and even if they were they wouldn’t be at the shark-infested Mako Island.

Nevertheless, Rikki proceeded with caution, keeping to the shadows as she noticed a tail. She was safe to approach the surface

“Rikki?” asked Emma for when she saw the blonde head dart up.

“Hey ‘Em.” Said Rikki. “What brings you out here this time of night?”

“It’s been so long since I’ve been here. I just had to come tonight.”

“What about Ash? And Lewis and Cleo? I thought you guys had your couple’s sleepover
tonight.”

“Oh you, knew about that? You know you’re always welcome to-”

“I know. Cleo invited me. I didn’t want to feel like a third wheel.”

“So what about you? Why are you out here?”

“To get some fresh air and be alone.”

“Ahh.”

Emma and Rikki floated in the pool, looking up at the moon. Although they both felt closer to Cleo than they did one another, one thing they appreciated about each other was their comfortable silences. Emma needed quiet to think and relax with the gears in her overactive mind churning out new ideas and creations. Sometimes, Rikki just needed to feel like she was alone, to live in her head, not be disturbed by the outside world.

“You better hope that boyfriend of yours doesn’t wake up without you there.” Rikki broke the silence.

“It’s not him I’m worried about. It’s Cleo.” Emma was always more gracious about her alone time being cut short than Rikki was. “You know how she gets, she’ll take it personally.”

“Well, you’re not usually this irresponsible.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment. How about you? Someone’s got to be looking out for you.”

“My dad’s going to this big motorbike expo. Even if he were here, he usually works the night shift so it’s never something I’ve had to worry about.”

“What about…never mind.”

“You were going to say ‘Zane’ weren’t you?”

“Yes, it’s just I’m worried about him after what happened to night. I’m worried about you too, don’t get me wrong but –“

“It’s fine, Emma.” If Rikki had to have this conversation, Emma was the best person to do it with. She knew Zane the longest and sometimes the best. “What did you know about his scar?”

“Just that he had a heart murmur, the scar is from surgery, and he’s self conscious about it.”

“That’s the gist of it.”

“How’s he doing?”

“Better after we talked. He’s mostly worried what people will think of him for hiding it for years.”

“I don’t think any less of him.”

“You also knew about it, most of those other people didn’t.”

“Nate-“

“He’s not worried about Nate either. I thought you were supposed to be the emotionally mature one. Think about it ‘Em, how would you feel if a bunch of high school acquaintances suddenly found out something personal about you that you were trying to keep a secret.”

“We’re mermaids, Rikki. You just described our entire lives.”
“Well, that’s an earthshattering secret that defies the laws of nature. I meant a smaller one. How would you feel about people knowing about your gross seafood addiction during the full moon?”

“Ugh. Don’t remind me. “
The two laughed and settled into another comfortable silence.

“You’re wrong, by the way.” Said Emma finally.

“How about what?” asked Rikki.

“The emotionally mature thing. Cleo is the one who is in touch with all of her emotions.”

“Well, you’re the one who’s good at articulating how you feel. You’re like a psychologist.”

“I’ve considered becoming one, actually. I can’t swim anymore and I love helping people. Not to mention the room for experiments and independent study. I plan on revolutionizing the field in a matter of ten years.”

“Oh, Dr. Gilbert. What do you think of Zane’s condition?”

“I think it will be a big change. You’ve heard of the Five Stages of Grief?”

“Yeah.”

“Well he never really accepted that scar, he can’t deny that he has it anymore either. So he’s going to be angry.”

“Well he already blew up at me when he thought I was Sophie.”

“I don’t think he’s ever truly been angry at you.”

“I stole his boat.”

“And yet he was still more angry at Cleo.”

“He just knows that I can dish out more than he can take. He never stood a chance.”

“That’s my Rikki.”

“Do you think he ever accepted his mother’s death?”

Emma looked at Rikki, unsure what exactly to say. “I’m not sure. He changed after she died. He was so much sweeter when we were kids. When she died he just got really angry that’s when he became the school ‘bad boy.’”

“He’s harmless.”

“Hurt you more than once.”

“We’ve all been victims of Zane Bennett’s short fuse. It’s not a very exclusive club.”

“I do know one thing though. He’s gotten better since he met you.”

They floated in silence, enjoying the starry sky up above.

“I should probably get going.” Said Emma. “I want to get back before Cleo wakes up.”

“You’re lucky she’s a heavy sleeper.”

“I don’t want to push my luck.”
“Before you leave, I just wanted to tell you that I’m glad that I ran into you. Just you.”

“Awww, Rikki. Are you actually letting someone know how you feel?”

“What? I just talked about feelings with you for a good half an hour.”

“Yes, but those were Zane’s feelings.”

“Whatever you say, Em.”

“See you later, Rikki!”

“Goodbye, Emma.”
Zane was in a rut. That much was obvious. He bought the restaurant, acting against his father’s financial advice, and it turned into the thing that tore him and Rikki apart.

“You’re not buying that place, Zane. You know nothing about running a restaurant.” Harrison told him.

“You sent me to school to run a business –“ Zane argued.

“I sent you to school to work your way up the food chain in an office not waste your days away playing shop with your high school girlfriend.”

“We’ll be successful, I know it.”

“You’ll be bankrupt within the first six months. I won’t give you a single cent.”

“I don’t care. I have money saved up I can afford it.”

“You won’t be able to maintain it. With my connections I can get you above entry level positions at some of the largest companies in the country.”

“My heart is in this, Dad.”

“You’re heart will leave you bankrupt with a massive debt.”

“Is that what you said to Mum when she wanted to pursue photography?” Harrison was silent. His eyes went cold. “If I even thought you had half the talent that your mother did, I’d finance three restaurants. Too bad you don’t have my smarts to make it work.”

The anger at his father momentarily distracted Zane from the reality that everyone knew about his scar.

At least Rikki was talking to him again. He went from living in his own apartment, far away from his father, to moving in with his grandmother. He still hadn’t told Rikki.

“It’s about time you got home.” His grandmother, Lydia, sat at the kitchen table.

“Sorry, Gran.” Said Zane giving her a hug.


“They found out about the scar, didn’t they?”

“Yeah, just about everyone I knew before Dad shipped me off to boarding school and then some.”

“Well, this too shall pass.”

“Is that all you have to say?”

“Your mother and I wanted you to learn to accept the scar in your own time.” Lydia put her hand on his arm. “We didn’t want anyone to force you and no one did, not even your father. Now
you had a wardrobe malfunction and people know. We can’t change that.”

“I guess.”
“Zane. Now that it’s out in the open you have to live with it.”
Zane made a noise like he was going to protest.

“I’m not saying that you have to show it to anyone, or that you have to talk about it, or that you need to do anything to it. I’m just saying that you need to deal with the fact that this happened to you. This too shall pass.”

“That’s easier said then done.”
“Zane, you’re a very sensitive boy. You get it from your mother. I wish she were here. She always knew the right thing to say.”

“Yeah she did.” And with that Zane went up to bed.

Everyone knew about his scar now but at least Rikki was talking to him again. Maybe things wouldn’t be so bad after all. Zane grabbed his phone and looked up when the next full moon would be. This time, when Rikki needed him, he’d be there for her.

Zane slept in that morning. The majority of the staff at Rikki’s Place were guests at Emma’s party so it only made sense to close the restaurant down for the day. No one needed a day off more than Zane. He’d deal with the world later, he promised his grandmother, but for now he just needed to be alone.

The universe, however, had other plans.

“Zane, could you come down stairs please?” asked Lydia through the door.

“In a minute Gran.” He answered back with no intention of moving.

“It’s noon on a Sunday. If the boy had any sense he’d be in that restaurant right now trying to make a profit.” The voice coming from down the stairs was unmistakably his father’s.

Zane shot out of bed and threw on some clothes. “You let him in?” he asked Lydia.

“He insisted.” She said.

“I’m an adult now, it’s not like I have to see him anymore.”

“He’s still your father, Zane.”

“Yeah. I can tell it means a lot to him. I’m not going down there.”

“And I’m not going to make you but I let him in because She loved him. Before you decide do stay holed up in your room all day think about what She would want you to do.”

“Fine. But don’t think that will work on me all the time.”

“It only worked because you know it’s true.”

Zane rolled his eyes and walked down stairs. His father was sitting at the table, tapping his fingers. Harrison still wore his wedding ring, as to why, Zane was never really sure.

“Dad.” He said neutrally.

It’s about time you grew up and accepted it. Of course if you really had grown up you’d be working this morning.”

“First of all, we all agreed not to work this morning before it even happened out of courtesy to our employees who were guests at the party. Second how did you even find out about –“

“Your friend Nate is an idiot. He decided to call the house at three in the morning looking for you. I guess you never had the gall to tell your friends that you were living with your Gran now.”

“Well, gee, I’m sorry someone was actually worried enough about my emotional well being to wake you up.”

“You’re not a little boy anymore, Zane, you need to stop acting like one and accept some responsibility for your actions.”

“I don’t understand what I did here –“

“You never accepted that scar and so it got revealed by your idiot friend. Sounds fitting for a coward.”

“Harrison!” Lydia came down the stairs. “I invited you in because I thought you wanted to talk to Zane, not verbally abuse him.”

“He needs to fight his own battles, Lydia, how long are you women going to –“ Harrison caught himself. The three looked at each other.

“You women.”

Zane hadn’t heard it since his mother’s death. Naturally, Lydia tended to agree with Christine on everything. Harrison was easily frustrated in Lydia’s company for that reason.

Lydia broke the silence with an icily calm tone. “You do not come into the house where I raised her, wearing that ring, and talk to her son like that. I invited you in to make peace but I see you’re too stubborn and proud to even admit to your son that you were worried about him.”

Harrison’s jaw clenched and unclenched. He looked like he wanted to say something, but thought better of it. “As the homeowner, you have every right to ask me to leave, as a law abiding citizen I will go. Tell my son to come and find me when he’s ready to become a man.”

Harrison walked out the door, leaving Lydia and Zane alone with his cruel words.

“You don’t have to be like him to be a man you know?” Lydia said sweetly, rubbing Zane’s back.

“I know. I’ll be better.” Zane wasn’t sure if he believed it himself.
If someone told Rikki three years ago that one of her favorite activities would be girly sleepovers she would’ve verbally destroyed them for having the audacity to suggest she’d like such a frilly, boring activity. Now here she was gulping red wine from a solo cup as she played “Never Have I Ever” with her fellow mermaids at the moon pool.

“Never have I ever stuffed my bra.” Said Emma confidently.

Cleo put down a finger.

“Story?” asked Bella.

“I had this really cute top but the bust line wasn’t fitting right so I did what I had to do. I didn’t care about making my boobs look bigger. I just wanted the top to sit right.” Said Cleo with a slightly defensive tone as she took a sip of her Rosé.

“Never have I ever regretted kissing anyone.”

The other three groaned and put down their fingers.

“Mine was Nate.” Started Cleo “I didn’t really want to kiss him but he just sort of kissed me when we went to the dance together. I got away a soon as I possibly could. I only went along with it to make Lewis jealous.”

“Mine was Byron. He’s gorgeous but you know what they say, ‘a friend to all is a friend to none.’ I’m really glad we never dated, it would’ve been an incredibly frustrating relationship.”

“Mine’s really bad.” Said Rikki, taking a gulp of her wine. Everyone turned to look at her. “Well, it wasn’t really a kiss. I gave Will mouth to mouth when Zane challenged him to a diving competition.”

“Which he only won because he cheated.” Said Cleo.

“Which he only won because he cheated.” Agreed Rikki. “Sorry, Bella.”

“I’m not mad. I’m just glad Will was safe.”

“Yeah. I don’t really want to think about that day anymore. Cleo, it’s your turn.”

“Never have I ever had sex anywhere other than my house or Lewis’s house.” Said Cleo who was on her second glass of Rosé.

Cleo had gotten a lot more confident this past year that coupled with the fact that she was a lightweight made her a lot more fun to be around, in Rikki’s opinion.

Emma and Rikki put their fingers down.

“Ash and I had sex a few times when he was visiting. My family likes him so much, between Elliot trying to get his attention and my parents insisting we do things ‘as a family’ we barely got a moment alone. We had a few quickies in our car or if he was staying at a hotel, there.” Explained
“Harrison was never liked me. Zane and I would have sex in his bed to spite him sometimes. I know it’s juvenile, but he did have a king sized bed with really nice sheets so I was up for it. We had sex in the Zodiac a few times too.” Said Rikki.

“I haven’t had sex with anyone yet, not even Will.” Said Bella shyly.

“Really?” said Rikki.

“Rikki.” Hissed Emma.

“Well, I mean that you’re absolutely gorgeous and every guy in a five mile radius falls in love with you. I thought maybe –“

“I’ve been a mermaid since I was nine years old. It’s quite the secret to keep. I never really had a serious boyfriend, I was always afraid of him finding out my secret. I wasn’t really happy with the way Will found out my secret so I’m still a little hesitant to make that jump with him.” Said Bella.

“Well at least he already knows you can’t have shower sex.” Said Cleo and then she burst out laughing.

Her laughter was infectious and the other girls started laughing too.

“Seriously, take your time. If you’re stressing out about it, you’re not doing it right. Sex is supposed to be relaxing.” Continued Cleo as she poured herself another glass of Rosé and grabbed Bella’s cup to fill it up too.

“Never have I ever been kicked out of a public place.” Said Rikki.

“Bitch.” Said Emma putting a finger down.

“Where did you get kicked out from?” asked Cleo.

“Juice Net, when Ash fired me, remember?” said Emma.

“The important part is that he begged for you back and paid for your date.” Said Rikki, raising her glass in a toast. “I’m just glad we can hang out without the ever present threat of the full moon.”

Emma smiled and almost spit out her drink.

“What was that?” asked Rikki, laughing at polished Emma’s sloppy response.

“You’re hiding something aren’t you?” said Cleo was clearly in her cups now. She stalked over to Emma and grabbed her face. “Tell me what it is.” Said Cleo seriously before bursting out laughing.

“I actually don’t really mind full moons any more.” Emma said slyly.

“Really?” asked Bella. “Why not?”

Emma settled into her sleeping bag and took a sip of her wine. “Well, we were living in Paris at the time and ash was visiting. You know what they say about moonlight. We got insanely lucky. Elliot was sleeping over at a friends house and my parents went on a weekend couples cruise with some friends –“
“Ah, swingers?” asked Rikki cheekily.

“Do you want to hear the story or not?”

Rikki raised up her hands in surrender and gestured for Emma to continue.

“Anyway, Ash was really good about protecting me from the moon’s rays and even though it ended up not working —“

“Of course it didn’t work.” Sighed Rikki.

Emma glared at her. “We ahem, enjoyed each other under the influence of the full moon. It was probably the most intense thing I’ve ever experienced in my love life.”

“And you remembered it all the next morning? There was no…moonlight amnesia?” Asked Bella.

“No, it was absolutely perfect.” Smiled Emma.

“Does this mean you don’t want to have full moon sleepovers with us any more?” pouted Cleo.

Emma pulled Cleo in for a hug. “Of course not, just maybe not as many. Also I recommend that you all spend the night with your boyfriends under the light of the full moon.”

“Emma,” whispered Cleo loudly. “Rikki broke up with her boyfriend.”

“It’s fine, Cleo. It’s good to know regardless.” Said Rikki. Who knows when I’ll be able to test it?

Chapter End Notes

I had a lot of ideas for what the "Never Have I Ever" questions would be. If you would like to hear more of the questions and the responses, let me know and I'll include it in a bonus chapter.
Since We Were 3 Years Old

Chapter Notes

Sorry this is so late. Moving, plus the holidays, plus a new job is a recipe for writer's block.

The Gilberts piled in to their family car. It had been a long time since Emma’s parents had seen Mr. Bennett and he was dying to see them.

“Oh look,” started Mrs. Gilbert. “Harrison says he and Candace can’t wait to see us.” She turned her phone to the back seat to show Emma, Ash, and Elliot.

“What about Zane?” asked Emma.

“Well, I’m sure he’s dying to see you too.”

Ash met them at the Bennett house. They met up with him and then went to ring the doorbell.

Harrison answered the door. “Neil!” he said greeting the Gilbert Patriarch with a handshake and a clap on the back. “Lisa!” He kissed Mrs. Gilbert on the cheek. “Elliot!” he said giving the boy a high five. “And the lovely Emma.”

“Mr. Bennett, I’d like you to meet my boyfriend, Ash.” Said Emma accepting a kiss on the cheek from Harrison.

“Nice to meet you, sir.” Ash extended a hand.

Harrison took it. “Good strong handshake. You’ll go far in the business world.”

“I’m actually studying to be Vet, sir.”

“Oh, we’ll see what we can do about that. Come, let’s sit down for dinner.”

Emma looked around the table, she noticed there were only 7 place settings and Zane was nowhere in sight.

They sat down to eat. Candace, Mr. Bennett’s girlfriend was much younger than he was. She was also trying to be all over him the whole night. Something Harrison disapproved of.

Harrison talked to Lisa and Neil about business, mutual friends they had from university, and the home improvement projects he had up and running.

Ash was trying to entertain Elliot who was getting more and more bored by the minute.

“Excuse me, Mr. Bennett,” said Emma.

“Yes, Emma?” Harrison answered.

“Where is Zane tonight?”
Harrison was silent.

“We were wondering the same thing. It’s been awhile, we wanted to see Zane.” Added Lisa.

“Zane is not living here at the moment. I told him he could come back when he was more serious about his future.”

Neil and Lisa exchanged odd looks. The Gilberts never knew what to say to Harrison when he brought up Zane. Their parenting style used to be more similar, but started to diverge after Christine died.

“Well, I’m sure Zane will come around eventually.” Said Lisa. What else could she say.

“So he’s got his own place then?” asked Neil.

“No.” said Harrison in a way that meant “drop the subject.”

Candace didn’t get the hint. “He threw a fit and moved in with your ex-wife’s mother, right?”

The table was silent.

“She was never my ex-wife.” Harrison said in a low, angry voice. “But yes, Zane moved in with Lydia.”

Another uncomfortable silence.

Ash and Emma exchanged glances. Emma knew that if Zane was living with Lydia, things must be bad between him and Harrison.

“Anyway, how were your travels?” asked Harrison taking a swig of wine. “You have a healthy tan, Lisa. The last place you stayed must’ve been nice and sunny.”

“Oh yes, it was –“ started Lisa.

Elliot let out a bored sigh.

“Something wrong, Elliot?” Neil asked.

“He’s just tired.” Insisted Emma, worried her brother would say he was bored. “He had swim practice today.”

“And a horseback riding lesson tomorrow.” Agreed Ash. “You’re going to need to rest up good tonight.”

“I will!” said Elliot, always one to agree with Ash.

“You can’t go just yet,” said Harrison.

“If it’s okay, Mr. Bennett,” started Emma. “Ash and I could take Elliot home. That way my parents can stay.”

“Oh Emma, what a lovely offer.” Agreed Lisa.

Emma and Ash took Elliot home. He got in bed of his own accord muttering something about being prepared for his riding lesson.
Emma let out a heavy sigh, looking up at the ceiling.

“That was Zane’s dad?” asked Ash.

“Yeah. That’s Mr. Bennett.” She said, gaze focused on some imaginary point in the distance.

“No wonder Zane turned out the way he did.”

Emma still wasn’t looking at Ash.

“What’s wrong, Em?” he turned her body to face him.

“Harrison kicked Zane out. I can’t believe he would do that his own son.”

“Honestly, he seems terrible.”

“A few years ago he found out I was a mermaid.”

“How did he-”

“It’s a long story, I’ll tell you later, but, he tried to exploit me. He’s known me since I was a toddler and he still tried to exploit me. Still, I never thought he’d do something like this to Zane. I need to check on him.”

“You’re not his mother, Emma.”

Emma wasn’t his mother. Or Rikki’s mother. Or anyone’s mother. She knew that. But she also knew she was a natural caregiver and acted as such. “You’re right. I’m his friend. I’m going to talk to him about this. No one else in his life will.”

Ash shut his eyes and squeezed the bridge of his nose. “I support your decision. You know Zane better than I do. How do we get to Zane’s grandmother’s?”

Emma kissed Ash on the cheek.

It was agreed that Emma would only stay for 30 minutes. She would check in on Zane and she would leave. She wouldn’t psychoanalyze him, push him to far, or overstay her welcome in any way. Ash would wait at his apartment and pick her up when she was done.

She gently knocked the door.

Lydia answered.

“Hi, I don’t know if you remember me I’m –“

“Emma Gilbert.” Lydia finished for her. “You think I don’t know who you are?”

“It’s just been a long time.”

“You look just like your mother did when she was a girl. Come in.”

“Zane! You’re friend is here!”

Zane came down the stairs, he was in a t-shirt and pajama pants. His hair was messy. He looked up at the ceiling, rolling his eyes. “Gran, could you tell Sophie I’m not really in the mood… right…..now?” his voice trailed off when he saw it was Emma.
“Hey, Zane.” Smiled Emma.

“Hey.” Once Zane realized it was Emma he sighed, accepting that his night would turn into playing 20 questions with her. He trusted his Gran’s judgment. “I guess we’re doing this.”

They went up to Zane’s room.

“You thought I was Sophie?” said Emma, sitting down in his desk chair.

Zane lied down on his bed. “She said ‘your friend’ Sophie’s the only one who wants to see me. Well, at least the only one I think is smart enough to figure out where I am. I don’t think Nate is smart enough to figure out I’m living here. My turn to ask a question. Who told you I was here?”

“Your dad. Well, actually your dad’s girlfriend blurted it out at dinner tonight.”

Zane rolled his eyes. “Yeah, she’s a real winner.”

Harrison was completely lost after Christine died. His lover, his best friend, his wife, the mother of his child, was dead. After Christine died, he realized how much he needed her and more importantly, how much Zane needed her.

There would be changes. Christine was still wrong about certain things. Zane needed to grow up. He needed to man up. Zane needed to be strong now that his mother was dead. He needed to stop being coddled by his grandmother. Zane needed his father.

Then it happened. Zane and Harrison went on vacation to New York City. Harrison hoped the city and culture would take Zane’s mind off of losing his mother. Zane was distant, quiet, almost like he wasn’t there. Zane had become the type of child a parent could forget was around.

But what parent forgets their 10 year-old child in a foreign country? That was the type of parent Harrison had become. He decided he needed to change too. He would be more involved in Zane’s life. He would guide him to be a strong leader in business. Zane would be successful, well rounded, the boy every parent wished their child would act like.

Harrison couldn’t watch Zane all the time, so he started dating the next year.

Margot was perfect. A pretty, successful, child psychologist. Harrison didn’t feel any sort of spark with Margot, but he knew she would be a good mother for Zane.

Zane didn’t think so. The day Harrison introduced the boy to Margot, he made every effort to sabotage the relationship. Zane behaved poorly, worse than he ever had before. He was loud, violent, it was like he was possessed by the devil.

Margot didn’t give in. She was sturdy, she met every challenge Zane presented with grace. Harrison eventually put Zane to bed without dinner. He apologized to Margot. She smiled, telling him Zane wasn’t ready for a new mother and she knew that Harrison wasn’t that interested in her. She wished him luck and they parted as friends.

Harrison went up to Zane’s room. He had been crying, that much was clear. When Harrison came up, Zane set his face in a determined scowl. “I won’t listen to her, she’s not my mom.”

“You don’t want a new mom?” asked Harrison evenly.
Zane kept scowling.

Harrison sighed. “That’s good. I don’t want a new wife.”

Zane’s face glowed happily.

“I know this might be hard for you to believe, but I miss her as much as you do. I assure you, your mother is irreplaceable.”

“Irreplaceable.” Zane repeated.

“No one will ever replace her. For either of us. We’ll be happy bachelors.”

“Bachelors?”

“Men who aren’t tied down by women.”

“Bachelors.” Zane repeated.

Harrison kept their pact but as Zane matured, he understood the need for a physical relationship. With that understanding, Harrison started dating but the women meant nothing to him. Not like Christine, not even a respectful appreciation like he had for Margot. Zane learned from his father. He learned that romantic partners could mean nothing, unless they meant something, but that was a one in a million chance that could be taken away in an instant.

“Why didn’t you tell anyone you moved in with your gran?” asked Emma.

“I don’t see how it’s anyone’s business but mine and gran’s considering she’s letting me live with her.”

“We care about you. You know what kind of problems can start when people lie about where they’re living.”

Zane rolled his eyes. “That was different. I’m not lying. I just haven’t told anyone where I’m living.”

“Well, I wish you would’ve told me.”

“What would you have done?”

“I don’t know. Come over sooner? Why are you living here? I want the truth.”

“I wanted to buy the Juicenet Café. I asked my father to invest and he refused. I bought it with my savings and turned it into Rikki’s Place. We got into a fight over what he calls ‘a bad business decision.’ He kicked me out. I was living on my own but couldn’t afford it after a while. I moved in with Gran to save money.”

“Did he kick you out or did you leave?”

“I don’t know, both.”

“Have you talked to him yet?”

Zane stood up. “Yes! He came barging in here demanding I get over the fact my secret was just exposed. Why do you need to know?”

Emma looked down. “Your secret was exposed. I keep thinking about you. You and your
secret and your dad. Your mother was okay with your secret. Your father wanted it out in the open. Your parents –“

“Emma, please I don’t want to hear about her right now.”

“My whole life revolves around a secret.” Emma raised her eyes to meet his.

His eyes widened in realization. He sat down on his bed, less relaxed and more at attention now. He nodded for her to continue.

“I keep thinking about what would happen to me if I told my parents.”

“They’re your parents. They love you. Lisa and Neil are great people. After Mom died I spent a lot of time wishing they were my parents.”

“Your dad kicked you out –“ Emma started to tear up.

“My dad. Not your dad. Your dad would never do something like that.” Zane held Emma in his arms. He couldn’t think of the last time he hugged her. They had to have been children. He remembered. The last time Emma hugged him was at his mother’s funeral. He pushed her off of him. She never hugged him again. He held her tighter to make up for lost time.

“I keep thinking, we were so close to giving up our secret, that day with you and your father and Denman –“ she cried in earnest.

“I’m sorry –“

“What would happen if people found out. Your dad was like an uncle to me but he turned on me as soon as it was convenient for him. What if he told –“

“He’s not going to tell anyone. He’d sound crazy.”

“If he can send away his son and still have a clear conscience then –“

“He doesn’t.”

“What?”

“My dad felt terrible about what he did to you. After you escaped, we fought. I played the only card I had in my deck, my mother, his entire conscience. I told him she loved you, she loved your parents, and if anything ever happened to you…he turned into a monster without his guidance.”

Emma looked up at him with her red, tearstained eyes.

“I know you were the one who saved me.”

“How –“

“It’s like you said, we’ve known each other since we were 3 years old. It hurt me just as bad to see you trapped in the moon pool as it did to see Rikki.”

Emma hugged Zane hard.

“Emma Christine Gilbert, I promise I will do everything I can to ensure that no one will find out your secret until you are ready to tell them.” Zane held out his pinky.

Emma grabbed it with hers and hugged him again. “She’d be proud of you.”
“I’ll say –“

Zane and Emma turned, Lydia was standing in the doorway.

“How much of that did you –“ started Zane.

“Enough.” Lydia smiled. “Here,’ she said handing a piece of paper to Emma. “I want you to have this.”

It was a picture. A picture of Lisa holding baby Emma and Christine holding baby Zane. They were smiling, they looked like it was the happiest day of their lives.”

“Thank you.” Said Emma. “I love it. I know my mom will too.”

“You didn’t –“ started Zane.

“Afraid I can’t keep a secret?” asked Lydia. “I’ve lived near Mako Island my whole life.”

“No one said anything about Mako Island.” Said Emma.

“There are things the locals have written off as tricks of the light, lack of sleep, any excuse to keep them from admitting that anything out of the ordinary goes on around here. I’ve stopped looking for excuses. Your secret is safe with me. It’s not the first I’ve kept.” Lydia gave Emma a warm smile and a hug. “You’re always welcome here, Emma Christine.”

Thirty minutes was up. Ash was outside waiting for Emma to come back. Zane walked her to the car. She kissed him on the cheek. He opened the car for Emma nodded at Ash.

“Good talk?” asked Ash as he started driving down the road.

“Yes, I think he did more for me than I did for him though.”

“You’re still worried.”

“Can we go back to your place?”

“Sure.”

Emma snuggled up with Ash on the bed in his tiny apartment. He held her close. “I was worried about our secret.”

“How so?”

“Harrison’s attitude toward his own son’s secret. What’s to say he won’t expose mine.”

“He thinks you’re a human.”

“Yeah, and Zane found a way to stop him from telling anyone.”

“Really?”

“Maybe there’s hope for them both after all.”

“So why did you want to come back here?”

“I’m tired of secrets. I just wanted to be with someone who knew mine.” She put her head over Ash’s heart. “What did you think, when I told you I was a mermaid?”
“I thought it was very cool. And you did use your powers to save a horse, you’re like a superhero.”

“A superhero, really?”

“I can’t be mature all the time. Take the compliment, Gilbert.”

“Okay, Dove.”

“But I am mature enough to handle your secret. I love all of you Emma. So do your parents, and Elliot, and all of your friends. I’ll support you with whoever you want to tell.”

Emma kissed Ash. “When’s the next full moon?” she asked wistfully.

“Not soon enough,” laughed Ash.

“We don’t have to wait –“

Ash pulled Emma close to him, determined to show her just how much she is loved.
Sorry this one is a little late. People in my office are out sick with the flu so I've been working regularly changing hours. Tell me how you feel about this one in the comments.

Over at the Bennett house, Candace had gone to sleep. She was tired of hearing stories about “The Good Old Days,” and told Harrison she was going to do the dishes. Harrison and the Gilbergs sat up talking and laughing, they missed the good old days. Neil did feel like he was on the outside looking in at times. Harrison, Lisa and Christine were all friends in high school. He didn’t meet them until university.

“She loved this song.” Said Harrison and Lisa at the same time.

Harrison said it longingly, like he was in a trance.

Lisa said it with a smile on her face and love in her heart.

Neil saw the way Harrison and Lisa were looking at each other and knew he should give them some space. “I think I’m going to help Candace with those dishes.” Said Neil.

“Harrison, what’s going on?” Lisa asked, clasping her hand over his.

“I don’t know.” He said.

Christine and Lisa. Lisa and Christine. They were always together. Glued at the hip. Christine was wild and carefree while Lisa was level-headed and nurturing. They were like sisters. They shared everything, snacks, books, beds, if there was a way to share it, Lisa and Christine found it. The one thing they didn’t share was Harrison.

Lisa had a brief, rather embarrassing crush on Harrison. He was one of the best-looking guys they went to school with. Of course she couldn’t get him to look her way after she saved his life. That broke the spell for Lisa. If a man wasn’t comfortable acknowledging he was saved by a woman, then she didn’t need to be dating that man.

Christine was different. She didn’t just want Harrison’s respect, she demanded it. And it worked. It was just how Christine did things.

Christine was like Lisa’s sister. That made Harrison her brother.

“You kicked your son out, Harrison. Christine’s son.”

“I didn’t kick him out, Lisa, he left.”

“Does he know that?”

Harrison groaned in frustration. He was proud. Christine was proud. Zane was most certainly there child, proud and stubborn.
Over at Rikki’s Place things weren’t going much better. Rikki and Zane had an agreement. Rikki worked Saturday, Tuesday and Thursday. Zane Worked Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. They both worked Sunday.

Work at Rikki’s place had been slow since Zane’s secret came out. Their usual, young crowd was replaced with tourists and kids Kim’s age who came to hang out (but all left before ten so there parents wouldn’t worry.) At least they could count on Cleo and Lewis.

The middle school aged kids all left at once and the remaining tourists weren’t really enjoying the music, so the band was taking a break. Most of the band left, leaving Will, Sophie and…Nate for some reason left waiting for Rikki and Sophie to close down the restaurant.

Rikki and Sophie were bussing tables and bringing food out to their remaining guests. It was a slow night and it somehow seemed more tiring.

Sophie was being extra nice to Rikki, trying to figure out how Zane was doing. She wondered why Zane told Rikki anything if Rikki didn’t care about him.

“Slow night,” said Sophie to Rikki at the hostess’s station.

“Very.” Commented Rikki, not looking up from her seating chart. There was nothing important on it, no reason Rikki needed to look at it, she just didn’t want to look at Sophie.

“How’s Zane?” asked Sophie.

“Fine as far as I know.” Said Rikki shortly. “Why don’t you ask him tomorrow.”

“I’ve tried to talk to him every day this week. He won’t talk about…it.” Sophie said it like she was whispering an important secret that only she and Rikki knew, not something that was Zane’s very public humiliation.

“He’s like that sometimes.” Rikki really didn’t want to have this conversation with Sophie.

“But told you.”

That struck a nerve with Rikki. She knew she shouldn’t care about Zane and his relationship to Sophie. She knew Zane didn’t want a relationship with Sophie. But the thought of Zane kissing Sophie still hurt like a bitch. “Karma’s a bitch and so am I.” Rikki couldn’t stop herself sometimes. She needed to put Sophie in her place. “Maybe you’re not asking the right way.” She got up and walked into her office shutting the door. She wasn’t sure why she felt the need to lord her relationship with Zane over Sophie…not that they have a relationship anymore, but Rikki was still a little possessive. She and Zane both were.

Over at the Bennett House, Lisa felt like she was talking in circles. She wanted to help Zane and Harrison, but Harrison wasn’t going to give in.

“It’s the girl, Lisa, she changed him.” He looked at her like he was explaining the simplest thing on earth.

“I know Rikki seems a little rough around the edges –“ said Lisa in her teacher voice.

“The girl is a nobody, as soon as he starts dating her he stops listening to me.”

“So she was the one who told him to steal your windsurfer and ride around Mako Island?”
“No but she’s the one who stole his boat. How do you fall for a girl who does that to you.”

“Christine stole your cellphone.”
“That was different, she wanted me to take a break from work. I knew she had it. I knew I’d get it back.”

“That’s not how you felt about it at the time.”
“It was finals.”

“And you were freaking out and not sleeping.”

“Why did Rikki steal the boat then?”
“Well he wasn’t very nice to her and her friends, even Emma for a while.”

“I’m sorry about that. This is why I should’ve been harder on him, but that’s not what Christine would’ve wanted.”

“Christine didn’t have all the answers.”

“When she was alive it felt like she did. Zane always liked her more than me. The only thing Rikki and Christine have in common is that they’re stubborn. Maybe Zane just likes stubborn women.”

“The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

“Christine was more than stubborn. Christine was smart, and creative, and funny. Rikki and Christine are both stubborn. That is where the similarities end. Why can’t Zane date someone practical, like Emma.

“Emma is in love with Ash. Besides, Emma and Zane are more like brother and sister than anything else. What would you say if your father said you couldn’t be with Christine.”

“My father never said that. My mother did.”

“Did you listen?”

“Of course not. She just didn’t want some woman taking her little boy away. She was fine once Zane was born and she had another child to coddle.”

“Do you think maybe you’re afraid of Rikki taking your little boy away?”

“Don’t ask it like that.”

“He’s your baby. Christine’s baby. You take such care of him, in your own way, but you can be…controlling. You can’t protect him forever, Harrison. You can’t keep him here forever.”

“I know.”

“You have to let go.”

Nate hadn’t been the same since Zane’s secret was revealed. Nate thought they didn’t have any secrets between the two of them. Nate told Zane everything. He tried to talk to Zane on days they worked together. Talk to Zane, apologize, make him laugh…nothing ever worked. Zane didn’t seem mad at Nate, he didn’t seem much of anything. It was like he was numb to the world.

Bella could see the change in Nate, and not just because his song writing shifted from all the
ladies who wanted him to sad ballads about secrets.

Bella read the crumpled up song written on lined paper “Secrets From Me” was the title, all about the heartbreak of someone you love hiding secrets from you.

“I think I can work with this…” said Bella. She didn’t want to shoot Nate down when he was this sad. She put her hand over his.

“I can’t believe he lied to me, Bella.”

“He didn’t lie, he just wasn’t ready for you to find out.” Bella knew what it was like to have a secret.

“He told Rikki.”

“Rikki was his girlfriend. She knew him more…intimately.”

“Ew. I don’t need to think of my best mate like that.”

Bella rolled her eyes. Nate could be such a child sometimes. She was starting to miss playful, optimistic Nate though.

Will hated the whole situation. He didn’t like Zane. He didn’t take pleasure in Zane’s secret being revealed either. He just wished everyone would get over it. He knew he couldn’t get Sophie to stop worrying. Zane caused this. He caused Sophie to worry. He caused Nate’s sadness, which is causing Bella’s sadness and in turn, making everything harder for him. “Don’t worry, Nate. He’ll get over it.”

“He won’t talk to me.”

“He’s like that. Don’t let it get to you.”

“Like what?”

“He can be a real jerk.”

Nate looked visibly hurt. Zane could be a jerk. Nate was forever loyal, forever forgiving.

“Will.” Said Bella, trying to stop him from hurting Nate further.

“You know it’s true, Bella.”

“I need to go now.” Said Nate getting up from their table and walking over to Cleo and Lewis.

“Hello, Nate.” Said Cleo, just to be polite.

“What can we do for you?” Lewis was in a good mood. He was home on break and he got to see Cleo, what more could he want.

“You’re good at emotions and girly stuff, right Lewis?”

“I suppose.” Said Lewis rolling his eyes.

“Is Zane mad at me?” Nate looked at Lewis like a little kid, or maybe a dog that had just been scolded.
“You know he’s not mad at you. He’s just upset. That was a big reveal.” Sighed Lewis. He couldn’t help but humor Nate.

Cleo didn’t want to deal with this. She was having a hard time feeling bad for Zane. He was such a jerk this past year. Not like he ever stopped being a jerk, it just fluctuated from bad to worse. Zane was nothing like Lewis, the sweetest, most loyal person she had ever met. She didn’t want to deal with this but, if Lewis wanted to, he could. She admired that about him. “I’m going to settle our tab and head out. It’s getting late.” She kissed him on the cheek. She gestured for Nate to sit down.

“We’ve been friends forever. He’s never been like this before. Well, he’s never taken this long to forgive me, before…”

Lewis was in for a long night.

Bella and Will were still arguing. Even when they got to Will’s boathouse they argued.

“I don’t see why this is such a big deal.”

“You didn’t have to hurt Nate’s feelings like that.”

“I was doing him a favor, the sooner he knows what Zane is like, the better.”

“He does know what Zane is like, he’s known him longer than both of us. There must be some reason to stick around.”

“Seriously, Bella? The guy tried to reveal your secret.”

“Rikki says he didn’t mean it. It was a low blow and an empty threat.”

“He still said it! It serves him right, getting his secret revealed. He’s vain. He deserves to be knocked down a peg.”

Bella was shocked.

“What?” asked Will.

She remembered. She remembered the day she showed Will she was a mermaid. No, she was forced to show Will she was a mermaid. Was she forced? She wanted to tell him. “But he didn’t have to force me into the water.” She thought.

“What?” demanded Will again.

“I’m just thinking about the day you found out I was a mermaid.” She said meekly, looking down at her own fists balled in her dress.

Will’s eyes softened. “Bella –“

“You pushed me into the water.” It was barely above a whisper.

“I’m sorry, you were just so beautiful and a complete mystery –“

“What if my secret was that I couldn’t swim? I could’ve drowned.” She raised her voice.

“I would’ve jumped in and gone after you.”

“What if I didn’t want you to know.”
“You did want me to know, right? You could’ve escaped if you wanted to.”

“I did but, I just wish it was on my terms.”

“Bella, I’m sorry.”

“I have a lot to think about. I need to be alone right now.”

“Bella –“

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Will.”

Bella left, Mako Island the only place on her mind.
Bella headed for the moon pool. Not her moon pool. The moon pool. It still didn’t feel right, and Bella had her secrets. Her whole life was a secret.

Who thought that going for a walk down by the seaside when she was nine years old would turn into becoming half fish every time she touched water.

When it happened for the first time she thought she was dreaming. Bella got lost playing by the sea she was scared and it was dark but the pool called to her. It was illuminated by the strongest moon she’d ever seen. It reminded her of all the stories about the fae her nanny used to tell her. She got into the pool, turning into a mermaid for the first time. She thought she was dreaming.

She fell asleep in the pool, hoping to wake up in her own bed but instead to the sound of a search crew – with a tail. She fixed herself well enough, turning the water on her body into gelatin.

Bella wondered how being a mermaid so young affected her life. She was scared, for sure, but she also felt like being a child helped her accept the fantasy of it.

Her parents never asked questions. Neither did her older brother.

“Bella doesn’t swim anymore because she went missing and nearly drowned in a pool at night.” Her father told his colleagues at work.

“Bella doesn’t want anyone in the bathroom with her because she’s becoming a lady and needs her privacy.” Her mother told her friends at garden parties.

“Bella doesn’t like going out when there’s a full moon because she’s a big, stupid baby who is afraid of werewolves.” Her older brother would tell her friends. He meant well, trying to get Bella to get over her “fear” and go out with friends.

If Bella could appreciate anything about Zane it was how alienating having a childhood secret could be.

Bella wanted to tell her family so many times. She wanted to tell her father when he came home from business trips and they’d sing in the car together.

She wanted to tell her mother when she’d be stuck sitting at home on moon lit nights rather than going out with friends.

She wanted to tell her brother to assure him she’d be okay and didn’t need him fighting off people who made fun of her weird habits.

Then she met Cleo and Rikki and, for once, she was relieved. Mermaids. Two of them. Both with their own powers, who had to figure it out for themselves.

Then Bella realized they didn’t figure the mermaid thing out by themselves. They went through it together with Emma. Bella was jealous. She wasn’t proud of her jealousy but she hated that she had to figure out everything for herself.

She had never felt more free than telling them. But she also told Lewis. Why did she have to tell Lewis? Lewis was part of the deal even though he wasn’t a mermaid. There were all these people she was dying to tell but couldn’t but she told Lewis…he wasn’t even a mermaid. Then someone
told Zane. She didn’t know what to expect really, how could these girls be so cavalier with this secret she’s guarded half of her life.

Then she met Will and everything changed. She wanted to tell Will so badly, worse than she had ever wanted to tell her family. She knew it was selfish, she decided it was just her hormones. She couldn’t keep away from him. She was like a moth drawn into a flame and then he pushed her into the water. At the time, giving up felt so good. She finally had someone she told by herself that she was a mermaid. Her very own secret with a cute new friend…but now…everything felt cheap.

Bella was so tired of secrets. Especially when she wasn’t the one freely giving them. She wanted to cry, but nothing came out.

Rikki emerged from the water a few moments later.

“Rikki?” asked Bella in a tired voice.

“Will asked me to check on you.” Said Rikki.

“What did he tell you?”

“Just that you two fought and you were sad.”

“He doesn’t get it. He doesn’t know what it’s like to have a secret. He knows mine but it’s not enough. He needs to have one of his own.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve been a mermaid since I was nine. Do you know how hard secrets are to keep when you’re nine? When you don’t have a good excuse not to go out on the night of a full moon so you say you’re afraid of werewolves?”

“I’m sorry.”

“I couldn’t tell my parents, or my brother, or my nanny or anyone. I was just the weird girl who didn’t like swimming, or nighttime, or public restrooms.”

“Lots of people don’t like public restrooms.”

“You know what I mean. We fought because he thinks Zane deserved to have his secret exposed, to be knocked down a peg. He thinks it’s karma. He doesn’t know what it’s like.”

Rikki looked angry. “Zane hates that scar. Having it exposed impacted him so much more than Will could ever understand.”

“Are you mad at Will?”

“A little. Things like that…I couldn’t even stay mad at Zane when it was exposed.”

“How did you feel?”

“Every part of me wanted to be there for him, even my better judgment, we might be fighting a cold war here but I’d be a really shitty friend if I wasn’t there for him. So why are you so upset.”

“Will pushed me into the water. That’s how he found out my secret.”
“Bella – that’s really messed up.”

“How did Zane find yours out?”

“Well the first time… he and a scientist and his dad were hunting mermaids –“

“That’s messed up too.”

“I know. The second time…we were down by the docks and I got wet. I asked him to help me and he did. No hesitation, just love. Then he looked all over for me to beg me to be with him again. So Will pushed you?”

“He knew my secret had something to do with the water. He was curious.”

“If it makes you feel any better, Ash thought Emma was afraid of the water so he tried to force her into the ocean to ‘overcome her fear.’ What happened next?”

“He just…took it all in. It felt really good to tell him, Rikki. You and Cleo and Emma all had each other. You even had Zane and Lewis, but Will was my special person. He was my friend who I got to tell my secret, before anyone else beat me to it.”

“He loves you.”

“I know. He can just be dense sometimes.”

“I think it might be a swimmer thing.”

“I really hate secrets.”

“Me too.”

And with that, they just floated there, letting the healing water of the moon pool wash over them.
Trying

Rikki lay in bed trying to summon the will to move. It was Sunday. The day she had been anticipating and dreading. She wanted to hear how Zane was doing but she also wanted one more day to sort out her feelings. That’s what you said yesterday. She thought to herself. It had been radio silence between her and Zane since the incident happened. She was really surprised he didn’t text or call her. The phone works both ways. The practical voice in her head said. She was starting to sound like Emma.

Rikki’s father, a long haul trucker, had been taking trips further and further away now that she was older. It paid better and he was saving up to move them to a nicer house but it left her alone a lot. Alone with only her thoughts for company. You should talk to your friends. - I will when I see them. Rikki knew it was self destructive to keep all of this bottled up but she didn’t know how she felt about it herself. How was she supposed to tell her friends?

Zane was having similar problems at his Gran’s house. He put on a suit, one that said “young, trendy, successful business owner.” The one his father gave to him when he turned 18. He felt undeniably confident when he wore it. Confident and attractive. He sighed and headed downstairs.

“I see you have your armor on.” Said Lydia from the kitchen table.

“What?”

“It’s a good outfit to dodge all the slings and arrows the day throws at you.”

“Thanks, Gran.”

She got up from the table and gave him a hug. “Good luck, Zane.” She kissed him on the cheek.

He kissed her back.

Rikki got in early to open up the restaurant. I’ll open early and keep it locked. That way I can unlock it when Zane comes in and I won’t be caught off guard. She hated how paranoid she was being about the whole deal.

Nate was waiting for her outside when she came. He opened his mouth to speak.

Rikki cut him off. It was too early to deal with any of Nate’s nonsense. “I don’t know where he is. I don’t know when he’s coming in. I don’t even know if he’s coming in. He hasn’t called in sick…yet.”

Nate looked defeated.

Rikki rolled her eyes. “Come on, you have guitars to tune.”

Nate perked up and ran inside.

A few minutes later the kitchen staff showed up to get the kitchen set up.

Then Bella showed up…with Sophie. Sophie was scheduled to work today but it was odd to
see them together without Will.

Rikki gave Bella a quizzical look.

“I drove us.” Said Sophie putting a hand gently on Bella’s back.

Bella flinched at the sudden contact and then relaxed into it.

“We both need a little break from my brother.” Sophie continued. She put her hands on Bella’s shoulders and turned to face her. “You should warm up. It will take your mind off of it. Besides, we don’t want you to hurt that pretty voice.” Sophie’s voice sounded tense but there was a deep quality to it. Sophie was trying with Bella. “I’ll bring you a glass of water after I get set up.”

All eyes focused on Zane when he walked in.

Bella gave a shy smile.

Sophie seemed like she was caught in a trance.

Rikki was caught completely off guard. She loved that suit on him. It was similar to the one he wore when he kissed her the first time, but it fit him better. She knew he wore it to feel confident, but she could still see the glimpses of insecurity in his eyes.

He wore a suit. She wore her arms folded in front of her, a barrier that protects her from the world. She moved her mouth to speak but nothing came out.

“It’s the power suit!” Whooped out Nate. He ran over to Zane and clapped him on the back. “Good to see you finally returned to the land of the living. I was getting bored hanging out with this bunch.”

Bella rolled her eyes.

Zane clapped Nate on the back. “Good to see you too, mate.”

Nate’s eyes shined. Those were the words he was dying to hear.


Rikki could hear it in her voice, she was trying again, but this time it sounded like she wanted something out of it. Something more than being the one to make Zane feel better.

She suddenly felt underdressed in her simple red blouse and black slacks.

Zane looked at her, only at her, his mouth was slightly open, begging her to make the first move.

She couldn’t. She didn’t have it in her. “I need to make sure the produce got delivered.” She managed to get out, then turned and walked to the kitchen.

Zane looked down. He felt even less confident then he did when he woke up this morning. He might as well be naked. “I’ll see to the paperwork, then.” Said Zane going to shut himself in his office.

Sophie came trailing after him. “Not now, Sophie.” He bit out.

She cringed at his tone and went back to work.
Bella gave him a moment then knocked on his door.

“Who is it?” he asked.

“Bella.” She said a little unsure.

“Come in.” he’d handle this quick. He couldn’t think of any reason Bella would want to talk to him that wasn’t work related. He could deal with work related. He was a good businessman after all.

Bella came in and sat down, signaling she would be staying for a decent amount of time.

“I can’t afford to pay you anything more than your current rate. I know you’re talented and you deserve more but—”

“That’s not what I wanted to talk about.”

“Good, because we can’t afford it.”

“Did Rikki ever tell you how I became a mermaid?”

“It never came up.”

“I jumped into a moon pool when I was nine years old.”

“Nine?”

“Nine. I didn’t tell anyone. My parents, my brother, my nanny. No one. I couldn’t let anyone know.”

“That’s a big secret for little girl to keep.”

“I know. I told my older brother I was scared of werewolves of all things to explain why I didn’t go out during full moons.”

“Werewolves?” Zane laughed.

“I was nine! It was the best I could come up with.”

“When I was nine I told Nate I had to keep my shirt on because I had a rare condition where I would catch on fire from the sun if I didn’t.”

“He believed you?”

“It’s Nate. He also believes you can die by mixing soda with pop rocks.”

“Really?”

“Yes, despite the fact he’s eaten them both together on many occasions. He’s still alive.”

They laughed.

“It felt so good telling Rikki I was a mermaid after keeping it a secret half my life.”

“I bet.”

“I bet it felt just as good for her when she told you about the mermaid thing.”
“Maybe.”

“You know, Will –“

Zane didn’t want to hear about Will.

Bella could tell, but he needed to hear this. “Will pushed me into the water to figure out my secret.”

“I hunted Rikki for months. Actually, I was hunting Emma. I never thought my girlfriend could possibly be a mermaid.”

“You didn’t know, and you did the right thing when it mattered.” She put her hand over his. “And it’s what you did the second time that counted.”

“How do you know about that?”

“All of us have a ‘how my boyfriend found out I was a mermaid’ story that we like to tell.”

“When the time came…when both times came…you accepted her without a moment’s hesitation. Just like Will accepted me. After years of keeping a secret inside. It felt amazing to tell someone.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Cleo, Rikki, and Emma have been mermaids for 3 years. I’ve been a mermaid half my life. I know how painful and lonely having a big secret can be to a little kid.”

“Thank you.”

“And if you’re ever sad…just imagine me explaining to my older brother that I’m afraid of werewolves.”

They both laughed.

“I should really talk to Rikki.”

“She’ll talk when she’s ready. Hang in there.”

Bella left Zane’s office, pulling out Nate’s “Secrets” song with a newfound determination. “Hey, Nate! I think we should really work on this.”

Before Bella could make her way over to Nate, Sophie cornered her, handing her a glass of water.

“What was that all about?”

“I just…my fight with Will last night got me thinking about how hard it is to keep a secret as a kid. How lonely it can be. I just felt like I should say something to Zane.”

“You got him to laugh so that’s promising. I’ve been trying to do that all week. Have any tips?”

Bella wasn’t going to give Sophie advice on how to win Zane over. She knew it would never happen.
“Have a horrible childhood secret that was near impossible to keep and have it exposed to all of your friends?” she said cheekily.

“You’re both still talking about this?” Will looked at them both disapprovingly.

“Will.” Sophie said sternly, stepping protectively in front of Bella.

Will rolled his eyes and took a deep breath. “Whatever. Bella, can I talk to you?”

Sophie looked at Bella.

Bella nodded back “yes.”

Sophie gave Bella a pat on the back and glared at Will.

“I’m sorry, Bella.”

“What exactly are you sorry for?” Bella wasn’t good at confrontation but she thought it was something Rikki would say…although Bella’s tone was a little nicer.”

“I’m sorry I upset you. I’m sorry about pushing you into the water. I shouldn’t have done that.” Will held her hands.

“And what else?” Bella knew he was sorry for all of those things. She wanted to hear him apologize for what he said about Zane.

“Calling Zane a jerk? He is a jerk.”

“He didn’t deserve having his secret exposed.”

“Okay, maybe he didn’t.”

Progress. For now, that’s all Bella wanted. “Well, then you can get me a refill on my water. The band and I have work to do.”

Zane came out of his office. He was going after Rikki. He was always going after Rikki. He went after her after their first kiss. He went after her after his dad tried to shut their relationship down. He went after her after they tried to forget each other. He went after her when he wanted to find out where she lived. He went after her when she nearly drowned. Zane was always the one to go after Rikki. This time shouldn’t be any different.

He went to the back of the restaurant where they received deliveries. Rikki was standing alone drinking a juice.

“I thought we didn’t have a new produce order today.”

Rikki jumped. “We do…at three.”

Zane came closer to her. “You look nice.”

“I look like a bum compared to your fancy suit.” The way she said it, it was meant as a slight at herself and him for making her feel that way.

“Well, it’s a good thing you know how to make a man feel naked.”

Rikki couldn’t help but blush, even with her grudge against him that suit still did things to
her. “Vulnerable.” She said snapping out of it.

“Yes, that’s how I meant it.”

“You didn’t deserve what happened to you.”

“Thanks. I don’t know if this is too forward but..I know there’s a full moon coming up so do you want to do something with me?”

Rikki was quiet for a long time.

Zane sighed. “You let me know when you’re ready –“

“We’ll see, Zane. I really haven’t thought ahead that far but, I’ll keep you in mind.”

Zane could hear the sincerity in her voice. “That’s all I need to hear.” He smiled and walked back inside.
When The Moon Hits Your Eye

Chapter Notes

10 Subscribers 10 Chapters.
Honestly, 10 people who regularly read this fic is 10 more than I ever thought would read it.
I would like to thank you all for continuing to read Murmurs while I meander around writing it.
I wrote an extra long full moon chapter! I hope you all like it!
Please continue to provide feedback to let me know how I'm doing.

1:17 AM Ash’s Apartment

Emma and Ash lie next to each other covered in sweat, trying to catch their breath.

“That was –“ Ash started.

“Perfect.” Emma completed his sentence.

“It’s the least I could do since we’re not going to be able to do this on the full moon.”

Emma rolled over to face him. “It has nothing to do with you, this will be the first full moon I’m back.”

“I know, and I understand. I still want to make it up to you, you’re missing out on just as much as I am.” Ash gave her a kiss on the forehead.

“Yeah, well…”

“Care for a round…what round are we on now?”

“Four or five…I think?” Emma gave him a cheeky smile.

“Want to keep going and try to break our record?”

“Not tonight. I’m in for a long night with the girls tomorrow.” Emma rolled over.

Ash pulled her close to him. “Goodnight, Em.”

“Goodnight.” Emma mumbled sleepily.

7:34 AM Lewis’s Fishing Boat

Lewis cast his line as Cleo let out a sleepy yawn.

“You sure you want to be out here this early?”

“Only because you do.”

“The fish are awake so I’m awake. So why did you want to come out with me so bad?”
“I need privacy and this is the most private place I can think of.”

“Okay.” Lewis checked his line.

“Do you know what tonight is?”

“Thursday?”

“No, Lewis, it’s a full moon.”

“Yeah, it’s the first one Emma will be back for. That’s gotta be special.”

“Well, it’s also the first one you’re back for.”

Lewis turned to look at Cleo.

Cleo rolled her eyes. “Remember the thing I told you that Emma told me? There are certain activities that can be enhanced by the full moon.”

Lewis gave Cleo a confused look.

“God, Lewis!”

His eyes widened in realization. “Oh. That thing. And you want to do that…tonight?”

“Yes.”

“What about your friends?”

“They’ll understand. Besides, it doesn’t have to be for the whole night. It could just be for an hour or two.”

Lewis stopped to consider it.

“It will be like an…experiment.”

“Oh, and experiment.” Lewis let his pole sit for a minute.

“Yes how moonlight effects a mermaid when she’s around someone she likes very much.” Cleo wrapped her arms around his neck.

“So if it’s an experiment, what’s our hypothesis?” Lewis asked holding her close.

“The hypothesis is…it will be a night to remember.”

“You have never been hotter to me right now.” Lewis kissed her.

“Just wait for tonight.”

“Two hypotheses to test.”

“It’s for science.” Cleo kissed Lewis.

“For science.” Lewis smiled back.

12:00 PM Rikki’s Place
Rikki came out of her office ready to take her lunch break. Bella, Cleo, and Emma were all already sitting at a quiet table in the corner. For once, Rikki was happy they didn’t have many customers. It meant she could discuss her life without having to worry who would hear her. “I’m taking my lunch break, you’re in charge, Sophie.”

“Got it. Your friends’ food is ready by the way.”

Rikki grabbed the tray and brought it over to their table.

“Here we go, burger for me, shrimp salad for Emma, chicken Panini for Cleo, and a grilled cheese for Bella.”

“Everything is set up for tonight,” started Emma. “Ash says we can stay at his apartment where it’s private. He’s going to go take Elliot out camping so we’ll have the place to ourselves. I bought snacks, rented some movies, I even broke out a few board games. How does that sound?”

“Actually…” Cleo started. “I kind of wanted to try out that thing you told us about when we had our sleepover.”

Emma’s mouth hung open with a dumbstruck smile.

“Cleo!” Rikki giggled.

“I mean, it doesn’t have to be the whole night I just wanted to do an experiment to see if I react to the moonlight the same way that Emma did. Emma was always more flirty-“

“Hey!” said Emma.

“Well it’s true. You practically threw yourself at Byron and you couldn’t wait for Ash to see you half naked with a tail.”

“There’s a different word for that, Cleo.” Rikki laughed “Slutty.”

Emma slapped Rikki on the arm. “Me? What about Cleo, she got the gift of song and used it to flirt with every guy she saw that night.”

“That was one time!” Cleo said. “What about Rikki, she kissed Zane and none of us even liked him then.”

“Hey, we don’t know if that’s true or not. I don’t remember it.”

“That must’ve been some kiss, because I can’t remember anything that happened afterward.” sighed Emma dramatically recreating what Zane said to Rikki the morning after.

Cleo, Rikki, and Emma giggled.

Bella stared at them confused.

Cleo cleared her throat. “Sorry, Bella. Those were just some of our embarrassing first full moon experiences.”

“Do you have any you want to share?” asked Emma.

“Not really like that. My first full moons were during childhood so I really didn’t feel the need to kiss anyone, or have them see me half naked.” Said Bella.
“I was completely covered. I was just in my mermaid form!” Emma defended herself with a smile.

“I don’t remember a lot. I remember craving fish, eating all the seafood we had in our fridge. Waking up next to the closet body of water to my house, especially if there was an ocean. I didn’t want bath time to end during a full moon so I stopped taking baths then, so my mom wouldn’t have to come in and get me and find out my secret. Sorry, nothing that exciting.”

“I think it’s interesting,” said Cleo. “Your experience is so much different because you were a kid when it happened. I think we should all start keeping journals about how our mermaid powers effect us.”

“You kept a journal. Kim read it.” Rikki reminded her.

“I’ll keep it in a better place. I want to learn as much about this as possible. I don’t want to be caught off guard.”

“You’re serious about the science thing then?” asked Emma.

“I didn’t win that scholarship for nothing. I want to see how the moon will effect me with Lewis being so close.” Cleo looked at her friends, pleading for permission.

“I think you should try it out.” Nodded Rikki.

“Yeah, go for it.” Agreed Bella.

“So I guess it’s just the 3 of us?” asked Emma.

“I’ll be there.” Said Rikki.

“Me too.” Said Bella.

“Excellent.” Said Emma. “I’ll go set the place up.” Emma got up and said goodbye to her friends.

“I’m going to go,” Cleo giggled, “Set my place up too. Wish me good luck!” she got up, giddy as ever and walked through the door.

“Good luck.” Said Rikki and Bella in unison.

A huge swarm of tourists walked in, mobbing Sophie at the hostess’s station.

“Guess it’s back to work for me.” Said Rikki, rolling her eyes and going to help Sophie

Will came in with the lunch rush, waving at Sophie. “My usual!” he said, not bothering to wait in line and heading over to Bella. “What are you up to today?”

“Just preparing for the full moon.” Said Bella, her voice laced with disappointment. She wondered what it would be like to be alone with Will during a full moon. The idea terrified and excited her.

“It can’t be that bad.”

“It’s unpredictable to say the least. I’m going to have a sleepover with Rikki and Emma so it won’t be too bad.”
“Tonight?”

“You forgot?” Bella was a little hurt.

“No! I was just hoping I would spend more time with you. I hoped so hard I forgot about it.” He smiled.

Bella smiled back, she couldn’t deny that face anything. “I’m not doing anything right now.”

“Great do you want to go swim to Mako?”

“Actually, can we just do normal teenage couple things? Like going for ice cream, going to a movie, walking around the mall?”


“Well, we can get ice cream there.”

“And they have informative movies and a gift shop.” Will held out his hand

“Okay.” Bella took his hand.

3:18 PM Lydia’s House

Zane sat staring at his calendar. He highlighted, underlined, and circled the day before him. It was a full moon. It was his chance to prove to Rikki he could be trusted. She told him she’d keep him in mind. He knew he couldn’t force her to do anything she didn’t want to do.

I shouldn’t want to force her. Zane thought to himself. He wanted her more than he ever wanted anything in his life. He checked his phone for the umpteenth time. Still no word from Rikki. He might just be in for a night alone.

4:35 PM The Marine Park

Bella slumped down on the first bleacher for the dolphin show. “I think we’ve done just about everything there is to do here.”

“Be careful, you’re sitting in the splash zone.”

“The show isn’t even on right now.” Bella stretched and slumped further into the beaches. “The sun feels great.”

“Sleepy?”

“Mmmhmm.” Bella said closing her eyes.

Will picked her up bridal style and started carrying her.

“Hey!”

“You said you were tired.”

“People are going to look at us, put me down!” she giggled.

Will put her down. “How about we go back to my place and we can take a nap together?”
“That sounds perfect.”

6:12 PM Rikki’s House

Rikki sat staring at her phone. She promised Zane she’d keep him in mind if there was a full moon. *That was before Emma planned a whole sleepover.* What was she going to tell Zane?

Rikki usually didn’t mind letting people down. She was always straightforward with people, if she let them down, it was just because they didn’t see what was clearly in front of them. She was honest to a fault. *Just tell him Emma planned a sleepover. That’s the truth. He’ll get over it. She didn’t have the heart to hurt him after he’d been hurting all month. The nice thing to do would to let him hang out with you for a little while. Emma will understand.* Emma will understand sure. But is that really what Rikki wants to do?

Her stomach growled. *There’s food at Emma’s.* But the growling did little to cover the heavy summer storm that started pummeling her roof. She groaned, completely stranded in her own home.

6:42 PM Ash’s Car

“This had to happen tonight?” pouted Elliot, soaking wet as he got in the passenger side of Ash’s car.

“I’m sorry Elliot. We’ll go camping next week and I can take you to the marine park tomorrow.” Ash handed Elliot a towel and got in the driver’s seat.

“Thanks Ash.”

Ash handed Elliot his cellphone. “Can you dial your sister for me?”

Elliot nodded yes, dialed Emma, and held the phone to Ash’s ear.


“We’re fine, just soaking wet. The sky opened up and practically drowned us at the campground. I’m taking Elliot home.”

“Thank God.”

“You know this means I might have to crash your girls night?”

“It’s your apartment-“ started Elliot.

“Quiet, Elliot!” Emma said it loud enough so he could hear.

Elliot rolled his eyes.

“It’s fine.” She said “Rikki just texted me that she can’t go anywhere in this rain and I haven’t heard from Bella but, I’m assuming it’s the same case.”

7:34 Rikki’s Place

Zane watched the sunset and the full moon rise over the marina. He couldn’t take it anymore. He called Rikki. “Rikki, I—”

“Hello?”
“It’s Zane. I know you only said you’d keep me in mind but, it’s practically a monsoon out here and the moon is up and I hadn’t heard from you yet.”

“Zane I will give you anything you want if you come to my house with a Pizza and a big bottle of Coca-Cola.”

“I’m on it.” He was about to hang up but stopped himself. “Anything else? Sour gummy worms?”

“And Redvines.”

“Got it.” Zane hung up and set out to get Rikki her pizza. His phone buzzed in his pocket. It was a text from Rikki reading: Anything you want within reason.

7:34 Cleo’s House

Lewis let himself in the door.

“Finally.” She sighed.

“You know, I do have to wait for the full moon. And I’m soaking wet.”

“Well, the way I see it, you won’t need your clothes for long.”

“Is this you moonstruck?”

“Of course not. We’re doing this experiment together. You should be here when I add the direct variable.”

“Are you ready?” Lewis held out his hand.

“Of course.” Cleo took it. She took a deep breath, then looked outside. A large smile formed over Cleo’s face before she turned to Lewis, eyes locked on him.

“Cleo?”

She gave him a sultry smile and captured his lips in a passionate kiss.

Lewis had so many questions, but he understood, they were in the middle of an experiment. Now is not the time to ask questions or demand answers. Instead, Lewis wrapped his arms around Cleo, giving himself to her fully.

8:03 Will’s Boathouse

The rain pounded on the rickety old tin roof. Bella loved nights like this, where the storm howled outside her window and she was safe and warm inside. She squirmed happily in Will’s arms. In Will’s arms.

Her eyes shot wide open. It was night, which meant the full moon was out. And that meant she was trapped alone, in the boathouse with Will, during a storm on the night of a full moon.

She picked up her phone, three missed calls from Emma. She quickly put a blanket over her head and went into the corner with the least moonlight.

“I should wake Will up.” That would mean she’d have to face the reality of being alone with a boy she really liked on one of the most unpredictable nights of the year. What if something
happened? Would she even remember it? Would she hurt him?

She didn’t have much time to think about it because Will was starting to stir.

She gasped.

Will rubbed the sleep from his eyes and sat up in bed. “Woah, we over slept. What time is it?”

He looked at Bella in the corner, face illuminated by her phone screen. “Bella?” he got up.

“Stay back.”

“Bella, what’s wrong?”

“I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

“Bella calm down, you haven’t looked at the moon have you?”

“No! I’m just not sure what I’ll do right now…since I’m alone…with you.”

“You’ve been through full moons before, I’ve heard about them, I know you get a little…loony.”

“It’s not just that!”

“Then what is it?”

“Today, Rikki, Cleo and Emma were telling stories about their full moon experiences with boys.”

“So?”

“So I’ve never dealt with that before!”

“It’s just me.” Will tried to walk closer.

“That’s what I’m afraid of!” Bella said, annoyed.

“What?” Will stopped walking toward her.

“Emma told me that…when you’re under the influence of the full moon with someone you really, really like…things can happen.”

“What things?”

“Don’t make me say it.” Bella said embarrassed and hid her face with the blanket.

“What do you –” Will stopped himself.

“Things that make you snog someone and not remember it, or sing to seduce every man around, or kiss someone you barely know and make them pass out from dehydration.”

“Did all those things really happen?”

Bella moved the blanket off her head in exasperation. “YES!” she yelled at Will getting an eyeful of the moon. “No,” she whispered to herself and went running to the door.
Will caught up with her “Where do you think you’re going?” He said, holding her close to him.

“I can’t be here. I can’t be with you. Something might happen, I need to go.” She fought against him.

“It’s raining outside you’ll turn into a mermaid as soon as you walk out there.”

“I’ll jump off the dock, I can make it.”

“Then what? Where will you go?”

The screaming urgency in Bella’s head cleared as the answer came to her head. “Mako.” Nothing ever seemed to make so much sense. She’d go to Mako Island. Bella went slack in Will’s arms.

He let go of her.

She walked with purpose to the door.

“Bella, let me come with you.”

“I can’t let you do that. I might hurt you.”

“You won’t.”

“I can’t promise that.”

“Bella –“

“Sorry, Will.”

She ran out the door and jumped of the dock.

Will didn’t think. He didn’t need to. He was coming to make sure she was safe, whether she liked it or not.

8:08 PM Rikki’s House.

Zane ran to Rikki’s front door, protecting the pizza from the weather at all costs.

He knocked on the door. “It’s Zane.”

Rikki unlocked the front door and ran back into the safety of her kitchen. “It’s unlocked. Just come in. And lock the door behind you.”

Zane walked into the tiny trailer, soaking wet. “The pizza should still be good. Sorry I’m late. I stopped to buy some plastic wrap to wrap the box in so it wouldn’t get wet.”

“You’re soaking wet.”

“That’s what happens when you’re out in a torrential downpour. Here, I’ll unwrap the Pizza.” Zane set to work removing the wet plastic wrap from the box.

“We’ll have to do something about you too.”
“What do you mean?”

“You can’t be near me like that, or on any of the furniture for that matter. Hold on.” Rikki retreated to her room and pulled out a tshirt and sweatpants that belonged to Zane.

“Aren’t those mine?”

“Maybe.”

“Why do you still have them? I thought you broke up –“

“They’re comfy, you never asked for them back, I like taking things that aren’t mine…especially when they’re yours. The reasons are endless. Here,” she handed Zane the clothes, “Put them on.”

“So, you like taking things of mine?” Zane emerged fully changed from Rikki’s bathroom. He served Rikki a piece of Pizza and grabbed her candy out of a wet grocery bag. “Like what?”

“Sparkplugs, t-shirts, suit jackets, snacks, your virginity –“

“I took yours too, I’d say it was a fair exchange.”

“Can I at least get points for an awesome joke?” Her jovial tone set him completely at ease. It was like nothing ever happened between them.

“It seems like you’re a bit rusty.”

“What can I say, I haven’t sparred with you in a while.”

“And why is that?” An uncomfortable silence hung in the air after he asked it. He immediately regretted it. “You don’t have to –“

“I don’t know. Part of it was…the incident, and part of it was my pride and part of it was…I don’t know I just guess I missed talking to you. Is that what you want to hear?”

“Is that the truth?”

“Yes. I’ve been worried about you.” She said like he was a child who couldn’t understand the concept of empathy.

Zane felt his macho bravado being challenged. “Well, you shouldn’t worry about me I –“

“Oh, cut that right out, Zane. You know I’m not trying to insult your masculinity or some bullshit like that. I just…I still care about you. I don’t think anything will change that. I just don’t always know how to deal with…how I’m feeling.” Rikki sat down on her couch, ignoring the slice of pizza.

Zane picked up Rikki’s pizza slice and his own and joined her on the couch. “I know how that is.” He offered her the pizza as a sign of peace.

Rikki nodded and took it. They ate in silence for a little while.

“Thank you for bringing me all of this.”

“No problem. I just wanted to make it up to you.”
“Make what up to me?”

“Everything, the way I’ve acted this past year, especially in regards to the full moon and mermaid business. I really should’ve listened to you when you told me how important it was.”

“How did you go from the guy who was obsessed with mermaids to the guy who couldn’t be bothered with mermaids?”

“I don’t know. Part of it was –“

“Will?”

“What do you see in him?”

“What do you mean ‘what do I see in him?’ He’s dating Bella, not me.”

“But you’re so close, you told him things you didn’t tell me –“

“He actually listened. You let your feelings toward him screw up our relationship. I mean – inviting your friends to play cards when we were supposed to have the café to ourselves, stealing the necklace he made me, nearly drowning him -“

“I know. I’m sorry.” Zane looked down defeated.

“I didn’t want to fight tonight.”

“Neither do I.”

“I know how bad you were hurting when he gave me that necklace. I know that you wouldn’t really reveal our secret.”

“I was willing to do anything to get you back –“

“Anything but act like the man I fell in love with. You were so childish. I just don’t understand why you were so threatened by him –“

“He’s can be in the water with you in a way that I could never dream to be.” Zane admitted feeling less than useless.

Rikki looked down at him. “Will is a talented diver but you’re not the only one. Lewis and Ash can’t be with us in the water the way Will can. It works for Cleo and Emma.”

“Lewis and Cleo have the whole science thing and Emma and Ash have that whole thing where they try to out perfect each other.”

Rikki laughed. “You’re right about Emma and Ash.”

“Do you ever miss me?” he looked up at her. He loved the sound of her laugh.

“More than I’d like to admit.”

Zane perked up. “How? When? Tell me about –“

“Here’s the way this is going to work; we’re in for a long night, I’ll ask a question and then you’ll ask a question. We get 3 passes on questions we don’t want to answer. Deal?”
“Deal.” Agreed Zane.

“Alright. Ladies first.”

8:53 PM Mako Island

Bella let the moon pool water bubble around her. She wrapped herself up in it, feeling compete and at peace. She felt drained in a peaceful way.

Will emerged from the land entrance moments later.

“Bella I –“ he started.

“I’m okay now.” Bella said sleepily.

“Then why don’t you come out of the moon pool, we can go home and –“

“I’m not doing that.” A bit of panic shot through her. “I’m afraid of what I’ll do to you if I leave.”

“You can’t stay here all night.” Will went closer to the moon pool.

“I want to.” Bella started to swim toward the sea entrance.

“Don’t go!” She stopped.

“If you’re staying here, I’m staying here with you.”

“Will –“

“I know you don’t think this but, right now the best place in the world for me to be is with you.”

“What are you going to do here?” Bella swam back toward Will.

“Be with you of course. You said it was hard having a big secret as a little girl, do you want to tell me about it?”

Bella shook her head no.

“Do you want to tell me anything?”

Bella considered it, her eyes looked at him and through him at the same time. “Before everything else, there was the ocean. It filled every corner of the earth, and the ruler of this amazing blue sphere, was the Ocean Queen.”

“The ocean queen?”

Bella didn’t answer. “She ruled the sea and all that inhabited it. She protected her loyal subjects as well as she could, even when the land took over.”

“Bella –“

“As the land grew, some of the Ocean Queen’s subjects left her, and so her powers started to leave her too. She was torn between anger at her subjects for leaving her and sorrow because she
would dearly miss them. To conserve her power she split herself into four ‘daughters’ Atlantia, Pacifia, India, Articia.”

“The four oceans?”

Bella nodded. “To Pacifia she gave power over the water’s shape. Pacifia could create crashing waves to take back some area from the land, but she could also create gentle waves and deliver gifts from the ocean’s bounty. Pacifia’s second gift was to create winds to blow away travelers who got too close to the heart of the ocean, but also deliver them to safety.”

Will sat down, fully engrossed in Bella’s story.

“To Articia she gave power over the cold. Articia could freeze shores solid, stopping travelers from leaving or arriving, but she could also create a solid surface for castaways, saving their lives. She also could control the snow, sometimes creating snowstorms to thick for travelers to see the heart, other times delighting the world with it’s beauty.”

Will nodded for Bella to continue.

She didn’t seem to be paying attention. “To Atlantia she gave the power over heat. Atlantia could cause fires in the most unlikely places, but she could also warm those who desperately needed it. Atlantia could command lightning, using it to drive away those who would get to close to the heart, or using it to clear away what needed to be lost so that the land dwellers could thrive.”

Will sat, mouth open, enjoying Bella’s story.

“Finally, to her youngest daughter, India, she gave the power over the constitution of water. India could turn the water into a useless gel, no longer able to be consumed, but she could also turn into crystal. India received the final gift, the gift of siren song, to pass down words and music so old they’ve been lost to all but the whales and orcas.”

“Are you India?”

Bella shook her head. “It’s a story I heard from my nanny.”

“It’s pretty. But it sounds like –“

“I know what it sounds like.”

“Tell me more?” Will sat down at the edge of the moon pool.

Bella swam toward him, resting on a rock nearby. “Once…”

8:53 PM Rikki’s House

“Why are you here now?” asked Rikki, taking out the bag of gummy worms Zane bought her.

“You told me you’d keep me in mind. You told me to get you a pizza, here we are. Are you happy I’m here?”

“I think so. What do you do when you’re not at the café?”

“Mostly just keep to myself, stay indoors, avoid people but at the same time hope I’ll run into you.”
“I’m surprised your dad let’s you stay at home and sulk all day.”

“It’s not sulking. How about you? Mermaid club?”

“Not as much as you’d think. I’m trying to take care of our restaurant and it’s kind of hard to spend time with your friends when they also juggle family and boyfriends.”

“Speaking of family, how’s yours?”

“My dad’s a jerk as usual. He’s only interested in coming around when he feels like I should be told to ‘man up’ and ‘grow up.’” Zane scoffed

“Coming around?” Rikki gave him a questioning look.

“It’s my turn. How is your family?”

“Same as always, Mom never wanted a kid, Dad does his best but providing for me means traveling far away, and I have no siblings to speak of. Your dad isn’t around much is he?”

“Other way around. Why do you care?” He wanted to tell the truth but he’d be embarrassed to let her know he was living with his grandmother.

“I know how difficult he can be. Does he know about –“

“Yes. Nate called the house several times. He woke my dad up. Dad tracked me down called me a coward and said this wouldn’t have happened if I had just had it all out in the open in the first place.”

“Does your dad have any humanity left or is he just a giant ego monster sucking up everything in his path?”

Zane let out a bitter laugh. “Sounds about right, save the times I manage to remind him Mom existed long enough for him to do some self reflection. You asked two questions. I want two questions.”

“Be my guest.”

“Do you ever think about your mom?”

“Not really. She never wanted me. I don’t really want to want her.” Rikki sounded angry. He knew there was another layer to it. He wasn’t ready to find out what it was.

“Understandable.”

“Do you think my dad wants me?”

“Of course he does. He just has a very narrow mindset of how his son should be.”

“Well, I broke that mold and broke our happy little home with it.”

Rikki decided to go with her gut instinct and ask a question. “You’re not living with your dad anymore?”

“No. Not for a while.”

“Does your dad still live here? I feel like I haven’t seen him around in forever.”
“Yes. He’s just gone a lot.”

“Where are you living now?”

“With Gran.” Zane felt embarrassed admitting it.

“No wonder you’re getting more tolerable to be around, Lydia is whipping you into shape.”

“She’ll do that.”

“This isn’t a question but…your friend Bella is a really sweet girl. I’m sorry I was too big of a jerk to really get to know her this past year. Did you know she’s been a mermaid since she was nine?”

“Yeah. What did she tell you about it?”

“Just that it was hard keeping a secret since childhood, that she felt like she couldn’t tell anyone. She gets how I feel.”

“What did you think when you found out we were mermaids?”

“I was in shock. I felt terrible because I trapped you all. I felt relieved because I realized you were blowing me off to keep your secret, not because you didn’t believe in me. For the first time in my life since Mom died, I felt like I was in real trouble. Nothing could prepare me to see you trapped like that.”

“Do you remember the night I won a golden starfish for my stellar ‘help shark’ performance?”

“Oh how could I forget.”

“You called me brave. Did you mean it?”

“Of course I meant it. It took guts to windsurf around Mako.”

“You saved me didn’t you?”

Rikki gave him a cheeky grin. “Not a day goes by that I don’t regret it. If I had known you would’ve been this much of a distraction I would’ve let the sharks have you.”

“I think even the sharks would’ve gotten tired of me. I asked two, your turn.”

“When did your interest in mermaids stop?”

“This summer. Emma was gone and I could tell you and Cleo were being weird about it –“

“We weren’t being weird! We didn’t want to feel like we were being mermaids without her, behind her back.”

“Yeah, that’s being weird. Emma would want you to have fun. She and Ash were gone which kind of threw off the group dynamic.”

“You and Lewis got pretty close.”

“Yes, we did go through a lot together with our countless ‘how to keep my mermaid girlfriend and her secret safe’ experiences.”
Rikki laughed.

"Then I bought the café. We got busy. I had to balance my work relationships with my friendships. Then Will came into the picture and I didn’t even have Lewis left any more.” Zane regretted so much of the past year. He kept telling himself if he did things differently he’d still have Rikki.

"Aw. Did you miss Lewis?"

"Every day. He’s a pretty cool guy for a science geek. He knew things about mermaids and was willing to teach me. Is that why you like Will so much? He just instinctively knows things about mermaids because he’s practically a fish himself?"

"No. He’s just a nice guy and a friend. It’s cool that he can swim with us but if I’m being perfectly honest, I just miss our mermaid only swims."

Zane perked up.

Rikki rolled her eyes. “It has nothing to do with me not liking him and is entirely because I miss our girl time. I never thought I’d say those words.”

"Girl time.” Zane laughed.

"Is that why you’re jealous of Will? You think he knows more about mermaids than you do?"

"Maybe. He can swim better than I can, he knows all about marine wildlife, he’s in love with the moon pool –"

"He’s a science geek, just like Lewis. The only difference is he gets up close and personal while Lewis sits in a boat and asks us to get him samples.”

"Am I a science geek?"

"No, you’re a business geek. Worse, you’re not very good at it."

"Not compared to the smartest girl at my father’s seminar.”

"You’re brining that up?” Rikki laughed.

"It was our first kiss. You tried to take my jacket. You helped me with my fear of heights –"

"You proved to me you could be decent for a change.”

They both sat there, looking into each other’s eyes. There was something magic, even without the full moon. Rikki’s words echoed in Zane’s head. *The good times were beautiful, but I can’t forget the bad times as well.*

10:47 PM Ash’s Apartment

Emma sat frustrated on the couch, the way she had been since all of her friends cancelled on her. She knew she couldn’t hold it against them. Cleo cancelled early, and she wanted her friend to try full moon sex. Rikki and presumably Bella got caught in the rain storm. She just wished Bella would’ve called.

Ash came in, soaking wet and hauling a camping backpack onto the counter.
“You’re back!” she walked over to him.

“I took Elliot home. Your parents asked me to stay for dinner and I figured I’d give you some extra time in case one of your friends decided to show up. They’re not here are they?” Ash took off his wet shirt and threw it in the sink.

Emma bit her lip, her eyes traveling down his body.

“See something you like, Gilbert?”

“Blame it on the moonlight.” Emma rolled her eyes.

Ash took off his wet pants and put them in next to his shirt. He dried off with a towel. “But you haven’t even looked at the moon tonight.”

“I-

“No use trying to deny it. I know moonstruck Emma when I see her.”

Emma put her arms around his neck. “Well, we’re alone, there’s a full moon, and these walls are pretty thick. What are you planning on doing about it?”

“Is that a challenge?”

“I can’t think of a better time to break our record?”

Ash gave Emma a sly smile. “Alright then.” He pulled the curtain aside, giving Emma an eyeful of the moon. She was on him the next instant.

12:17 AM Rikki’s House

The good times were beautiful, but I can’t forget the bad times as well.

They talked about lighter subjects for the rest of the night, who was going where to university, gossip about the café workers, things they saw online. They polished off the pizza leaving them both bloated and tired.

“I think I’m going to call it an early night.” Said Rikki stretching.

“I’ll get going, I didn’t tell Gran I’d be out this late. She’ll be —“

“Do you think she’d mind if you spent the night? As long as you told her you were safe of course.”

Zane stared at Rikki. Was she asking him to spend the night?

“I really don’t want to be alone tonight.”

“Yeah, just let me call and leave a message.”

Zane made a quick call to his grandmother while Rikki converted the couch into a Bed for Zane, pulling out a mattress underneath and making it up for him.

Rikki got in the bed. Zane looked at her, not sure if he should sit down.

Rikki rolled her eyes. “I know we’re not dating anymore but I meant it when I said I didn’t
want to be alone tonight.”

Zane’s eyes widened “Are you saying we should –“

“I just…I don’t want to have sex with you, or anyone else for that matter tonight but…could you please just be with me.”

Zane didn’t need to be asked twice. “Of course.” He got into the bed with her. They lay side by side together.

Rikki reached out and grabbed his hand. “Goodnight business geek.”

“Goodnight smartest girl at the seminar.”

It was the best sleep either of them got in weeks.

The good times were beautiful.
Sunrise Over Mako Island

Chapter Notes

Sorry this is so late. The most stressful week of the year for my workplace was last week, we prepared for it weeks in advance so I haven't got a chance to write too much. Here's my latest chapter. I know it's short but I hope to get another out sooner than usual.

6:32 AM Ash’s Apartment

Emma and Ash lay in bed, desperate to catch their breath, as the first light of sunrise crept through the window. The apartment was in complete disarray.

“How many was that?” Ash finally managed to get out.

“Ten.” Emma said between breaths.

“We beat our record.”

“Yeah. We did. What do you want to do now?”

“Rest. Not all of us run on moonlight.”

Emma sighed.

“Something wrong?”

“No, resting sounds nice right now.”

Ash turned over to pull Emma into a spoon, kissing the back of her neck. “Good morning, Emma.”

Emma let out a short laugh. “Good morning, Ash.” The two fell asleep almost instantly.

7:09 AM The Moonpool

Sunlight crept into the opening of the volcano, illuminating the moon pool. The sand was soft and cool as Bella and Will slept on the bank.

Bella woke up, in Will’s arms, on the bank of The Moonpool. She quickly shrugged him off of her. “What happened?”

“We fell asleep,” started Will, wiping the sleep away from his eyes.

“No, before that. What happened, what did I do?” she sounded frantic.

“What do you mean?” Will was still half asleep.

“The last thing I remember was telling you stories and –“
“Bella, that’s all that happened.” Did she think she hurt me? Did she think I hurt her? Will didn’t know what to say to her, or if she would believe him.

“Really?”

“I promise.”

“How did I get out here?”

“You don’t remember?” Will sounded a little sad.

“What don’t I remember?” Bella was even more frantic now.

Will didn’t know what she was thinking but he knew it couldn’t have been good. “It wasn’t anything…wrong. I know what you’re thinking…well, actually I don’t. You just kept telling me stories about mermaids, I eventually coaxed you out of the water and onto the bank, I figured you didn’t want to fall asleep in the water. You didn’t want to leave here either.”

“Oh. Okay.”

“Something wrong?”

“That’s all that happened?”

“Bella, I promise nothing happened but the story telling. I wouldn’t hurt you, you know that.”

“You’re not the one I’m worried about hurting someone.”

“You didn’t hurt me either.”

“If I ever start, I want you to leave.”

“Bella I –“

“Promise me you’ll leave.”

“I can’t promise that.”

Bella didn’t know what to say to that. Part of her was happy that Will would stick around even if she was under the moonspell. Part of her was worried he’d get hurt. “Okay. Can we just go home?” They weren’t done with the conversation, but there was no use in arguing now.

9:30 AM Cleo’s House

Cleo came up the stairs to her bedroom, two coffees in hand. “Time to wake up, Lewis. You already missed the prime fishing hours.”

Lewis rolled over in bed and grumbled. “Then I see no reason to get up.”

“Really, because we have an experiment to continue…and coffee.” She set down the coffee on her desk.

Lewis grumbled again.

Cleo threw the covers off of him. “Come on Lewis, science waits for no one, man or
Lewis pulled her down into him, kissing her gently. “Okay, if you say so.”

He got up and sat at her desk. She sat in his lap.

“What are the results of our experiment?”

“Increased libido, stamina, and uh…aggression..”

Cleo gave Lewis an annoyed look.

“I mean assertiveness on the part of our mermaid.”

“And how did you like it?”

“It was, amazing, mindblowing, when I could keep up at least.”

“And our conclusion?”

“Inconclusive. More research needed.” Lewis raised his eyebrows at Cleo.

“More research needed?”

“Much more.”

Cleo kissed Lewis. “More research needed indeed.”

10:00 AM Rikki’s House

Rikki lay awake, picking at her nails. In hindsight, inviting Zane over might no have been the best idea. Zane made her feel safe when the moonlight was lurking outside, now she just felt dumb. “I should know how to handle this by now.” She thought to herself.

She knew he had to leave for work in a few hours – they opened late on Friday so they could stay open late, still it was his night to work.

She got up, took a bath and got dressed. She saw Zane stirring on the couch and handed him a bowl of cereal. “I made breakfast.” She said cheekily.

“I can see you put a lot of effort into it.” Zane smiled at her.

“I did, I poured the milk in myself and everything.”

“Well you did a great job, I can see the cereal isn’t soggy at all yet.”

“Made with love in every spoonful.” Rikki froze, she couldn’t believe she just said that. She really didn’t want to fuel Zane’s fire. She just wanted to be friends for now.

Zane opened his mouth to comment and then thought better of it. He took a bite of the cereal, “If that’s what they’re calling red dye number four now, I can definitely taste it.”

Rikki laughed.

“So what are you doing later?”

“I am laying low and relaxing. Treating myself for surviving yet another full moon with
Zane’s face fell, but he pulled his smile right back up. “So I only embarrass you a little now?”

“Sometimes. I do a good enough job being embarrassing all by myself during the full moon.”

Zane felt a little better. He still wasn’t a fan of listening to Rikki put herself down. “What are you doing later?”

“Listening to the incomparable Bella Hartley and enjoying the ambiance at Rikki’s Place.”

“Sounds like a good time.”

“Yeah, you should check it out sometime.”

“I should? How does,” Zane checked his phone, “two hours from now sound.”

“Getting there right when they open, good plan.” They both smiled at each other. Rikki missed their back and forth. She missed Zane.

The silence was deafening, Zane took it as his cue to leave. “I should head out.” He started to get changed into the clothes he wore the day before.

“You can keep the pajamas. I don’t want to make you do the saddest walk of shame ever.”

“Saddest ever?”

“Yeah, it’s when you leave a girl’s house wearing the same clothes you wore the day before and all you did was sit up with her all night and talk and then fall asleep together fully clothed.”

“That doesn’t sound like the saddest walk of shame ever.”

“Then what is?”

Zane thought for a minute. “Waking up and regretting everything you did the night before – especially who you did it with.”

“Food for thought.” Rikki nodded, not knowing what else to do. She was surprised he said anything like that.

Zane smiled and started walking out the door.

“I want those clothes back! They’re mine now, do you hear me?” she yelled as he walked to his car.

“Loud and clear.”

Damn if that smile didn’t get her every time, when it was sincere at least.
Very Important Emergency Mermaid Meeting

They all got the text.

“Emergency mermaid meeting. We need to talk about the full moon. Take Lunch.” Bella

Rikki gave Sophie a quick “You’re in charge.” And hurried out the door.

Cleo told her supervisor she was taking her lunch break early.

Emma gave Ash a quick kiss and hurried out of his apartment.

Rikki was the first to arrive. “So, where’s the fire?”

“No fire, we just need to talk about the full moon.” Giggled Bella.

“You called us here for girl talk?” said Emma, who just arrived. “Bella, some of us have jobs.”

Cleo came in shortly after her.

“I don’t see what the harm is Em, you don’t have a job and I’m a manager. I can take off whenever.” Said Rikki.

“What about Cleo?” asked Emma.

“My supervisor loves me. Do you have any idea how much I do for the Marine Park. Besides, I always love a little girl talk with my lunch break. So, who goes first?”

“Who wants to?” asked Bella a little shyly.

“You called the meeting, sweet thing.” Said Rikki waggling her eyebrows at Bella.

Bella blushed.

“How ‘bout I start,” started Cleo. “Lewis and I had full moon sex last night. It was amazing, I had so much energy, I think I even scared Lewis a little bit – In a good way of course!”

“That good, huh?” asked Bella wide eyed.

“Not sure,” grinned Cleo “More research needed.”

“So, Bella?” asked Rikki.

“I can wait. Emma, how was your full moon?” asked Bella little unsure.

“Well…”

“Emma’s not going to tell, she’s sober. She only talks like that when she’s drunk…or there’s a full moon.” Said Cleo matter-of-factly.

Emma rolled her eyes. “I do NOT need alcohol to be honest.”

“I didn’t say that –“
“- If you all must know. Ash and I...beat our record.”

“Excuse me?” said Rikki with wide eyes.

“What record?” asked Bella.

“Of how many times we’ve had sex in one night.” Said Emma looking away from her friends.

“So, what’s the new high score?” asked Rikki.

“Ten.” Sighed Emma.


“Well, you need to prepare really well to get to ten, Cleo. It’s not just something you’re able to do out of nowhere, even with the full moon.”

“Ugh, do you and Ash *have* to turn everything into a competition?” asked Rikki

“As opposed to what?”

“Well, last night Me and Zane –“


“Come on,” said Rikki looking around at her friends. “Bella called us all here, she told me last night she needed to tell me her full moon story but we were working. It’s her turn to tell a story.”

“I can wait.” Said Bella, who had calmed down and was ready for the pressure to be on Rikki.

Rikki rolled her eyes. “I told Zane *in passing* a few days before that if I didn’t have any plans for the full moon, I’d keep him in mind. I was planning on going to Emma’s and then the rain started. Zane called and asked if I needed anything, not having any food at the house to eat or money to order delivery, I asked him to get me a pizza –“

“And gummy worms?” asked Cleo.

“He remembered the gummy worms, I had to remind him about the Redvines. Anyway, he came over, we ate pizza, talked and he spent the night. I didn’t want to be alone during the full moon.”

“Same bed or separate?” asked Emma raising her eyebrows cheekily.

“I said, *I didn’t want to be alone.*” Said Rikki, rolling her eyes.

“Same bed it is then.” Interpreted Cleo. “You ready to tell us about your full moon experience, Bella?”

“Yeah,” Bella said shyly. “First of all, you guys kind of freaked me out with your stories about your first full moon. I mean, Rikki kissing Zane when all of you hated him –“

“Never proven.” Rikki reminded her.

“So, Will and I spent the day together because I wanted to be away from him during the full
moon. I wanted to be at Emma’s sleepover. We took a nap and the next thing I knew the moon was out and rain was beating down on the roof. I was really afraid of hurting him.”

“Bella you –“ started Emma.

“ Eventually, I made a break for it and swam to Mako. The moon pool calmed me down. Then Will showed up, just to check on me, just to watch me. He had no expectations and no demands. He just sat here and let me tell him old mermaid stories my nanny used to tell me in Ireland. We woke up together…here…yesterday morning.”

“And?” asked Cleo raising her eyebrows.

“And he was just holding me. He says nothing happened. I don’t remember a lot. He says I got tired of telling stories and he got me to get out of the water to go to sleep. I just feel like I can really trust him.”

“What’s new there?” asked Rikki.

“You’re going to have sex with Will next full moon!” Squealed Cleo.

“No,” Started Bella, “Maybe. I’m definitely thinking about it.”

“Everything you do should be in your own time. Will will understand and if he doesn’t… he’ll have me to deal with.” Said Emma putting her arm around Bella.

Bella smiled, “So let’s hear more about Rikki and Zane.”

“How ‘bout we don’t?” said Rikki.

“Come on, you had a sleepover with your ex –“

“Not news, it’s like the third…or fourth time he’s been my ex.”

“Well, what did you talk about?” asked Cleo. “It’s just talking.”

“I can’t tell you.”

“Actually, girls, I’m with Rikki on this one. Some secrets are meant to be kept. Give her a break.”


“I want to see Ronnie’s show before my shift starts!” agreed Bella following Cleo.

“Thank you.” Said Rikki to Emma.

“No problem.”

“Did you know he was living with his Gran?”

“Yeah, Mr. Bennett let that one slip…or I should say he was very annoyed and bluntly answered the question and then said –“

“Moving on.” Rikki finished the sentence.

“Why didn’t you tell me he was living with Lydia?”
“It wasn’t my secret to tell. I didn’t want Zane to have to tell everyone he’s broke, not talking to his dad, and was taken in by his grandmother.”

“Thank you for not forcing him.”

“You can’t force Zane to do anything.”

“You can’t, but I can.”
First off, let me apologize. My job has gotten really stressful because we've had a lot of people leave my department in a short period of time, meaning the rest of us pick up the slack. I haven't had much time to do anything and I'm usually too tired to work through my writer's block. I hoped I could get this out earlier but here it is. Let me know what you think.

Business was starting to return to normal at Rikki’s Place. It had been a little over a month since Zane’s shirt ripped open and his secret was revealed and the high school crowd was starting to come back.

It was a nice day and things did seem to be looking up. Bella and Nate were rehearsing. Will was watching them. Cleo, Lewis, Emma, and Ash were all sitting together on a double date. Rikki was even getting along pretty well with Sophie today.

All that went away in a second, the moment Harrison Bennett walked in. Cleo’s table was the first to notice, as they had already finished their meals and were just talking.

“What do we do?” Cleo asked Emma. All eyes were on her since she knew Mr. Bennett the better than anyone else did.

“We act normal.” Emma said, as if that was a perfectly reasonable statement.

“Do we tell Rikki?” asked Lewis.

“He’s probably looking for Zane. He’ll probably just ask where Zane is and leave.” Still, Emma kept an eye on him.

Nate was the next to notice him. The laughter in Nate’s eyes immediately died as soon as he locked eyes with Mr. Bennett.

“I’m going to go take a water break.” He said nervously, leaving Bella on stage by herself.

“The song’s looking really good now, Nate. You don’t need to take my suggestions so personally.” She said, watching him slowly move to the kitchen. She knew Nate could be sensitive about her suggestions when it came to writing songs but this was ridiculous. She rolled her eyes and motioned to the guitarist to come work with her.

Harrison sat himself down in a booth in the corner, near the stage. Not a popular place to sit at 11:00 AM when the band was rehearsing and not actually playing. He found himself actually tapping his foot to Bella’s soft singing.

“He’s sitting down!” whispered Cleo loudly at Emma.

Sophie was the next person to notice this man who she had never seen before, sitting in a
section that wasn’t open yet. She finished serving her customers and walked over to Harrison.

“Excuse me sir,”

Harrison looked up at her.

“My name is Sophie, I’ll be your server today. I just want to warn you, the band isn’t set to
play for another hour, you may want to move if you don’t want to hear endless mic checks.”

Harrison blinked slowly at her. “I sat where I intend to sit for my meal. I’ll have a banana
beat box to start.”

Sophie’s mind completely blanked. She had never heard the words “banana beat box” before
in her life. Luckily for her, she was an excellent business woman. “Right away, sir.” She smiled and
headed to the kitchen.

“Hey, Rikki.” Sophie went into the office.

Rikki was catching up on paperwork before the lunch rush. “Yeah?”

“A man came in, asking about something called a ‘banana beat box’ is that like a secret menu
item or something? Because if it is, it really shouldn’t be a secret from employees.”

Rikki smiled. “No, it’s an old drink from when this place used to be the JuiceNet Café. It’s
the one Emma always orders.”

“So a banana smoothie with mango, strawberry, and pineapple?”

“Exactly. Let me guess, is the guy about our parents age?”

“I’d say so.”

Rikki smiled and put down the paperwork. “I can’t wait to tell Emma, if she hasn’t seen him
yet.”

They walked out of Rikki’s office together. Rikki’s face fell when she saw who was at the
far table. She was expecting the graying hair, kind smile, and Hawaiian shirt of Wilbur but instead
she saw Harrison Bennett.

“Let me handle this, Sophie.” Rikki said groaning.

“What, what is it?”

“You don’t want to deal with him.”

“A second ago you were all smiling and now you look like a kid who just dropped their ice
cream cone. Everyone stopped smiling when he walked in, what gives?”

“I’ll tell you later.”

Rikki made Harrison’s smoothie quickly, making an extra one for Emma just in case she got
it wrong.

“Hey,” she said handing Emma the smoothie. “Did I make it right?”

Emma took a sip of her own smoothie. “Tastes fine to me. Is this about Mr. Bennett?
“Yeah. He ordered it. By name. You know it’s a test.”

“You’re being ridiculous.”

“Easy for you to say, he likes you.”

“I thought you didn’t care what he thought of you.”

“I don’t.” Rikki insisted.

Rikki walked to Harrison’s table with his smoothie in her hand. “One banana beat box.”

Harrison took a sip. “Very good.” He meant it, but his face had no indication that he liked the smoothie.

“Is there anything else I can get you?” asked Rikki.

“It’s not every day the manager at the most trendy café in town…for teens that is…makes your smoothie herself. Take a seat.”

Rikki narrowed her eyes. They were doing this. She sat down across from Mr. Bennett. “What’s this about?”

“I think you know, Rikki.”

“I really can’t say I do. I’m not dating your son anymore and he’s not here right now so I don’t know what you want from me. Or did you even know that?”

“I know you aren’t dating.” He said simply.

“Do you know why that is?”

“Because your son keeps reverting back to a spoiled toddler?”

Harrison smiled and shook his head. “He does act like that, as much as I’ve tried to break him of the habit, but that’s not the answer.”

“Enlighten me. Why aren’t he and I together?”

“Because you said ‘no.’”

“Wow, you’re a genius. We’re not together anymore because one party broke up with another, I’m glad you told me because that was much easier than having to look up the term ‘breakup’ in the dictionary.”

“Don’t be smart with me, Rikki. Especially because you still don’t get it.”

Rikki widened her eyes and shrugged. “Spell it out for me, then.”

“You run half of a business even though my son bought the whole thing, this restaurant bears your name even though you left it for awhile, he cut himself off from me and is living with his gran to do all of this, and he’s still hangs on your every word, ready to come back to you the moment you take him.”

Rikki’s mouth opened, she was completely dumbfounded. “I-“
“Have no idea the power you hold over my son. You say that, but do you mean it? Can you honestly say you don’t see how much power you have over him?”

Rikki never really thought about it. She didn’t like to think about it. When things were going good, Zane was a loving, dedicated boyfriend who would do anything to make her happy. When things were going bad, he was constantly trying to make up for past transgressions, often inappropriately. When things were over, he’d give her anything she’d ask of him to take him back. It wasn’t fun to see Zane so lovesick, it was cruel. “What is this about?”

“How long do you plan on working here, managing this restaurant?”

She hadn’t really thought of it. So many changes happened this summer, Emma came back but who knows how long she’d stick around, she was looking forward to going to university with Ash this year. Lewis and Cleo were off to America for a research program. Bella and Will were wrapped up in themselves. And Rikki was just there.

“You’re a bright girl Rikki, and I don’t mind admitting it, believe it or not. You’ll work here this summer, and you’ll be restless afterward. I know you must have some plan.”

“What are you saying?”

“My son holds on to your every word and I know you don’t want to work in the restaurant forever. Do us both a favor and tell him to sell the place. I know you’re in debt and I know you’re miserable. He’s only still doing this for you. The moment you let it go, he’ll let it go.”

“You’re telling me to give up on this place so Zane will?”

“You don’t want this forever. We both know that.”

“How do you think he’d feel, knowing that you came in here, telling me all this?”

“I know how he feels. I’ve already told him to give it all up, but, you have more power over him than I do.” Harrison pulled a twenty dollar note out of his wallet and left it on the table. “Keep the change, it’s not a bribe. This isn’t a bad place, I just don’t think it should be run by a love struck 19 year old trying to find any way to get his ex-girlfriend to stay.”

Rikki was furious. “How dare you say that. He’s not lovestruck. He can get by without me just fine. He’s been doing it. This isn’t about me, this about him proving he can run a business. And he’s doing just fine.”

Harrison smiled at Rikki. “Keep saying that, you almost sound like you believe it.” He walked out of the restaurant.

Rikki took off her apron and slammed it down on the table. “I’m taking an early lunch break. I’m really sorry, Sophie.”

“It’s fine, really. Will you tell me what that was all about first?”

Rikki sighed, she didn’t want to tell Sophie but she’d rather the information come from her than from any kind of snooping Sophie could get up to. “That was Mr. Bennett.”

“Zane’s dad?”

“And a royal jerk.”

“What did he want?”
“Same thing he always wants. Zane to do as he says like a robot with no free will. I’m going now, I want to get back soon so I’m not leaving you with peak lunch rush hours all by yourself.”

Rikki darted out of the café with her mermaids in tow.

They all felt much better now that they were at the moonpool.

“You know, it could just be because he hasn’t trapped us in an underwater cave to profit off of our transformation recently, but I forgot how terrible Zane’s dad is.” Said Cleo.

“Everything about Zane makes so much sense now.” Agreed Bella.

“He’s not that bad,” Emma said, trying to reassure everyone. “He’s just been lost since his wife died…and he copes with it by micromanaging Zane’s life.”

“But he can’t do that because Zane likes Rikki more than he’s afraid of his dad.” Said Cleo, looking at Rikki for confirmation.

“It’s not that, he wants to prove his dad wrong. He wants to prove Rikki’s place can be a good business decision.”

“Why did he come in if he thinks it’s bad business?” asked Bella.

“He wants me to quit and to tell Zane everything is over: the café, the music, our relationship, everything. He says Zane will leave if I do.”

“Well you’re not pulling the plug on my microphone.” Smiled Bella.

“Of course I’m not.” Said Rikki.

“And you’re relationship is already over and he’s still hanging around.” Said Cleo.

“That’s the thing. He wants me to leave so Zane will leave. He doesn’t want Zane to move on. He wants Zane to leave even if he has to force it.” Said Rikki.

“That’s not healthy.” Said Emma.

“Do you really think Zane will leave if you do?” asked Cleo.

“I don’t know.” Said Rikki honestly. “I hope not.”

Rikki felt cruel, she was so busy with school and the café she lost track of her goals. Mr. Bennett was right about one thing, she couldn’t work in the restaurant forever. Still, that scared her less than the idea that she had power over Zane. It didn’t seem fair. She was lucky, that in her experience Mr. Bennett was usually wrong. She hoped to God he was this time.
Lavender Vs. Lysol

Chapter Notes

Once again sorry for how late this is. Thank you all for sticking by me and reading this fic.

What did Rikki want? She knew she didn’t want to manage a restaurant her whole life. “Think, what did little Rikki want to be?” She thought to herself, although Shark-fighting astronaut didn’t seem practical. “Travel? Bella, Will, and Emma made it sound nice. She and Lewis talked about how cool it would be to manage an Alt Rock band. Get married, to a wonderful loving husband and have lots of babies? The last one was Cleo’s dream, and it seemed the most delusional of all at this point.

“Did Zane want that? Does it matter? What does Zane want, anyway?” once again, Rikki was feeling like her trailer was a cage and she knew only one person could answer her questions.

She walked to Zane’s Gran’s house and rang the doorbell.

Lydia answered the door. “Rikki?” she said in amazement.

“Hi, Grandma Lydia.” Rikki said with an awkward smile on her face.

“Gran is fine, you know that. Zane, come down, your friend is here.”

Zane came down the stairs, amazed Rikki was coming by. He was still in his pajamas, the ones Rikki let him borrow last time. His hair was a mess. “Rikki?” he asked, still unable to believe she was there.

“I thought we could go to the movies. We can find the most ridiculous romcom playing and we can try not to laugh.”

“Yeah, okay.” Zane said scrambling back up the stairs to put something suitable on.

“I’m glad you’re here.” Lydia said as Zane scrambled up the stairs.

“Yeah,” Rikki agreed to be polite. It wasn’t her strong suit but she’d do it for Lydia. “Zane needs to get out more.”

“That’s not what I meant. I’m glad you’re here to remind him to get it together.”

“Ready.” Zane said, scrambling back down the stairs and shutting the door.

“You know, I did really like the outfit you had on before.”

“Well, I’m glad you like it because I’m giving it to you.”

“What a gift!” said Rikki, opening the bag. The clothes smelled like Zane. Like cologne and sweat and a hint of lavender. Lydia’s house always smelled like lavender. Rikki loved it when Zane would go visit his Gran, the big sweaters he let her borrow always smelled like lavender when he came back. She preferred the smell to the strong smell of Lysol cleaner use to make sure every inch
of the Bennett’s house was spotless. Like the smell, Zane was always a softer version of himself after visiting his Gran.

She must’ve been in a trance because Zane made a comment.

“Sorry, I didn’t have time to wash it. I didn’t expect I’d see you so soon.”

“No, it’s fine.”

“It still smells kind of like your house.” He said.

“Does it?” she couldn’t tell. No one knows what their own house smells like.

“Yeah.”

Rikki nodded, still thinking about the weird concept of smell and how things smell different to different people.

“It’s a good smell.” Zane assured her, worried he said something wrong. “It smells like sea salt and sandalwood.”

The rest of the walk was relatively uneventful. Rikki asked how Lydia was doing and Zane asked about Rikki’s dad.

The movie though…the movie was a sight to behold.

“A love like this doesn’t come every day…” said the male lead, clutching the female lead in his arms. “It’s rare…it only comes once every…four years.”

“You know what they say about leap day.” Said the female lead, like that was supposed to mean anything. They kissed, like it was supposed to be a profound moment. And then it started to rain.

“You know what they say about rainy February?”

“No rain on your wedding day.” They kiss again.

Rikki started to laugh and Zane put a hand over her mouth, holding in giggles himself.

“Rikki, there are other people in this theater.”

“I’m fine, I’m fine. Pft.” She put her own hand over her mouth.

A young couple in front of them glared.

It was awful, but it only made Rikki laugh harder to know someone would genuinely enjoy the film.

“I think it’s time for us to go.” Zane said, grabbing Rikki’s hand and leading her outside.

“God, why would they ever think to make a prequel to 30 Days of Love?” she said, wiping tears away from her eyes from her laughter as they ran out of the theater and started walking around the mall.

“You didn’t think 29 Days of Love was a cinematic masterpiece.”
“No, I think the first thing they wrote was ‘A love like this only comes once every 4 years.’ And then the whole movie was based off of that one line.”

“It would explain the meaningless ‘you know what they say about leap day’ line.”

“Maybe we should be screen writers.” Laughed Rikki.

“I’m up for anything, as long as I have you.” Said Zane.

Rikki stopped laughing. “Zane what do you want to do?”

“What do you mean?”

“Like in life, come on, you have to have some sort of childhood dream.”

“When I was a kid I wanted to Race BMX bikes but, you saw where that got me.”

“Well, don’t you want to do something with business?”

“I thought about it, making Rikki’s into something spectacular. Somewhere everyone wants to eat.”

“You don’t want it to become a tourist trap?” Rikki made a face. She liked the locals, and the young crowd.

“We won’t be young forever and their money is still good. It’s not like we’d be radioactive sharks.”

The exaggeration made Rikki smile. “Although if one did come in, I’d be sure to fill him up so he didn’t eat anyone.”

“What else do you want to do?”

“What?” asked Rikki.

“You asked me what I wanted, what do you want?”

Rikki looked down. “I don’t know.”

“Career?”

“I have no idea, something that isn’t lame I guess?”

“School.”

“That would be the practical thing.”

“Love?”

“In my experience, it doesn’t work out.”

She expected him to get mad, to throw a temper tantrum like a little boy and demand she come up with a plan that involves him, even if he has to beg.

But Zane was soft as the lavender detergent Lydia used to wash his clothes. “You know, you can tell me anything.” He held her hand and led her to sit down at on of the tables at the food court.
“I don’t know what I want to do. Cleo and Lewis have scholarships in America, and Emma is going to an extremely prestigious and expensive private school here so she can stay with Ash while he works at the stable. Bella is doing the music thing and Will’s just trying to support Bella. And I’m just here.”

“I don’t have money for school. I don’t even know what I’d study. I can’t really think about career options because I’m too busy with the cafe and when I’m not doing that I’m managing the band. And after you…it’s not like there’s anyone else around for me.”

Zane decided not to ask her what she meant, even though he was desperate to know. He nodded for her to continue.

She breathed out a sigh of relief. “I mean, my parents were terrible for each other –“

“I know the feeling.” Agreed Zane.

“No, you don’t. Your dad loved your mom. I know he did. My parents were just a train wreck from start to finish. I just. I wish I had better role models. I wish I knew what love was supposed to feel like.”

“Maybe it’s different things for different people. My parents…their ‘love’ was a lot different from Emma’s parents. Whenever they’d fight I’d wish Lisa and Neil were my parents.”

“I’ve spent a lot of time wishing Lisa was my mom.”

“Then you and Emma would be sisters!”

“You couldn’t pay me to live with miss alphabetizes her shoes by type and color.” Rikki shoved Zane playfully. “And what about you?”

“Do you know how many times I’ve slept at Emma’s house? You didn’t know her when she banned Saturday morning cartoons because ‘tv rots your brain.’ We were 8 and it was storming out. She suggested we just sit side by side and read books, no human interaction whatsoever.”

“Little Emma sounds like a trip.”

“Cleo loosened her up a lot.” They shared a smile. Soft Zane remembered things about people he claimed not to care very much about. “It doesn’t matter if you don’t have things figured out right now. We’re young. We have time.”

“Yeah,” Rikki agreed savoring the moment.

“Is there anything you know you won’t want to do?”

It was like someone poured a cold bucket of water over her head. “Work at the café.” She thought it, but she didn’t say it. Some moments just couldn’t be interrupted.
Will played with Bella’s long blonde hair as they lied in bed together. “You are too nice.” He said gently into her hair.

“I’m not. It’s just being a good friend.” Said Bella blushing

“You’re taking a half baked poem by Nate and turning it into a real song. That’s charity work if I’ve ever heard it. And you say you’re doing it for Zane.”

“He’s not that bad, and Rikki still sees the good in him.” Bella sat up, completely serious.

“If you say so.” Will sat up with her.

“Will,” she put her hands on his chest. “I need you to trust me.”

“I do.” Will assured her.

Bella looked like she was choosing her words carefully. “If this is going to…work. I need you to trust me…and I need to trust you.”

“Bella, I care about our relationship. I’ll do whatever I can to prove I care I –“

Bella looked deep into his eyes.

His own eyes widened in realization. “You’re not just talking about our relationship, are you?”

“Well…it’s part of being in a relationship…sometimes…when you’re serious and the time is right.”

“And you think the time might be right –“

“Next full moon.” Bella finished his sentence. “I want to be with you on the next full moon.”

Will had a confused look on his face. He was pretty sure he knew what she meant…but he didn’t want to be wrong. “By ‘be’ together you mean have se-“

“Be intimate. I want to spend the next full moon with you…intimately.”

Will took Bella into his arms. “What brought this up?”

“You were just so good with me on last night’s full moon. I figured it was time. It’s the right time.”

“We don’t have to do it if you don’t want to.”

“I do. That’s what I’m telling you.”

Will and Bella looked deep into each other’s eyes and just held each other. Sometimes, it was nice just to be held.
They all got the text: “Mako. Now.” – Cleo.

The girls of course, dropped everything they were doing to swim to Mako. Luckily, Rikki and Bella were both off of work and Emma had no plans for the night.

Cleo was waiting in the moon pool with a big smile on her face. “We need to talk about the full moon.”

“Cleo, for real? That’s why you called us all here?” Rikki rolled her eyes.

“Hey, I’m sorry to take you away from stalking – slash – avoiding your ex all day.”

“I am not avoiding Zane.”

“Stalking?” asked Cleo innocently.

“We’re just…we’re talking again.”

“It’s a good thing.” Assured Emma. “Forgive but don’t forget…that’s what I always say. But Cleo is right, we do need to start planning. I’m still up to my ears in junk food after you guys bailed on me last month.”

“Sorry.” Said Bella, shyly.

“Guess we plan better this time.” Agreed Rikki.

“I won’t be there.” Said Cleo, nonchalantly.

“Full moon sex experiments?” asked Rikki, laughing.

“It’s for science.” Said Cleo, with a cheeky smile.

“Whatsoever, you know I’m up for anything,” said Rikki. “Bella?”

“I – I actually was planning on being with Will next full moon.” Bella started. Her friends all exchanged surprised, but happy glances. “He was just so good with me last time, I think next full moon will be the right time.”

“That’s sweet Bella, it should be really special.” Smiled Emma.

“Good for you, girl.” Rikki gave her a hug.

Cleo just winked at her.

“So, Rikki?” Emma started, “Just you and me for the sleepover?”

Rikki thought about it, things Emma did still annoyed her from time to time, but they were friends and could enjoy each other’s company. Still, Emma loved Ash and maybe she’d rather be with him. Hell, if her friends plans’ for the full moon were any indication, Emma would rather be with Ash. Then she thought about Zane, they had a pretty good time last time they were together and it was always good to have someone immune to the effects of the full moon around. “I’ll manage,” Rikki started. “You can do what you want.”

“Okay then.” Smiled Emma. “Remember, I’m up to my ears in snacks if any of you change your minds.”
Will finally found it. The thing that would make his first time with Bella perfect. She was amazing and he just wanted to show her how much he cared. When he still cringed inwardly every time he thought of the cologne he wore that gave Bella an allergic reaction. It wouldn’t happen again. This gift would be perfect. It was rare, beautiful, special, and came from the sea. It was perfect for Bella. And lucky him, he was the highest bidder and it would arrive just before the full moon.

Rikki swung by the café, giving Sophie a friendly wave. She was feeling pretty good about her decision to spend the next full moon without any of her friends.

Sophie waved back, a little confused with how happy Rikki was.

“Zane in?” asked Rikki.

“Back office.” Said Bella as she went to take a call.

Rikki swung the door open.

“You weren’t scheduled today,” Zane said smiling at his unexpected visitor. “Was the thought of seeing me just too tempting.”

“Zane Bennett, if you don’t shut your mouth right now I will leave and take my good mood…and my proposition with me.” She was only half kidding.

“Proposition? Okay well, proposition me.” He gestured for her to sit down.

“We’ve been hanging out again and I had a great time last time —”

“I did too —” Zane started a little over enthusiastically.

“Let me finish. And you did come buy me a pizza and candy last time, so I was thinking, want to be my full moon buddy again?”

“Yeah, that sounds great. What do you want to do?”

“Meet me at my place, bring food and we’ll rent the worst rom coms we can think of.”

“Pizza and rift tracks, sounds like my kind of night.”

Zane reached out and shook Rikki’s hand. She shook back with mock seriousness.

They looked each other in the eye. This was weird. Shaking hands was weird when all you could think about was how badly you wanted to hold the other person.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know in the comments what you think the special gift Will got for Bella is.

Thanks!
It was raining, pouring, cats and dogs were falling from the sky. It was the type of rain that made you forget what being dry was like. It was the type of rain that kept tourists in hotels and locals at home. Most importantly, it was the type of rain that seriously limited travel for mermaid…or four.

Ash (bless his heart) volunteered to chauffer the girls around. He kept 4 umbrellas, towels, and a battery-powered hair dryer in his car to keep them dry. They were all grateful, but they also felt bad about making him drive them, so they only went from home to work and back.

Cleo was stressed. She had an outdoor job. She couldn’t work at the Marine Park in the rain, and she couldn’t stay home and have Kim somehow figure out she wasn’t well. She resolved to call in sick, sleep in late, and then leave for the café once Kim left to see her friends. She figured Rikki would let her hide in a broom closet or something if Kim came in. Still, she was always looking over her shoulder, afraid of getting caught.

She ducked as she saw two girls run to a waiting car from another shop outside. “It’s Kim!”

Lewis shot up and looked out the window. It wasn’t Kim, it was actually too young to be Kim. Cleo would’ve realized it if she wasn’t so on edge.

“It’s just a kid, darling.” He took her in his arms.

Cleo fought rolling her eyes.

“Besides, if we do see her, or your dad. I have a plan. Don’t worry that pretty head of yours about a thing.” He kissed her cheek.

Cleo couldn’t fight rolling her eyes that time.

Her own anxieties made Lewis revert back to being a helicopter boyfriend. He was so worried about his precious mermaid accidentally transforming in front of everyone that he was with her every waking moment. He looked crazy, carrying around a large duffle bag filled with towels, a mermaid-friendly disguise, and science experiments he was sure would work this time. The few customers eyed the bag suspiciously. As he sat next to Cleo, making sure they were somehow touching at all times.

Rikki was going stir crazy. Work had been remarkably slow with the rain driving away anyone. She loved that the café was out of the way and on the water but it relied almost entirely on foot traffic, which relied almost entirely on good weather. She could count the number of people eating there on one hand – two if she included the staff. When she wasn’t at work she was home, staring at the walls of her trailer and fighting the urge to call Zane. They were hanging out again but she didn’t want to get his hopes up.

Even cheery Bella was suffering from the tedious exercises associated with band practice. She wanted to help Nate with his song, and it was really starting to get good. He’d even stopped fighting her and was taking her suggestions to heart. He was becoming a better songwriter but today he was reverting back into old lazy habits.

Nate didn’t want to do anything. Plain and simple. There were no ladies under the age of 40
for him to impress. He just wanted to goof off and play guitar, the customers weren’t listening to him anyway.

Will didn’t seem to notice any of it. The annoyance or the rain. He was a competitive swimmer, it seemed like he was wet most of the time.

“Want to go swimming on your break, Bella?” asked Will.

“I’ll pass.” She said closing her eyes and pinching the bridge of her nose. She rubbed her temples and tried to let the rain outside drown out the sound of Nate’s playing.

“Suit yourself.” Will shrugged.

“How about a sandwich, Will?” asked Sophie cheerfully.

“I’m good.” He said pulling up a chair by the stage.

“Can I get you a juice then?”

“No thanks.”

Sophie was getting annoyed with all of them. There were people in the café which meant it was time for work. She didn’t like that Cleo and Lewis could just hang out without ordering at least a juice, especially when customers were staring at them. She was even getting annoyed with her own brother. She didn’t care for Nate’s “practicing” or that Bella had given up on reining him in today. She wished Rikki would just tell them to leave. Zane would do it if he were here. At least she thought he would.

Emma was trying her best to keep everyone happy. She was a saint, at least she thought so. She suggested to Cleo that the two of them go hang out at Ash’s apartment where she could lay low and have fun. Cleo frantically insisted she didn’t want to get too far away from home in case she had to go back and fake sick again. She suggested Lewis go do anything that would require him to leave Cleo’s side for 2 minutes – giving them both some much needed alone time. Lewis just accused her of not trusting him to take care of Cleo. She tried talking to Rikki about her problems but all she got was an annoyed “Not today, Em.” She asked to hear the latest song Bella was working on but Bella just rubbed her temples and said she couldn’t think of anything but Nate’s inane playing. When Emma tried to take the guitar from Nate, he whined just like a little boy. She even asked Sophie if she could help but was told she could help by actually buying something.

She forced a smile and ordered a banana beat box, sitting in a booth with Ash. He was reading about home remedies for horses and sipping his own juice. It took a lot to annoy Ash. She only remembered doing it twice (three times if you count the time she fell under the ambergris spell and thought she was in love with Nate, but she didn’t remember that.) The first time, she almost killed his horse. The second, he thought she was trying to sabotage him. When Emma tried to take the guitar from Nate, he whined just like a little boy. She even asked Sophie if she could help but was told she could help by actually buying something.

“Didn’t go so well, huh?” said Ash with a cheeky smirk.

Unfortunately, it didn’t take a lot to annoy Emma. She could hide it pretty well, but not from Ash. She had a love-hate relationship with his cockiness. Sometimes it was sexy, other times she just wanted to freeze that smirk on his face to teach him a lesson. “There’s no harm in trying.” She forced a smile.

“If you say so.”

Zane came in, soaking wet and looking tired.
“What are you doing here?!?” Rikki blurted out, she didn’t mean for it to sound so accusatory, or loud but that’s how it came out.

An elderly couple sitting near the door shook their heads at the outburst. They curtly tipped Sophie and then walked out the door.

Zane was a little hurt by the way she said it but trying to hide it. “I thought maybe you guys could use some help…but I see you’re all just hanging out without me.” He failed.

“We’re not hanging out without you, some of us don’t even want to be here.” Said Cleo rolling her eyes.

“Well, you don’t have to be.” Said Sophie, counting her meager check.

A college student sitting at the juice bar put her book away and quickly left the tense situation at the café, leaving most of her drink still full.

“She can go anywhere she wants.” Lewis stood up and puffed out his chest.

“Please, Lewis.” Said Cleo rolling her eyes.

Through all of this, Nate was still playing.

“Can’t you read a room?” snapped Bella.

“What?”

“No one wants to hear you play right now!” she shouted at him.

“Well that’s not very nice, I’m leaving!” Nate walked out in a huff.

Bella put her face in her hands.

Emma put a hand on her shoulder “He needed to be told –“

“Just leave me alone Emma!” she said.

“I’m trying to help –“

“You’re not doing it.”

Emma scowled and walked back over to Ash.

Will reached out for her, she pushed him away.

Now Will was angry. He wouldn’t hurt Bella, but he knew who he could take it out on. It was his fault, anyway. Everything was fine until he came in. Now everyone was arguing and the customers were scared away. “Damn it, Zane!”

Everyone stopped fighting and looked at Will.

“How is it you always manage to make everyone’s day worse whenever you come around?”

“What?” Zane was livid.

“Will –“ started Sophie.
“No.” Will cut her off. “You ruined Emma’s welcome home party. You got upset, so you made it all about you. You made Bella feel bad enough to defend you and then we got into a fight. Not to mention all the horrible things I’ve heard you’ve done to Cleo and Lewis over the years. The only people who seem to like you are Nate and my sister: a moron and the person with the absolute worst taste in guys I’ve ever met in my life. And I don’t know your whole messed-up history with Rikki but from everything else I’ve seen, you’re the problem.”

“You. Me. Outside, now.” Growled Zane, his face was red with anger and embarrassment. He led the way out the door and Will followed.

Chapter End Notes

I'm alive! Sorry I took forever to write this. I was really busy this summer and my schedule still isn't 100% normal. This chapter was a little intimidating at first. I wasn't sure I could get them all to fight but once I did...tell me what you think.
Everyone was stunned for a moment. Then Sophie rushed outside. “Will! Zane! You can’t do this.”

Ash gave a nod to Emma and ran out the door. “Let’s go, Lewis!”

“R-right.” Said Lewis caught off guard, he’d never had to be backup in a fight before. He never thought he’d have to be backup in a fight.

Rikki ran to kitchen. She had a pretty good idea of where Zane was taking Will, it was a little enclosed space by the dumpsters. It was outside, but private enough no passersby would see.

Sophie put herself between Will and Zane. She was dwarfed by her brother but she still had her older sister air about her.

He didn’t care, not today. Zane was about to be taught a well deserved lesson, and he wasn’t going to let anyone, not even Sophie stand in his way. He pushed her aside.

He let Zane throw the first punch, just like he knew Zane would. Then he started swinging.

Rikki couldn’t stop watching. She couldn’t stop anything. Her powers were useless right now and if she tried to run outside she’d be even more useless.

The girls followed her into the kitchen. “We have to do something!” cried Cleo as Lewis and Ash ran out trying to pull Will off of Zane.

“What can we do?” asked Emma. “It’s not like we can go out there.”

“We can use our powers.” Rikki pleaded with Cleo.

“I don’t see how that –“ Cleo looked at her.

“Wind. You can blow them apart can’t you?”

“It’s too dangerous.” Said Emma. “What if she hurts them.”

“They’re all ready getting hurt!” shouted Rikki. “I’d do it myself but I my power would definitely get them both killed.”

Cleo watched as Will accidentally elbowed Lewis in the gut as he went to hit Zane. Lewis doubled over in pain.

Cleo narrowed her eyes at Will and Zane and sent a powerful gust of wind to separate them.

To anyone passing by, it would seem that the gust of wind came out of nowhere. Zane and Will knew exactly where it came from and as they were knocked on their backs, they got some sense knocked back into them.

Ash picked Zane up off his feet while Sophie and Lewis worked to pick Will up.

“I’m leaving.” Growled Will.
“Like hell you are!” Shouted Sophie, pushing him backwards. “What the hell was that all about?”

“We’re going to go inside.” Ash said to Sophie, guiding Zane.

“Don’t –“ Zane started to protest.

“Don’t fight me on this. We’re going to need to put something on your eye. You’ll definitely have a shiner tomorrow.”

Zane and Ash walked back into the café. Zane refused to look at anyone as he went to the freezer to get ice for his eye.

Ash walked over to Emma and the girls.

“Obviously no one wants to stay here after that.” Said Emma. “Can you take us home?”

“Yeah, of course. Just let me make sure Zane cools off. It will only take 5 minutes.”

“Take all the time you need, we can wait.”

“Thank you.” Rikki said to Ash.

Ash followed Zane into the freezer where Zane had a rag full of ice resting on his eye.

“You’re coming after me again?” said Zane.

“You’re in the freezer but you haven’t cooled off much, huh?” Ash responded.

Zane just grunted back.

“Do you want to talk about this somewhere more comfortable?”

“Are you coming on to me?”

“You’re not my type.”

Zane laughed bitterly. “If we must.”

They moved into Zane’s office. There was always something about Ash that made Zane feel less powerful. And he felt like Ash knew it. It felt like a lie sitting at his big desk while Ash was across from him so they both sat on the couch.

“Why did you come after me?” asked Zane.

“I mostly came after Sophie. She was really worried.”

“I appreciate your honesty.”

“But, I did feel bad for you. I know Will isn’t the first guy who’s wanted to hit you. I remember a time when I wanted to do the same –“

“Is this supposed to be making me feel better?”

“It will if you let me finish. There’s a lot of bad stuff you’ve done Zane, a lot of stuff you should probably be hit for, but walking in on an already tense situation that you couldn’t have known about is not one of them. It was an honest mistake.”
“So why did you come after me?”

Ash stood up and examined Zane’s head. “Did that fall knock you on the head? I just answered that question.”

“No, it’s a different question. Why did you follow me here now and not someone else.”

“You can’t honestly expect Sophie to come after you. She was busy laying into her brother.”

“I wasn’t talking about Sophie or any of the girls for that matter.”

“Who were you talking about then?”

Zane sighed in exasperation. He really didn’t want to be having this conversation with Ash. “Who has 2 thumbs, wears stupid hats and is obsessed with science, fishing, and Cleo?”

“You’re upset because Lewis didn’t come after you?”

“Yeah, he’s my friend and I don’t get why he picked Will over me.”

“He didn’t pick Will over you, he knows Will better than I do. I don’t know how to talk to Will but I do know how to talk to you.”

“Okay.” Zane didn’t know what else to say.

“If it makes you feel any better, I do consider us friends. I don’t know Will well enough to call him that.”

“Friends.” Zane repeated.

“Yeah, and as your friend I’m going to give you some advice: start rehearsing what you’re going to say to Rikki now because you have a lot of explaining to do.”

“Thanks, mate.”

Chapter End Notes

Double Update because y'all were so patient.
Thanks for all of you who are subscribed and keep reading this! I'm trying to get better about updating, it always helps to have inspiration! A special thanks for everyone who's been commenting.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” Sophie had small tears in her eyes as she shoved her brother.

“He asked for it –“ Started Will.

“No he didn’t! All that stuff you said was just problems you had with him. He didn’t plan any of it.”

“He’s a colossal jerk to everyone, including you.”

“He is not. He cares about –“

“What? You? You know he doesn’t care about you. He barely cares about Rikki. He’s using both of you and you’re to blind to see it.”

“He’s not using –“

“Yes he is, how often do you get stuck working by yourself because of some sort of drama he’s gotten himself into?”

“I –“

“And then you keep throwing yourself at him. The girls say they saw him kiss you. But I’ve got to ask, who kissed who?”

“It was the heat of the moment –“

“That’s all I needed to know. Why do you always go for these guys, Sophie? How many times do you need to get hurt –“

“Enough!” Sophie unable to fight back her tears.

“You know I’m right.” Will moved toward her.

“I can’t do this right now, Will. Just go home.”

“I’m sorry –“

“Go home, Will.”

Sophie ran back into café. It was deserted. She saw Rikki had turned everything off and flipped the sign to “closed.” She went straight to the women’s bathroom and locked herself inside. She gave herself a quick time check – the clock said it was just now 5:00 pm, in 15 minutes, she’d be a different person. She took a deep breath and forced a smile.
Lewis went inside to check on Zane when he saw Sophie and Will started arguing. Lewis had 4 brothers, when they fought there was no apologizing, no talking things out, they just got over it. He couldn’t imagine arguing with a sister. He knew he couldn’t help them, but he could help Zane.

Zane was still sitting in his office holding the ice to his face.

“Hey…buddy.” Said Lewis not knowing what else to say.

“Hey.”

“So that fight was pretty crazy…”

“Have you ever thrown a punch, Lewis?” Zane laughed slightly.

“No, I’ve never really needed to.”

“You’ve just hit big dudes in the back with heavy doors.”

“Only when they’re trying to expose my friends as mermaids. And you helped me do it.”

Lewis sat down next to him on the couch.

“I did a really stupid thing.”

“You’ve done a lot of those so you’ll need to be more specific.”

“My latest mistake would be getting into a fight with Will.”

“Seems right.”

“He –“

“Don’t you say he started it. I know he said some really messed up things but you punched first. That’s what Rikki is going to remember.”

“I can’t win?” Sighed Zane.

“You can’t win.” Agreed Lewis.

They both sat there awkwardly for a moment.

“How come we don’t hang out more?” Zane asked, breaking the silence.

Lewis laughed.

Zane rolled his eyes.

“Oh. You weren’t kidding.” Said Lewis swallowing. “Well, I’ve been in America and –“

“We only spend time together when we are trying to prevent a mermaid crisis or are otherwise accompanied by our girlfriends.” Zane mentally kicked himself for calling Rikki his girlfriend. Having to correct himself hurt worse than his black eye. “Sorry, I mean your girlfriend and my ex.”

“We do make a pretty good team. I mean we’ve tricked this entire town into believing the girls are normal. I even tricked you –“ Lewis. “Sorry.”
“It’s fine. I was obsessed. You needed to throw me off their trail to protect them.”

“So what happened? You were so interested in mermaids, in being part of Rikki’s life, in everything.”

“I guess I grew up. I started focusing more on work and I thought that’s what Rikki wanted to do to.”

“Have you asked her what she wants?”

“I did. She doesn’t know.”

“Maybe that’s why, she has to figure it out for herself.” Lewis put his hand on Zane’s shoulder. “I’ve known Cleo most of my life, I’ve been into science most of my life. Cleo only realized she loved science after I left for America.”

“So you’re saying I should leave her alone?” said Zane like he had a revelation.

“Well, you’re going to need to apologize –“ Lewis backtracked.

“So I need to talk to her?” Zane said confused.

“Yes, but maybe give her some space first.” Lewis sounded unsure.

“How much space? When I can I apologize?”

“Maybe, you apologize, then give her space, then try and talk to her again?” Lewis was thinking it over and trying to sound sure.

“You think that will work?”

“I don’t know! Why are you asking me?” asked Lewis anxiously.

“Because I want to know!” said Zane getting loud and forceful.

“Why?” asked Lewis in a comically exasperated tone.

“Because you’re my friend!” Zane yelled. “And I value your opinion.” He said a lot softer.

“You want to know what I think because I’m your friend.” Lewis said it back to himself like he couldn’t believe it. He and Zane had an almost business like relationship. They both worked together for the good of their friends. He couldn’t believe someone as proud as Zane would call anyone a friend, or tell them he valued their opinion. Lewis saw Zane was embarrassed. Then he smiled. “Oh, so we’re friends?”

“Yeah, what of it?” Zane asked holding the ice to his face in an effort to hide his embarrassment.

“You like me. You enjoy being around me.”

“That’s generally what friends do.”

“Huh, friends.” Lewis smiled. “Well then as a friend I’ll tell you this: you need to be the one who buries the hatchet and gives up on your little pissing contest with Will.”

“What?”
“You guys are always trying to one up each other. It’s like how you were with Ash at first but at least your girlfriends approved of that feud. You need to stop fighting with Will or it will destroy your relationship with Rikki.”

“He’s –“

“He’s a lot of things, but he’s Rikki’s friend too. If you want to make things right with her, you’ve got to try and make things right with him.”

“I’ll try.”

Sophie looked at her tear stained, makeup smeared face. She splashed cold water on her face and cleaned it up the best she could.

The café was completely deserted. She went to get her purse from her employee locker. Then she walked back into the bathroom.

She took out her makeup remover and started humming to herself. In a few minutes her face was completely bare. She splashed cold water on it again. Then she started reapplying her makeup. She forced another smile. In 15 minutes flat, she was an entirely new Sophie.

It was clear to her that no one bothered cleaning up before they left. Normally she’d be mad but this time she needed something to take her mind off of Will and Zane and everything else that was going on. She got a rag and a bottle of surface cleaner and started bussing the tables.

A few hours later she finished cleaning the entire café. The tables were clean, floors were sparkling, and the bar was completely organized. Sophie sat back in a booth and sighed.

Rikki walked in a few minutes later.

They caught each other off guard. “I was just staying to clean.” Said Sophie getting up from the table.

“It looks great.” Rikki said. She wasn’t expecting to see Sophie but she really did appreciate the effort. “You didn’t have to do this all yourself.”

“Cleaning helps me take my mind off things.”

“Thank you for trying to stop Will and Zane.” Rikki said walking over to Sophie.

“I still don’t understand why he didn’t listen to me.”

“He usually does.” Said Rikki. It was one of the things that annoyed her about Will. He almost always did what his sister said. The one time she wanted him to listen to Sophie, he didn’t.

“I practically raised him, you know?” It was a rhetorical question.

Rikki didn’t know that.

“My parents were always busy with work. When they were around, it was great and we all spent time together. I made our lunches, I made sure we got up in time for school, I helped Will with his home work, I went to every single swim meet.”

“You guys are close.” Rikki didn’t know what else to say.

“He’s always hated my taste in guys.”
Rikki gave Sophie a confused look. Sophie was the last person she wanted to talk about relationships with.

Sophie was beyond caring. “I mean I tend to go for jerks. By jerks I just mean they’re attractive and focused on getting ahead. Just like me. The problems come when they try and screw me over. I don’t get screwed over.”

“You screw people over?” Rikki was starting to get angry.

Sophie threw her hands up in surrender. “Only when they deserve it, most of the time. Trust me, the guys I’ve dated deserved it.”

“And Zane –“

“Zane doesn’t deserve it. He’s a mess, and hot, and trying to get ahead. But he doesn’t deserve it.”

“Well, that’s something we can both agree on.”

“And I’ve been kidding myself.”

“What?”

“He doesn’t want to be with me. He’s too focused on you.”

“And?”

“And Nothing. It is what it is. Rikki, I’ve dated some pretty messed up people, and Will has every right to worry. I worry about him. But when I make my next mistake, I promise I won’t take you all down with me.” Sophie held out her hand for Rikki to shake it.

Rikki took her hand. “You’re a mess, Sophie.”

Sophie shook Rikki’s hand. “Takes one to know one.”

“You don’t know how right you are.”
The Promise

Zane was done talking. The only person he wanted to talk to was Rikki and he couldn’t do that until he apologized to Will. So, he just wasn’t going to talk for the rest of the night.

He walked home in the rain letting it soak him completely. He could tell his gran he slipped and face-planted walking up stairs in the rain. He’d tell her that’s where his bruises and bloody nose came from. And since he was wet he could walk right by her and tell her he needed a shower immediately.

He walked through the door. His return seemed to be working out better than planned because his gran had someone over. They were drinking tea in the living room when Zane came home. He figured it would be best for him not to interrupt. Until his gran stopped him from walking up the stairs.

“Zane, we have company.” She called from the living room.

“I’m soaked, Gran. I really need a shower.” Zane called back from the stairway.

Lydia got up and came over to him. “I really think you should talk to our guest.”

“It seems this time 2 years ago you couldn’t stop him from bothering me.” An airy voice commented from the living room.

It was familiar somehow, but Zane couldn’t place it. His curiosity got the better of him and he walked into the living room to see Miss Chatham.

“Hello, Zane.” She smiled curtly.

“What are you doing here?” asked Zane. It sounded more like an accusation than anything else.

“She’s just here for tea. Be respectful.” Lydia told Zane. Then she directed her attention to Miss Chatham. “I’m sorry. I raised him better than this. His father undid all my hard work.”

“Yes, a bad influence can make all the difference in a young life.” Miss Chatham agreed. “I’ve been here and there.” She answered Zane’s question. “I just got back from Ireland.”

“Ireland? Did you have anything to do with the comet?”

“Stopping it? No, the girls did all of that. I just wanted to keep an eye on them.”

“From thousands of miles away?” Zane had never liked the batty old woman and now she was really getting to him. “They were worried sick about you. You just disappeared. And you knew about the comet?”

“Zane, watch your tone.” Cried Lydia.

“Would you ask the tides why they go away and come back?” She asked Zane simply.

“No, because that can be explained by science.” Zane shot back at her.

“Very well. The winds of change carried me to travel. It’s been so long since I’ve been anywhere new. I knew about the comet’s history and I knew my girls could take care of it without
me. Not that I have much power anymore.”

“How do you know about all of this?”

“The sea talks but only to those who take the time to learn its language.” Miss Chatham picked up Zane’s school dance picture from an end table. It showed him, Rikki, Emma, Lewis and Cleo all smiling and having a great time. “To be honest, I was a little worried when I found out my Emma wouldn’t be helping them. She’s a good leader, so mature and level headed. She’s made me proud. Cleo has certainly grown up a lot too. She’s so strong and brave. She’s showing a determination I’ve never seen before. Ah, and Rikki, my happy wanderer. The girl loses herself sometimes but she always puts her self back together better than before.”

“What’s wrong with Rikki?” asked Zane immediately concerned.

“Nothing…right now.” She said thoughtfully putting down the picture. “She’s fiercely loyal. It’ll keep her from getting into trouble.”

“But Rikki will be in trouble?” asked Zane, now afraid.

“I didn’t say that. I’m most concerned with the new one.”

“Bella?” asked Zane. Now he was really afraid.

“She just wants to belong. Her life has been so lonely, so isolating. It’s a big burden to bear on your own for so long.” Miss Chatham paused and shut her eyes tightly. With Julia and Gracie gone, there was no one left to share her secret.

Zane took on a softer tone. “The girls really like her. They’re all really close.”

Miss Chatham opened her eyes suddenly. “But there’s someone else she’s close to isn’t there? A boy?”

“His name is Will.” Zane bit out.

“Yes, I see. He loves her, but he also loves the mystery of it all. He wants to be part of her world, sometimes more so than she does.”

“You forgot the part about him being a jerk.”

“Hmmmm, sounds like someone else I know.” Miss Chatham shot back.

“So, why are you telling me this? Why not tell Lewis?”

“He’s not the one I’m worried about. You two both made a promise to protect my girls. He’s kept it time and time again. Meanwhile, you falter when you think it will give you the upper hand.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I don’t want an apology. I want your word. Will you do what it takes to protect my girls?”

“Yes, Miss Chatham.”

“Good. The winds of change are about to bring in something most foul. And the timing couldn’t be worse.”

“The full moon?” asked Zane.
Miss Chatham nodded. She got up and squeezed Zane’s hand. “Protect my girls, Zane.”

“I will.”

Miss Chatham and Lydia shared a knowing smile. Zane wondered what it meant. But he knew better than to question it. He was raised better than that, after all.
Miss Chatham

Zane wanted to text Lewis as soon as he finished talking to Miss Chatham, but he knew it was a conversation better had face-to-face. He tried (and failed) to get some sleep. No problem, he knew Lewis would be up early and he knew exactly where to find him. The sun was rising and the sky cleared up as Zane headed to the dock.

Lewis yawned and wiped the sleep off his face as he set up his fishing rod. He cast his line and stood completely still waiting for a bite.

Zane rushed down the dock and called out once he was few feet behind Lewis.

The call nearly caused Lewis to lose his rod. He fumbled with it for a minute before securing it back in the stand and turned around. “You’ll scare the fish!” he said still shaken up by Zane’s abrupt entry.

“Looks like the fish aren’t the only thing I’m scaring.” Zane laughed earnestly for the first time in a while.

“Why are you up this early?”

“I talked to Miss Chatham, she was at my house last night.”

Lewis was completely awake now. “Miss Chatham? Louise Chatham? I thought she was dead.”

“So did I, turns out she just disappeared. She was in Ireland.”

“Why didn’t she tell the girls?”

“I don’t know, she’s weird but –”

“Do you know where she’s staying? Where we can find her?”

“No.” Zane’s face fell. “She didn’t tell me.”

“You didn’t ask?” Lewis sounded exasperated.

“She didn’t tell me! She just came over to have tea with my gran. She told me something bad is coming, something that could hurt the girls.”

“She told you?” Lewis couldn’t believe it. “Why didn’t she tell me?” he sounded upset.

“She says you never let her down like I did. You always protect them.” Zane hated admitting it was true.

“Huh?” Lewis smiled to himself considering it before worry spread across his face “What’s the bad thing?”

“I don’t know but it might have something to do with Will.” He tried to hide the happiness in his voice as he said the last word.

Lewis rolled his eyes. “Zane, I know you don’t like him but you don’t have to make him the bad guy.”
“No, really, she says that he’s sometimes more into Bella being a mermaid than she is.”

“I don’t think that means Will is trouble. Besides, she’s never even actually met Will or Bella. Have you told the girls yet?”

“Not yet.”

“Zane, you need to tell the girls these things first. It concerns them.” Lewis was trying to make Zane a better person.

“I know, but Miss Chatham made me promise I’d help you protect them. I think this might be something we can do but they can’t.”

“You still don’t know anything about this trouble?”

“All I know is it has something to do with the full moon. And she said ‘something foul is in the air.’ Whatever that means.”

Lewis started packing up his fishing equipment. “I’ll get started on researching it. You go tell the girls.”

Telling the girls was easier said than done. Zane felt like he swallowed a rock and now it was settling in his stomach. He wanted to tell Rikki, but it was her day off. He knew what would happen if he turned up at her house after fighting with Will the day before. It involved either a verbal lashing or worse: the silent treatment combined with heat powers. He didn’t want to think about either of those scenarios.

He couldn’t tell Bella because the name “Miss Chatham” meant nothing to her. She’s also probably not very happy about him punching her boyfriend.

Cleo would shut him down completely. Zane mentally kicked himself for picking on Cleo all these years. He didn’t have anything against her, but she was an easy target for someone as insecure and angry as he was. “How I used to be.” He assured himself.

The only one he had any chance of convincing was Emma.

He called ahead to let Emma and Ash know he was coming to their apartment to talk. He sat in a chair across from Ash and Emma who were sitting on the couch.

“You did a really dumb thing, Zane –“ Emma started.

“I’m not here to talk about that.” Zane cut her off.

“Oh.” She was surprised. “You don’t want my advice.”

“It’s not that!” Zane assured her. He needed her advice more than ever. He still didn’t have a plan of how he was going to apologize to Will or make things right with Rikki. “I have something else I need to talk about.”

“What is it?” asked Ash.

“I saw Miss Chatham last night. She told me there was trouble coming, for the mermaids, during the full moon.”

Emma’s eyes lit up. “You saw Miss Chatham? Where? I thought she was gone.”
“I did too. She came to my gran’s house last night for tea. Don’t ask me if I know where she is. I don’t. She didn’t tell me and I didn’t think to ask. All she told me is ‘something foul is coming in the air.’ I don’t know anything more than that.”

“Why didn’t she tell us herself?” asked Emma halfway to herself. “We’ve missed her so much and it impacts us directly.”

“I think it might be something you can’t handle yourself. Something you need someone without powers for.”

“Does your Gran know where to find her?” asked Emma hopefully.

“I don’t know. Maybe?”

“I know you have work. I’ll swing by your grandmother’s house and see what I can find out.” Emma picked up her purse. Ash got up to leave with her. Emma put a hand on his chest. “I need to do this alone. It’s not that I don’t trust you, but Miss Chatham can be a bit…jumpy with people she doesn’t know.”

Luckily, Lydia did know where to find Miss Chatham. She was staying at a small, tucked away, bed and breakfast near the water. She called a moon pool meeting to decide the next course of action.

“Miss Chatham is back.” She said once everyone arrived.

“I thought she was dead?” said Rikki.

“How?” said Cleo.

“Who is Miss Chatham?” asked Bella.

“Cliff Notes version: she used to be a mermaid but gave it up at some point, she helped us out when we first got our powers.” Answered Rikki.

“She is also really vague and sometimes speaks in riddles.” Said Cleo rolling her eyes.

“What?” Bella couldn’t believe this was a real person.

“She is how she is.” Emma got everyone back on track. “What’s important is that she’s back and she says there is trouble coming, something to do with the full moon.”

“I’m going to go ahead and guess she didn’t say what the trouble was.” Said Rikki rolling her eyes.

“No. All Zane told me was she said ‘something foul was coming in the air.’”

“Zane?” asked Cleo. “We’re trusting what Zane says? Why would she even go to him in the first place?”

“Apparently she knows his grandmother. He says he thinks she told him because we need someone without powers to help.”

“Lewis has always helped us. Why not tell him?”

“I don’t know, you can ask her yourself when we go to see her. I got the address of where she’s staying from Zane’s gran.”
Rikki had been quiet this whole time. She didn’t look happy.

“Rikki?” asked Emma. “Are you with us?”

“Why didn’t Zane tell me first?”

“Rikki –” Emma started softly.

“He told you and Lewis before me.”

“I know things are tense between you two right now. Maybe he didn’t think you would believe him –”

“So?”

“Can you honestly say you would’ve believed him?”

“The only reason I’m on board with this plan is because Zane’s grandmother has an address for her.” Cleo chimed in.

“I don’t want to talk about it. Let’s just go see Miss Chatham.”

Zane and Sophie were hard at work at the café. The lunch rush hadn’t arrived yet but they felt they needed to compensate for all of the drama the day before.

Nate was doing his warm-up exercises. “When’s Bella supposed to be here again?”

“I don’t know mate, she said she has to take care of something personal.” Zane replied knowing Nate didn’t actually care and he didn’t have to explain further.

Unfortunately, there was one person Emma didn’t include in their plan, and apparently Bella didn’t think to contact. Will walked in during the lunch rush to see Nate on stage alone playing instrumentals of popular songs.

“Where’s Bella?” he asked Nate.

“Personal business, didn’t you know?”

“Who told you that?”

“Zane.” Nate nodded his head toward the bar where Zane was making drinks.

Zane smelled Will before he heard him. Zane hated to admit it but Will always smelt really good. Maybe it was to mask the scent of chlorine or saltwater, but Will always loved his colognes.

Will glared and walked toward Zane. “Surprised to see you here today with that thing on your face.”

“Well, it is a Monday, so I’m working.” Zane lifted his head so Will could get a good look at his black eye. Turns out Zane did some damage too, a few small bruises were on Will’s face.

“What’s this ‘personal business’ you say Bella is doing?”

“She didn’t tell you?” Zane smiled enjoying having something to hold over Will.

“No.” said Will curtly.
Zane’s smile fell. He realized this would be a good time to take Lewis and Ash’s advice and bury the hatchet with Will. “Alright come with me.” Zane stepped out from behind the bar and led Will to his office. He closed the door behind them. “There’s this woman who we all used to know, Miss Chatham, she was a mermaid when she was younger. She lost her powers, but she knows a lot about mermaid stuff.”

“So how come I never met her?”

“She was gone for a long time, we thought she was dead. She just disappeared one day and didn’t tell anyone where she was going.”

“Interesting.” Will wasn’t interested. “Glad Bella is meeting your old friend.” He turned to leave.

“Will, wait!” Zane had so much urgency in his voice that Will couldn’t help but turn around.

“What?” he asked wondering why Zane was taking up his time.

“The important thing is that she told me the girls are in trouble. She says something foul is coming on the wind. It has something to do with the full moon’

“What?” Will couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

“She talks like that. I think she told me because they need someone without powers to help them.”

“So she asked the least helpful person around?”

Zane bit his tongue. “They need us, Will. I’m warning you because you hang out with them all the time and can be on the lookout for trouble.”

“Oh okay.” Will said sarcastically.

Zane was done biting his tongue. The heavy scent of Will’s cologne was permeating his office. He didn’t want to be around Will or any reminders of him for the rest of the day. “Fine, get out and go stink up someone else’s air space.” Rikki was going to kill him.

Will rolled his eyes and got out.

The girls had a hard time finding the bed and breakfast, even with the address. It was small, littered with odd statues, wind chimes, and other trinkets, but it seemed clean and cozy. It was just the place for Miss Chatham.

They went inside to find an older man at the counter.

Emma approached him politely. “Hello, is there is Miss Louise Chatham here? We’re -“

The man cut her off, looking over her shoulder at the 3 other girls “-Emma, Cleo, Rikki, and Bella. She’s in room 3.”

“That was weird.” Said Bella.

“She’s expecting us to find her.” Emma said.

“She doesn’t know who I am. And how did she know we’d all be together?”
“Maybe Zane told her your name. And maybe she just made the list so they’d know who could visit her.”

Miss Chatham was sitting in a chair in her room. She opened her arms. Emma, Cleo, and even Rikki rushed over to her and hugged her. Miss Chatham closed her eyes and embraced them, her girls.

“We have so many questions—” Cleo started.

Miss Chatham put her hand up. “You know I can’t answer them all.” She gestured for them to sit on the bed. She told them about her trip to Ireland, about how she just needed to disappear.

They asked her how she knew about Bella and the comet.

“I just told you, I don’t have all the answers.”

Rikki decided to get down to business. “Why did you tell Zane about the trouble we’re facing and not us?”

“You girls are strong, I know you’ll be fine, but it doesn’t hurt to have a safety net, especially during a full moon.”

“But why Zane?” Asked Cleo who trusted Zane about as much as a mouse trusts a cat to babysit.

“He needed a reminder of how to help the people he cares about. I’ve never worried about Lewis, dear.”

Cleo smiled at that.

“Can’t you tell us anything more?” begged Emma.

“I’m sorry.” Miss Chatham smiled sadly. “Sometimes these things aren’t always clear, even to me.”

Bella felt like she was on the outside looking in. She didn’t know what to make of this woman. Miss Chatham said there was trouble but offered no help to them. She was vague and held back information seemingly on a whim. Bella didn’t know why the girls just blindly trusted her.

“Bella,” Miss Chatham called out to her. “The Ocean Queen sends her regards.”

“How do you know—” Bella started.

“It’s an old story.” She smiled simply. She got up and took Bella’s hand. “Trust your friends, but, most importantly, trust yourself.”

Bella did trust herself and her friends, but she couldn’t bring herself to trust this woman.
The girls floated in the moon pool, each pondering what Miss Chatham meant. After their talk, she said she needed to rest and sent them on their way.

“What could she mean by something foul is coming on the air?” asked Emma.

“Do you think it’s literal?” answered Cleo with another question.

“It’s Miss Chatham, who knows?” Rikki was annoyed with the whole situation. She and Zane were finally getting along and then he had to go get into a fight. Then he told Lewis and Emma about mermaid business before her. She used to be the one he talked about all his mermaid business to. That’s when he thought you were a normal girl and he was hunting one. She thought to herself.

“Well, we have to try and figure it out.” Emma called her out of her memories.

“What do you mean full moons are all different?” Bella asked. “You see the moon, you’re called to the sea, you crave seafood, sometimes you attract boys, the end. You’re fine if you just stay inside.”

Cleo’s eyes shined with excitement. She was ready to compare and contrast the different results of the full moon’s effect on them. “Well, not exactly. The first time we went into the moon pool on a full moon, we got our powers. The second, Emma got really flirty, wanted to swim and ate a lot of seafood, which is pretty normal I guess. The third, I got way braver and had an amazing voice. The first part is pretty normal, the second not so much. The fourth…” Cleo trailed off and looked at Rikki, it was her experience that scared them.

“Was the fourth where Rikki kissed Zane?” asked Bella remembering their earlier conversation.

“No.” Rikki answered for herself. “Well, yes, but not at first. The fourth time I saw the moon and my powers started going haywire. I ran away. I practically burned the whole beach. Then Zane found me. I don’t know what exactly happened. But it felt good talking to him. I might’ve kissed him, I’m not entirely sure. I just know I felt better one minute, and the next I was on fire.”

The girls looked at Rikki in fear, they had never heard the whole story before.

Rikki started to backtrack looking at them. “Well I didn’t really catch on fire. It’s a figure of speech. I was burning up.”

“Then what?” asked Cleo, wishing she had a pen.

“Then you guys saved me.” Rikki shrugged. “You got me into the moon pool and I was fine. But I think that’s the worst thing that happened.”

“Second worst,” started Cleo. “You forgot the time Charlotte went crazy.”
“Yeah, but that was her fault, not something we ourselves couldn’t control.”

“Who’s Charlotte?” asked Bella. She was starting to get annoyed with how little she knew. It almost seemed like they were keeping things from her.

“Lewis’ ex.” Started Rikki. “She was a jealous psycho who found out we were mermaids, learned how to become one, somehow got all of our powers, and tried to push us out of Lewis’ life.”

“And when she couldn’t do that, she tried to take away our powers.” Finished Emma.

“That’s another thing the moon can do,” Cleo stated. “It can take away your powers for a short time or forever. It can also make your powers stronger.”

Emma looked down at her locket, remembering exactly why they were talking about the full moon. “That’s why we need to figure out just what this moon means for us.”

“Some of those stories sound scary, and I’ll admit there’s a lot I didn’t know, is it really such a big deal?” asked Bella, ready to move on.

“Of course it is! How can you say that?”

“You’ve had bad experiences, but you dealt with them. Sure you have some embarrassing memories, but you also have new strengths to show for it. Besides, you basically told us that for the last year you just spent full moons having sex, safe and sound.”

“This is serious –“

“Honestly, I’m with Bella on this.” Said Cleo.

Emma looked at her like she had just said she wanted to marry Ronnie the dolphin.

“Come on, Em.” Said Cleo “We’ve been through this whole song and dance. When was the last time the full moon has caused that much trouble for us. Miss Chatham even said we can handle it ourselves, and if not, we have a safety net.”

“Lewis?” asked Emma.

“I’ll have Lewis. Ash certainly seems capable of taking care of you on his own.” Said Cleo with a sultry smile.

“Cleo…” Emma blushed, but she was clearly a lot calmer.

“And, Bella will have Will. Everyone is in good hands.”

“Rikki?” asked Emma turning around sheepishly to look at the one single member of the group.

“I’ll figure something out.” Rikki nodded. “I’ve been meaning to talk to Zane about how he treats people anyway.”

She got in the water, ready to take off.

“Be careful!” Emma advised.

“Use a condom!” Cleo suggested.
Rikki rolled her eyes and swam away.

Bella swam away shortly after her. She dried herself off on a small beach before heading to Will’s boathouse.

She knocked on the door. He opened it with a big smile. “Where have you been, stranger?”

“With the girls.” She smiled coming inside and hugging Will. He smelled amazing, better than usual and much better than when he was wearing that stuff that she was allergic to.

“You didn’t happen to go see a Miss Chowder did you?” asked Will, remembering Zane’s ridiculous story.

“No. We went to see someone named Miss Chatham.”

“So Zane was telling the truth?” Will was truly shocked.

Bella shrugged. “I don’t know.” She sat on his bed.

“What do you mean?”

“She seems like she’s not all there in the head if you ask me. I don’t know why the other girls trust her so much.”

“Zane says she knows a lot about mermaids.” Will sat down next to her.

“She seems to, but that’s not the same as actually knowing.”

“So, you’re not worried about the full moon tomorrow?”

“No. And even if I did, she said I should have a safety net.” Bella climbed into Will’s lap so she was straddling him.

Will held her close to him. “I’ve got you.”

Bella kissed him gently. “I’m so lucky.” She snuggled in closer and taking in everything about him. Tomorrow is going to be quite a night.

Over at Rikki’s Place a very different conversation was about to happen. Rikki stormed into the café and over to Sophie at the hostess station. “Zane in his office?” she asked.

Sophie answered yes and Rikki went on her way.

Rikki stormed into the office and Zane stood up, completely off guard.

“Rikki, I –“

Rikki came over and pinned him to the wall.

“You’re still allowed to spend the full moon with me.”

Zane breathed a sigh of relief.

Rikki pushed him into the wall again. “This is how it’s going to work: I’m getting out of here before the sun sets. I don’t care if we have to leave Sophie in charge or close this place down for the
night. You’ll pick up pizza, soda, and snacks. I’ll decide which bad rom-coms we’ll watch. You’ll arrive at my place at decent hour. Got it?”

“Got it.” Said Zane, giddy and slightly embarrassed.

Rikki let go of him. “I understand what happened on the rainy day wasn’t entirely your fault.”

Zane opened his mouth to speak.

Rikki cut him off. “But enough of it was that I don’t want to hear any excuses. You’ll play by my rules and we can still be friends. If not, I don’t think this will work out.”

Zane felt like he had just won the lottery. “You won’t regret it.”

“Prove it.” Rikki winked at him and walked away.
7:45 PM Will’s Boathouse

Will examined the crystal bottle filled with pale yellow liquid in his hands. It was beautiful, unique, and came from the sea. He was surprised he found someone willing to sell such a rare treasure to him online.

Imagine his disappointment when he opened the bottle and realize it smelled bad. It smelled like fish that had been left out to bake in the summer sun for weeks. He was a diver he knew the sea didn’t smell good all the time but this was something unlike he had ever smelled before.

He knew that it was used to make perfumes years ago so there must be some trick. Will started with mixing some of it with his cologne. He still smelled bad. Then he took smallest amount possible and mixing it with his cologne. The cologne completely overpowered it. He didn’t stink anymore but the desired affect was completely lost. Then he found it, a happy medium. He smelled good, with a hint of something stronger underneath to make for a completely unique smell.

He was happy with it but then he spilled a little too much of the liquid onto himself. He the bad smell came back, but it was subdued. Someone would only smell it if they got really close to him. He quickly sprayed on more cologne trying to mask it, no luck.

He looked at the clock, he needed to pick up Bella from the café, sunset was coming.

“She’ll understand if I need to shower before our night together, right?” Will tried his best to shrug off his embarrassment. It would just have to be a test for their relationship.

8:01 PM Rikki’s Place

Will waited outside the café while Bella got her things together. He was minding his own business when Zane walked up to the café. Will was already annoyed after his cologne experiment didn’t turn out the way he wanted it to and really didn’t want to deal with Zane.

“What are you doing here?” blurted out Zane.

“Let’s see, it’s almost sunset and there’s a full moon tonight. I’m about to take Rikki out on a date.” Will answered as sarcastically has he could. He could see his comment, no matter how far from reality, was getting to Zane. “I’m here for Bella.” Will rolled his eyes wondering why that was so hard to guess.

Zane visibly relaxed. Then he remembered what Miss Chatham told him. “Have you seen anything suspicious tonight?”

“No. Why?” Will was annoyed.

“What Miss Chatham told me, to be wary of the winds of change? They’re supposedly bringing in something foul.”

“Yeah, yeah. Something wicked this way comes. Anyway, I haven’t seen anything.” Will didn’t want to talk to Zane.
“Good. Neither have I. I asked Lewis and Ash. They say nothing suspicious so far.”

“Great. Can we stop talking and wait for our girlfriends in silence now?” Will didn’t believe anything the crazy old woman said, especially since Bella thought she was crazy too. And he really didn’t want to talk to Zane.

Zane got angry. “Good luck with your girlfriend,” Zane took a whiff of the air near Will, “You stink more than normal, fish boy.”

Will was about to shoot back a reply when Rikki and Bella came out of the café together. “Everything okay?” asked Rikki with a fake smile plastered on her face.

“Fine.” Zane and Will said in unison.

“Good. You look really nice today Will, hot date tonight?” Rikki waggled her eyebrows, making both Will and Bella blush. Then she took Zane’s arm and walked him away to his car.

“Pizza?” It was more of a demand than a question.

“I haven’t had a chance to get it yet.” Said Zane, defensively.

“I rented the movies on my lunch break. I just need you to drop me off.”

“You sure you don’t want to go with me to get the Pizza?”

“I don’t want to take any chances tonight, not with the full moon.”

“Okay, drop you off, then get the Pizza.”

Meanwhile, Bella and Will were having their own reunion.

“What was that all about?” asked Bella who had heard Will’s hostility to Zane through the door to the café.

“Nothing, he’s just paranoid about whatever that old woman said.” Will rolled his eyes. He had enough with fairy tales.

“It is hard to believe.” Agreed Bella. Realizing it was more or less normal bickering for Will and Zane, Bella returned to being her cheerful self. She wrapped her arms around Will and pulled him close.

Will lightly patted her back. He really didn’t want her that close to him right now, not when he smelled bad.

Then she said something unexpected. Drawing in a deep breath Bella sighed out, “You smell really good. New cologne?”

Will smiled. So the rumors were true. “Same cologne, plus a secret ingredient.”

“Whatever it is, keep buying it.” She smiled.

Just then, Nate burst through the door after Bella. “Bella, wait, what about my song?” He was holding comically large packet of paper in his hands.

Bella smiled and shook her head “no” at Nate’s antics. “I told you, I have to leave early tonight. Personal business.”
Nate narrowed his eyes and walked up to Will. “Going on a date is not personal business. You should know that.” Nate was standing chest to chest with will, looking up to him like a spoiled child fighting over a parent’s attention. Then his face changed. “Hey,” he smiled up at Will, “Did you get a new cologne?”

“Yeah, why?” asked Will, entirely confused at the tone shift.

“It reminds me of a cologne I used to have. Not exactly, mine was better. The ladies loved it. I wish I had some now.” Nate stared off into space as he reminisced about the alleged magic cologne he used to have.

Bella and Will exchanged a confused look.

Sophie called Nate out of his daze. “Nate! Get back in here, we don’t have a singer tonight so I’m counting on you to make up for it?”

“Me?” asked Nate confused.

Sophie shifted to a sugary sweet tone. She put her arm around him. “Yes, you are our lead guitarist. I’m counting on you to lead the band in their time of need. We can’t do our instrumental song list without you.”

Nate blushed. “Okay.”

Sophie led him back inside. Turning her head around she smiled and winked at Bella before mouthing “have fun.”

Will and Bella laughed. Will held out his arm. “Shall we?”

Bella took his arm and giggled. “Yes we shall.”

8:36 PM Italian Restaurant

Zane made it to the Italian restaurant Rikki liked to get Pizza from. He was mentally kicking himself for not picking it up before meeting her, but he was afraid it would get cold. He completely forgot Rikki would most likely be very hungry at the end of a long shift. It hurt even more when he realized picking up the Pizza after dropping her off would be a 30 minute detour from spending time with her.

Will on the other hand, was so focused on making himself presentable for Bella that he forgot both he and Bella needed to eat. Of course, there’s nothing more romantic than Italian food so he rushed out to the restaurant to get them something.

He in no way expected to see Zane standing in the lobby waiting on his carryout order.

Zane opened his mouth to speak to Will then rolled his eyes. “Nevermind…” He growled out.

Will rolled his eyes back. The 2 looked away from each other and refused to make eye contact.

The hostess came out of the kitchen and handed Will his order.

Zane was getting antsy. He was already mad at himself and just wanted to spend time with Rikki, the words came out of his mouth before he could stop them. “I was here first. Where’s my
order?” His tone was more demanding than he intended.

The hostess blinked. “Oh, I’m sorry,” she said flustered. “I’ll go check with the kitchen.” Then she ran out of the lobby.

“You’re impossible.” Said Will under his breath, but loud enough for Zane to hear.

“And you stink like women’s perfume rotten squid.” Zane shot back. The insult sounded better in his head. He was losing his touch.

“Real mature, Zane.” Will said simply before walking out his door with his order.

The hostess returned and quickly handed Zane his order before running back to the safety of her station.

8:47 PM Will’s Boathouse

Bella looked sat at Will’s dresser and stared at herself in the mirror. She waved at the mirror. “Bye, bye, Bella.” She said softly. Soon, she would be a different person, or it felt like it at least. She was tired of being alone. Will was the first person she let in after she became a mermaid. He was hers, her friend who loved her and supported her even though she was a mermaid. He was friends with the other girls too, but they didn’t know him like she did. Bella felt so lucky to have Will as her person someone she could trust to love her and keep her secret unlike anyone else could.

Bella just hoped she was his person, and that, is what made her scared.

Will knocked on the door of his boathouse. “I’m back.” He called.

Bella closed her eyes and turned away from the door. “I’m ready.” She called to him. They both agreed not to expose her to the full moon until she felt the time was right.

Will came in carrying their takeout and setting it up on the table. They sat down and started enjoying their meal.

Will admired Bella as she ate. She was the sweetest, most beautiful soul he’d ever met. He loved her entirely and was ready to be there for her on the full moon.

8:48 PM Zane’s Car

Zane was angry. Mostly at himself. He really needed to be nicer to people, but it was so hard when he had Will rooting for him to fail.

“The guy can take his holier-than-thou attitude, fishy cologne, and ocean knowledge and shove it up his…” In his anger, Zane had a moment of clarity.

“Fishy cologne.” Where had he smelled that smell before? Did someone get him bad cologne as a gift? Well, yes, but not like Will’s. Was it something Nate wore? Maybe. Then it hit him. “Fishy cologne.”

Ambergris.

He almost wrecked the car when he realized what Will had used in his cologne. He thought about Rikki, hanging on Nate’s every word when he was wearing it. He thought about the girls almost revealing their secret when they were under it’s influence.
But Rikki seemed fine earlier when he and Will were waiting on her and Bella. Maybe it was fine, maybe he covered it up enough that there wouldn’t be any strong affects.

But, it’s the night of a full moon, and that **always** means trouble. Maybe it wouldn’t be too bad. As far as he knew, Will and Bella had just planned a cozy night in. And they loved and trusted each other so everything should be fine. And he was almost to Rikki’s house…

But Will didn’t know about the ambergris. He didn’t know just how dangerous it could be. And the full moon was almost down.

Zane cut the wheel hard, turning around into the other lane and headed back to Will’s boathouse.

At a red light he managed to call Lewis. The first few times it went straight to voicemail.

Finally, Lewis picked up. “Zane, you do know I’m with Cleo right now?”

“I know. Will has ambergris.” Said Zane frantically.

“Ambergris? Are you sure?”

“Yes. He was wearing it earlier but I couldn’t tell right away because he’s covering it up with another cologne.”

“So, you couldn’t tell right away but you say it is ambergris?”

“Yes, I’m sure of it.”

Cleo was standing with her arms crossed in her bedroom. “How do we know he’s not making this up to get back at Will?”

Zane heard it through the phone. “I’m supposed to be with Rikki tonight! Why would I waste my time checking to see if Bella is okay if I didn’t think it was serious?” He yelled through the phone.

Silence.

“It’s a full moon! Think of how much damage that stuff could do on a full moon!” Zane yelled again.

“I believe him.” Said Lewis, looking sheepishly at Cleo.

“Okay, I’m not so sure about this, but go check on Bella. I’ll be here when you get back.” She nodded her head.

“I’m going to call Ash, we might need backup, you know how powerful that stuff is.”

Lewis grabbed his phone and dialed Ash.

Ash and Emma were already enjoying the full moon together, making out on his couch.

His phone started ringing.

Emma, still practical even during a full moon, reached for it.

“Don’t.” Ash breathed back, pulling her back into him.
“It’s Lewis.” Emma pulled away in shock. “We have to take this. Cleo wouldn’t let him call right now if there wasn’t a problem.”

Ash took the phone from Emma, putting it on speaker, he knew she’d want to hear about any problems going on. “Hello?”

“Zane thinks Will might be wearing ambergris tonight. He’s worried about Bella.”

“Ambergris? That stuff whales…um…deposit?” asked Ash confused.

At the same time, Emma gave a worried “Oh no.”

“Is that Emma?” asked Lewis.

“Yes, you’re on speaker.” Emma answered back. “How does he know it’s ambergris?”

“He says he smelled it on Will earlier but he’s wearing another cologne with it. You know how dangerous that stuff can be.”

“No?” said Ash confused.

“Emma never told you? It’s –“

Emma cut Lewis off. “It’s what made me attracted to Nate that one time. Ambergris is like a mermaid aphrodisiac. But it’s also like a date rape drug. You lose all free will when under the influence and then you forget everything.”

Then Silence. Finally Lewis said frantically into the phone “Ash, we might need you for backup. Are you coming?”

“Of course. I’ll meet you at the boathouse.” Ash hung up the phone.

“I should stay here.” Emma looked intently at the ground. “It won’t do any good to have 2 mermaids are around ambergris.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” asked Ash, drawing her into him. Even though Bella might need him, he always had time for Emma.

“It’s scary. Knowing there’s something out there that can rob me of my free will and then wipe my memory. I don’t like to think about it. I was already embarrassed enough about the way I acted and how I treated you. Now I just think about how that situation could’ve been so much worse if Lewis and Zane weren’t looking out for us.”

9:03 PM Will’s Boathouse

“You’re barely eating.” Will commented on Bella’s plate full of food.

“I guess I’m just –“ she started.

“Nervous?” He finished for her.

“No, excited.” She smiled up at him. She climbed into his lap, breathing in his cologne. “I’m ready.” She said dreamily.

“Are you sure?” asked Will
Bella nodded her head yes.

Will opened the curtains letting in the full moon.

Bella’s eyes dilated, then she smiled big. She walked over to Will and started kissing him hungrily.

Will kissed back passionately. He felt like they were kissing forever when he finally got a word in. “What do you want to do?”

“Whatever you want.” She sighed back, kissing him more.

“I’m serious, Bella, what do you want?”

“To make you happy.” She answered back seriously. She pushed him onto his bed and straddled him. “You want me don’t you?”

“I always want you, I love you, Bella.” He looked up at her with wonder and caution.

Bella went back to kissing him, taking off his shirt in the process.

Something didn’t seem right about her. Bella was shy, but honest with him. She knew he wasn’t just in this for himself, right? He wanted to make her happy just as much as she wanted to make him happy. Maybe she was scared

“What do you want to do this?” he asked.

“Don’t you?” she sounded terrified.

Will sat up and gently moved her off of him. “I do, but I’m worried about you. You seem different –“

“What are you saying?” She sounded despondent.

“I’m worried –“

“You don’t want me any more?” she grabbed him by the shoulders. “I love you, I’ll do whatever you say, I want to be yours forever isn’t that enough?”

Will was scared, not for himself but for Bella. Maybe the moon was too strong tonight…

Just then a loud knock came to the door. Lewis and Zane were waiting outside. Lewis spoke, knowing Will probably wouldn’t open the door for Zane. “It’s Lewis. I was just wondering if you guys were okay in there.”

“You can come in.” Will yelled.

“No!” Bella shouted in anguish.

Lewis and Zane walked through the door. Bella was a mess before them, her hair was wild, her eyes were huge and she seemed to be focused on one thing, Will.

“Everything is fine.” She said to Lewis and Zane “Make them go away so we can go back to what we were doing before.” She said to Will.

Lewis moved closer to the two of them.
Bella grabbed Will’s arm and put herself into his lap, hiding her face from Lewis.

“I think the full moon is getting to her.” Will said, holding her close.

Lewis got really close to Will and sniffed him hard.

“What are you doing!?” Asked Will, really freaked out by what Lewis was doing and the fact that Zane searching through his boathouse.

“That’s ambergris alright.” Said Lewis moving away to get away from the smell.

“I read it was supposed to smell good to mermaids, calm them down, make them happy.” Will said, explaining why he would be wearing such a foul smelling thing.

“It’s a mermaid date rape drug,” Zane shot back. He was scared for Bella, but he was also mad at Will. All of his feelings came out in that one statement. “It doesn’t make them happy and calm it makes them helpless and wipes their memories. And you wore it on the night of a full moon!”

“How do you know about ambergris?”

“Long story,” said Lewis. “We dealt with it before. It was fixed pretty easily by the user washing it off. But, since it’s a full moon, I think we need to get her to the moon pool.”

“You can go, Will and I will stay here.” Insisted Bella.

“Where’s the rest of the ambergris?” asked Zane searching Will’s boathouse.

“It’s on my dresser, clear glass bottle, yellow liquid.” Will said, picking up Bella.

“I’m throwing this into the ocean.” Zane went outside and threw the bottle as hard as he could.

9:05 PM Rikki’s House

Rikki stared at her phone. Zane should’ve been back 30 minutes ago. Maybe the order was taking long at the Italian restaurant or maybe he was planning something special. “Or maybe he’s letting you down again.” Rikki thought to herself. She shook off the thought. “The food is probably taking longer than expected and he left his phone in the car. That’s all.”

9:37 PM The Dock

Zane did leave his phone in his car. Too bad it was still parked at Will’s boathouse.

Ash caught up with the group. They somehow managed to pry Bella out of Will’s arms and put her in Lewis’s car. They hoped separating the 2 would calm her down but it didn’t seem to be working.

Will didn’t want Zane around Bella but he also didn’t want to be around Zane himself. So Ash ended up driving both of them to make sure they didn’t kill each other.

Lewis frantically texted Will’s group to get in the Zodiac and head to Mako Island.

He knew he’d have no trouble getting Bella into his fishing boat if she knew she was following Will.

They followed instructions speeding toward the island.
Lewis still had to drag a kicking and screaming Bella out of his car and into the boat. He put his hand over her mouth. “Quiet, we’re going to see Will but you have to be quiet.”

“You’re lying!” she screamed at him.

“I’m not, he wants to see you on Mako Island, he thinks it will be more special that way.”

“Then I’ll swim.” She said trying to squirm out of his grasp.

“No you won’t.”

“Yes I will!”

“Excuse me, what the hell is going on here?” asked Sophie, making the short walk from Rikki’s place to the Dock. She had just close down the restaurant and was heading home.

Bella squirmed out of Lewis’ arms and headed toward Sophie, she’d know where Will really was. “He’s keeping me away from Will.”

“No I’m not.” Said Lewis frantically.

Sophie put a protective arm around Bella. “Why should we believe you?”

“Long story short, Bella was exposed to what is basically a mermaid drug and Will was kind of part of the problem so we sent him to Mako Island so we can get her into the moon pool to fix it.”

“Uh huh.” Said Sophie, not believing Lewis completely.

“I told you.” Said Bella.

Still, Sophie could see there was something wrong with Bella. She couldn’t imagine what Lewis or anyone else could do to make her kick and flail and freak out like that. This is the girl who was nice to her no matter how Sophie treated her because she loved her brother. Sophie put her hands on Bella’s shoulders and used her best big sister voice. “Bella, we’re going to the moon pool in that boat. I have it on good authority my brother is there. If he isn’t I’ll kick Lewis’ butt and I’ll spend the rest of the night helping you find him.”

The answer seemed to satisfy Bella and she got into Lewis’ boat.

Lewis wasn’t sure if the separation was doing Bella any good. She was still susceptible to suggestion from others, but it wasn’t exactly Will. And a minute ago she was about to jump in the ocean. Now she agreed to ride in the boat.

9:40 PM The Zodiac

Will and Zane were seated as far away from each other as possible. Ash was seated in the middle. “How are you feeling?” he asked Will.

“I can’t believe I did this to her.” Will sounded numb.

There were so many things Zane wanted to tell Will: that he was arrogant, stupid, and in over his head. Still, Zane was scared for Bella. Just like he was scared for Cleo, Rikki, and Emma the year before. And that time, you could argue it was his fault. “You didn’t mean to.” Zane said softly. “You couldn’t have known.”

“I had a mermaid obsession for a while. Emma saved me in her mermaid form and I was determined to prove they were real. I did a lot of research. Then I started dating a mermaid and did different research. I came across a legend that said it was basically a mermaid aphrodisiac –“

“Only the article said it was fun for both parties instead of just the human wearing it.” Will finished numbly.

“Exactly.” Said Zane, meeting Will’s eyes. “I asked Lewis about it, he said it wouldn’t work, he also said it practically didn’t exist anymore. I managed to buy a really old bottle. We tried it out.” Zane laughed, remembering spraying the stinking liquid onto Lewis. “We hated the smell so much we just abandoned it. We weren’t really thinking. Even if someone did find it, we thought they’d just throw it away.”

“Then what happened?” Will was actually curious to hear where this was going.

Zane rolled his eyes. “Nate found it, he’s got to be the one person on earth who isn’t bothered by the smell.”

“He came into the café and scared away all of my customers.” Ash added.

“Then Emma, Cleo, and Rikki all fell under the spell. We couldn’t get them to leave him. They did whatever he said. But they obeyed him when he told them he had to leave them alone for a while.”

“Why isn’t Bella listening to me when I tell her to be alone right now?”

“It’s probably just the full moon, mate.” Zane realized this is the first time he called Will “mate” without an ounce of sarcasm. “Lewis and I were scared, especially when the girls tried to follow Nate into the ocean. Luckily the water washed it all off.”

“They almost revealed their secret?” Will asked.

“Yeah, Lewis and I dumped the rest of the stuff back into the ocean.”

“Why didn’t you tell me about it?” Will’s question was softer than his demands at the beginning of their conversation.

“Like I said, Lewis told me it practically didn’t exist anymore, and I had a really hard time finding it. I paid a lot for it on an auction website. We didn’t think it would be a problem again. I’m sorry we didn’t tell you.” Zane meant it.

“I’m sorry I didn’t listen to you about Miss Chatham earlier.”

Zane looked up at Will in surprise.

“‘The winds of change are bringing in something foul’ this is pretty foul right now. I should’ve believed you in the first place.”

9:40 PM Rikki’s House

There’s no way the food was taking this long. And considering Zane wasn’t texting her a million times to “hold on, it’ll be worth it,” she knew he didn’t have a surprise for her either. He just… ditched her. She wasn’t sure if it was intentional or not. Maybe he was out with his friends. Maybe he forgot. That was almost worse. She was sick of his games. He seemed so excited to be with her but, here she was, alone on one of the most vulnerable nights of the year.
10:17 PM Moon Pool

Will waited in the moon pool. His body was completely soaked in the water. He wasn’t entirely sure what would happen to him, but at the very least, Bella would be safe.

She managed to sniff Will out and lead Lewis and Sophie to the pool quickly.

He opened his arms to hold her.

She jumped into the water and swam toward him, wrapping herself around him and trying to kiss him.

Will didn’t want to tell her what to do, but he also didn’t want her doing anything she’d regret and forget because of a drug. He picked the lesser of 2 evils. “Let’s not kiss right now, let’s just enjoy the moment.”

Bella obeyed. She went slack in his arms and after a few minutes. She was fully aware. “What’s happening? Where am I?”

“Magic drugs.” Said Will sheepishly.

“Moon pool.” Said Lewis in a matter of fact manner.

“What did I do?” asked Bella scared. She could only remember bits and pieces. Seeing the full moon, kissing will, then everything was blurry.

“Nothing, Bella, not a thing. You just scared us.” Said Will.

“What are magic drugs?”

“It was my cologne. It said it would make you feel more comfortable with me, but instead it made you do everything I say.”

Bella’s eyes widened in horror. She swam back a few feet from Will.

“I didn’t make you do anything you didn’t want to!” Will insisted.

“He’s telling the truth.” Zane backed him up.

“It’s not that I don’t believe you, I just need to be alone right now, I think.” Bella said, choking on her words. She quickly gave Will a soft, sweet kiss on the cheek. “I love you.” She whispered before swimming back to the surface. “Sophie, will you take me home?”

“Of course,” said softly.

Zane handed her the keys to the Zodiac. “Take the Zodiac, it’s fast. It will get her home quicker. We’ll all ride in Lewis’ fishing boat”

“Thank you.” Said Bella.

Sophie wrapped a protective arm around her and they left.

10:44 Rikki’s House

Rikki didn’t cry. She didn’t. She made other people cry. “Why isn’t he here?” she thought desperately. If he loved her like he insisted, like everyone in her life insisted he did, why wasn’t he...
with her now? She went into the bathroom and splashed some cold water on her face. She was planning on having a tough talk with herself in the mirror, but when she looked up, the full moon’s reflection was all she could see.

Her pupils dilated and she was burning up. Rikki was used to having no one, to being so tough and honest it drove others away from her and each other. She thought about it, Zane was kicked out of his house because he acted on his feelings for her. Zane and Will got into a fight because Zane was jealous of the time she spent with Will, and Will was mad Zane didn’t treat her like he thought she should be treated. Her own parents broke up because of her. She might as well play the role of the fire starter, there was no denying who she really was. Time for a scorching, lonely night on Mako as the girl who drove everyone else away.

Chapter End Notes

I want to thank everyone who continues to support me in writing this fic. I really appreciate all of your kind words, kudos, and bookmarks. I really love your feedback and I have to know: When did you figure out Will was wearing ambergris? Tell me in the comments section!
The mood on Lewis’s fishing boat was somber, but celebratory. Will was a little withdrawn. He was happy that he was able to help Bella but felt like it was his fault she was in danger in the first place. It hurt that she wanted to be away from him after the ordeal. He just hoped she still loved him, or at least trusted him.

Ash was happy they were able to complete their little mission without trouble. His friends were safe and Zane and Will hadn’t fought in the past few hours.

Lewis was flying high. It wasn’t often his plans worked out so well, but this one did! They got Bella into the moon pool and now she was safe and sound with Sophie.

Zane was coming down, he imagined it was about the same for Will. He was really worried about Bella, but he turned out to be right about the danger. He knew, in a way, he was the reason Bella wasn’t seriously hurt tonight. He was actually starting to worry about Will and what he was feeling in the whole ordeal. Zane got up and sat beside him.

“How are you doing?” Zane asked awkwardly, trying to channel his inner Lewis when talking to someone who was hurting.

Will was surprised by the question. “I’m fine.” He mumbled.

“I know how that feels.”

“I can’t believe I could’ve hurt her.”

“You didn’t,” Zane offered. He could tell by the way Will was looking at him that it wasn’t enough. “You wouldn’t. You saw something was wrong with Bella and you were willing to fix it. You wouldn’t have hurt her. Even I know that.”

“You think so?”

“Bella trusts you for a reason. I’m starting to see it.”

“I’m starting to see why she doesn’t hate you.” Will offered back.

Zane nodded, accepting it and sitting in comfortable silence with Will.

Ash smiled. He’d have a lot to tell Emma about when he got home.

Once they got closer to land, Lewis’ phone went off. Lewis nearly jumped out of his seat, startled by the loud ringing and vibrations. He flipped it open to answer. “Hi, Cleo…Yes, Zane was right…Bella is fine now…We took her to the moon pool…No, she wasn’t hurt…physically…She seems a little shaken up…She’s with Sophie now…I’ll be back soon, I love you.”

Zane checked his pocket in a panic. He knew Rikki would not be happy with him taking so long and not telling her why. He braced himself for angry messages, but they wouldn’t come, he realized his phone was not on him and he left it in his car. “I forgot to tell Rikki what I was doing!” Zane shouted at Lewis in a panic.

“Oh boy,” Lewis started, thinking about angry Rikki, “That’s not going to be pretty. I don’t envy you at all.” He laughed lightly.
“It’s not funny, you know we’ve had a rough time recently, she’ll –“

“-hold on,” Lewis cut Zane off handing him his cellphone, already calling Rikki’s number. “She’ll be more likely to pick up if she thinks it’s me anyway.”

But Rikki didn’t pick up.

“That’s not a good sign.” Said Zane.

“Maybe she went to bed?” Lewis offered.

“Rikki doesn’t just go to bed when things like this happen. She’s restless, she’ll be on the move.” Everyone turned to look at Ash, wondering how he knew so much about Rikki. “Emma talks about you all a lot, you won’t believe how many theories she has about all of you and your behavior.”

“No, I believe it.” Zane nodded.

Just then, something big and quick swam under the boat, leaving a stream of bubbles in its wake.

“What was that?!” asked Ash, in shock.

“Do you think it could be –“ Lewis started

“Rikki!” Zane finished, his hands in the water. “The water is practically boiling right here. She’s going to Mako, I need to follow her.”

“I’ll come with you, let me just get these guys back –“

“I have to do it alone.”

“You don’t need to take us back, Lewis. We’ll all go.” Will offered.

“I kind of agree with Zane on this one, Rikki won’t like it if we all show up and try and save her.” Lewis told Will. Then he directed his attention toward Zane. “But, I don’t want you doing this on your own. Remember what happened last time?”

“Can’t say I do, the important part is that I lived. She needs me. Just get me back to Mako, I’ll figure out my own way back.”

“You better take this,” Lewis threw him a duffle bag. “It’s my Mako survival kit. It has camping equipment, food, water, navigation equipment, first aid kit. Trust me, you’ll want it.”

Zane hit the ground running as soon as he got off the boat. He could smell smoke. Small brush fires led him to the beach where Rikki was seated, holding herself. She ignored him as he walked up to her, dropping the duffle bag.

“Rikki!”

No response. She just stared blankly ahead at the moon.

He sat down beside her. “Rikki, Are you alright?”

She refused to respond or even look at him.
Zane grabbed her arm gently, leaning in closer to see if she had cuts or bruises. She was burning up, it almost hurt to touch her.

She glared at him as he did. “You left me.” She slowly pulled her arm away.

“I didn’t mean to. Bella was in danger. Will was wearing ambergris. It’s a long story but I had to take care of it –“

“I don’t care.”

It wasn’t the answer he was expecting.

“Your friend was in danger Rikki –“

“I’m tired of hearing about how you feel about Will.”

“This wasn’t about him. Bella was under a spell, she needed help –“

“Will could’ve handled it. He’s her boyfriend and he loves her. I’m so tired of this.”

“Tired of what?”

Rikki looked like she was on the verge of tears. “You. My feelings. All of it. Here I am trying to make an effort with you, and you go and leave me without a second thought.”

“I didn’t mean to –“

“Even if you were worried about Bella, why wouldn’t you tell me?” A tear rolled down her cheek.

Zane heard heat lightening crack above his head. “Rikki –“

“Why did you pick them over me?” it was a selfish part of her, a part she had learned to hide. Part of it was the full moon talking, she would do anything to keep Bella safe under normal circumstances. It was the other part that was more insidious. Rikki loved Zane, she couldn’t stop herself. Seeing him pass her over for his business, friends, Sophie, it all wore her down. Now he was picking her friends over her. He was worrying about another girl more than he worried about her. It never happened before. Except with Sophie. A part of her knew Sophie would never hold the place in his life she did, but another part of her knew he kissed her. Somehow it was so much worse than watching him kiss Miriam. What hurt the worst though, was knowing he picked someone she actually cared about over her.

The heat lightening cracked again. “Rikki I think it’s time we got you into the moon pool.”

She shut her eyes tight as more tears rolled down. “What’s wrong with me?” she let out a gasp.

Zane put his arms around her. Her skin was searing. “Nothing, you’re just hot that’s all, the full moon –“

“No!” She snapped at him “Why aren’t you with me?”

“I am. I’m here now. And right now we have to get you into the moon pool.”

“Liar.” She sobbed, but she didn’t fight him as he picked her up.
Carrying Rikki was like carrying a pot of boiling water. Heavy, hot, and Zane knew if he put her down he ran the risk of a painful accident. “I’m not lying.” He said softly.

“Yes you are. You might be here physically, but you’re not present.”

Zane cradled Rikki even as he felt parts of his skin become red and angry with the heat and dryness. “I’m going to get you into the moon pool, we’re going to cool you down and I’m going to spend the rest of the night with you. When the morning comes, you can do whatever you want: keep me by your side, strand me here, talk, don’t talk, I don’t care.” It wasn’t the best thing to say and he knew it. He changed his tune. “Well, I do care, a lot, but what I care about the most is what will make you happy.”

The lightening stopped but she was still burning up. He slid down the passage way with her still in his arms. Then he put her into the moon pool. He took off his shirt and pants, revealing the large scar in the center of his chest, as well as what looked like a bad, blotchy sunburn. He got in the water, not wanting to let go of her again. It was hot, but becoming more comfortable by the minute. He watched the water bubble over Rikki as it carried away the heat. He watched as the bright red blotches on her skin disappeared leaving it almost glowing in the pale moonlight.

Finally, her eyes returned to normal. “What are you doing here?” she was exhausted. He knew she would be.

“You got hot. I brought you here.”

“How did we get here?” she asked again, letting him hold her.

“It’s a long story. Are you sure you want to hear it now?”

She shook her head “no.”

“What do you want to do?”

“Stay with me.” It sounded like she was praying.

“Okay. Walk back to the beach with me, I need to get our supplies.”

“I can’t move.” She said softly. She really was exhausted.

“Can you rest here while I go and get them?”

Rikki thought about it and nodded, “Be quick.” She was almost back to her old self.

Zane moved as quickly as he could, bringing back the duffle bag and setting up a sleeping bag on the sand. It was comfy enough to sleep on and warm enough that they wouldn’t need a cover, so he unzipped it completely to make a mattress. He put the pillow against the wall of the cave.

Zane walked over to the moon pool and got Rikki out. “Do you want to dry yourself off?” he asked her.

“I’m not ready for that yet.” She sounded sad, Zane knew she was talking about using her heat powers.

He took a towel out of Lewis’s bag and passed it to her. She dried off her skin and tail before wrapping her hair with the towel.

Zane got some snacks and water. Then he picked Rikki up and propped her gently up using
the pillow. He handed her a water bottle and some trail mix.

Rikki guzzled down the water bottle, and then another before she finally started eating.

Zane slowly drank his own water, he found a life jacket in the duffle bag and figured it was the closest thing he’d get to a pillow that night. They ate in silence, only communicating in glances.

Eventually, Rikki dried off. Zane could see she was dressed nicely, for Rikki at least. To most people, it wouldn’t be obvious she was trying to impress, but he knew better. He knew the dark red button down with the black, pencil skirt couldn’t be comfortable, neither could the bra for that matter.

Rikki blushed lightly, realizing how closely he was looking at her.

“Do you want my shirt?” he asked, gesturing to the pile he left his clothes in before getting into the moon pool with Rikki.

She nodded “yes.”

As Zane moved to get it, Rikki started undressing. She wordlessly took off her skirt, folding it nicely. Then she took off her shirt, putting it on top of the skirt. Finally, she took off the bra and added it to the pile.

Zane turned to look at her, standing there in just her underwear. He was always in awe of her beauty, no matter what she was wearing or not wearing. Still, it had been a long time since he saw her in this state of undress, and he’d certainly never seen her like this in the moonlight. He was speechless.

Rikki stared deeply into his eyes. She didn’t mind him looking. She wasn’t shy and it was second nature to her at this point. He’d seen her completely naked on several occasions.

Zane thought he saw a hint of a smile as she caught him staring. She took the t-shirt from his hands and put it around herself. She grabbed his arm and led him back to the sleeping bag.

They both lay down on the sleeping bag, Rikki with her pillow and Zane with his life jacket. She snuggled in close to him, tracing the large scar on his chest. That’s when Zane realized he was naked too. Not in the traditional sense, he still had his boxers on, but whenever his scar was out he couldn’t help but feel naked. Why didn’t he notice before? It was his second nature, he could be like this with her. He missed her so much.

“Can I kiss you?” he whispered into the night air.

Rikki sat up and leaned over him, looking deep into his eyes, then she kissed him. Her lips were cool and comfortable. The way she kissed, he knew she was back to her old self, but the way she looked at him, there was something new, something he was determined to discover with her.
I'm going to be real with y'all: my aunt died unexpectedly about a week after I finished the last chapter. She wasn't sick and was only in her 50s, so it was very shocking and painful. My family is really close and this aunt was always the one who got everyone together. This past month and a half has been really hard for me and while I wanted to update, I just couldn't pull myself up and do it. I started thinking about all of the support you've given me throughout writing this fic. The H2O fandom is small, but it's one of the most supportive fandoms I've ever been a part of. Thanks for all of the love you've given this fic, I hope you enjoy the latest update and let me know what you think.

Rikki and Zane woke up to the sun creeping in through the volcano on Mako Island. Both of them still felt exhausted after their night by the moon pool.

Zane winced in pain as he got up. Using a life jacket as a pillow didn’t seem like such a good idea anymore and he was still covered in red angry marks for Rikki’s heat powers.

Rikki was already up and had moved away from Zane. She was at the edge of the moon pool, staring silently into it.

“Now what?” Zane asked her.

“First we need to get off of this island. I don’t suppose Lewis left anything in that survival kit for us to call for a ride home.”

Zane dug through the bag. “CB radio. It even says what channel to use.”

“Hopefully he’s listening to it wherever he is. He and Cleo may still be in the throws of passion.” She joked.

Zane laughed and winced when he moved his neck the wrong way.

“Problem?” asked Rikki, genuinely concerned.

“My neck is just hurting from sleeping on the life jacket.”

“Let me help.” Rikki sat on a rock and gestured for Zane to come and sit down. “I’ll rub it for you while you try to get in contact with Lewis.”

Zane sat down and figured out how to work the radio as Rikki rubbed his shoulders. She even used her powers to gently add heat to the wounded area.

Zane let out a moan as she got the right spot.

Finally Lewis responded to the radio call. “I see you figured out how to work my radio. Pretty good idea, huh? It’s basically the only way to communicate on Mako Island without starting a signal fire.”
They could practically hear the self-satisfied smile in Lewis’ voice.

“Whatever, Lewis. Can you just come and get us?” asked Rikki before Zane could answer.

“Of course. I’ll be right over.” Said Lewis. “Out.”

“What do you want to do until he gets here?” asked Zane.

“There is something I want to check on. You don’t think you got mermaid powers do you?”

“What?” asked Zane in disbelief.

“Well, you were in the moon pool during a full moon, so there’s a chance.”

“But it took away your power for the night.”

“And you might be half fish now, so just please test it out.”

Zane would be lying if he said he wasn’t worried about the possibility of becoming a merman. Honestly, he was worried enough that he didn’t want to test it out, just in case his fears would be realized.

Both Rikki and Zane held their breath as he stuck his hand into the moon pool, after what seemed like forever, Rikki spoke. “Forget it, if you were going to change, you’d have done it by now. I can’t be wet for more than 10 seconds before I grow a tail.”

Zane let out a shaky breath. “Good to know.”

They packed up the remaining gear in Lewis’ survival bag. Rikki took off Zane’s shirt, handing it to him. “Thank you.”

She stood there before him, Zane was amazed at how beautiful a person could look after having a rough night in a cave without any sort of grooming. He knew he was staring too long as she thrust the shirt into his arms. “We’ve got to get dressed at some point. I really don’t feel like Lewis seeing me in just a shirt and underwear.”

“Right.” Rikki got dressed, watching Zane do the same. She felt bad about all the painful looking burns she left on him. She was disgusted with herself for letting her emotions get the best of her. Emotions were for girls, like Cleo and sometimes Emma. Of course, she could blame it on the full moon but that would only go so far.

“What do you remember from last night?” asked Zane calling her out of her thoughts.

“Not much. I got hungry, saw the moon, came here. You showed up and then I was safe and sound in the moon pool.” That was just a basic summary. But what was she supposed to say “You picked my friend over me and my abandonment issues took over, fueled by the full moon. So I ran away and threw a temper tantrum until you paid attention to me. Then I made you hurt all while you took care of me, but you got to see me topless, and it’s not like I’ve never done the same for you, so we’re even.”

“That’s about it.” Zane agreed. He didn’t know how to tell her about her behavior the night before. He figured it was best they both leave it in the pass.

“Thank you for taking care of me!” Rikki said quickly, worried she’d forget. “And I’m sorry about all of the…” she gestured to what looked like sunburn blooming on his skin.
“Anything for you.” He smiled.

She knew it wasn’t really true. He’d let her down in the past, but she could tell he meant it for now.

Rikki was reminded of why she was a comfy sneaker and boot girl rather than a heel girl as soon as they started trudging through the jungle. It’s not like she was planning on going hiking on Mako, hell she could swim home and leave Zane to Lewis if she wanted to. The thing was, she didn’t want to leave him.

Zane moved to pick her up as they hit their first overgrown area.

“What are you doing?” Rikki asked, flinching away from him.

“Sorry, you just look like you won’t be able to hike in those. I was going to carry you.”

“I guess that’s okay.” Said Rikki, climbing onto his back. She settled in as he kept walking but the silence was only comfortable for so long.

“What are we now?” asked Zane.

Damn. It’s not like she could get away from him when he was literally carrying her through a jungle, while she was wearing heels and had no large body of water to escape to.

“We’re Rikki and Zane. I’m a mermaid, you’re a human. I’m a girl, you’re a boy –”

Zane faked a laugh. He needed to know what they were, he didn’t want any games. “Be serious, Rikki.” He said in a lighthearted way, but she could feel the need underneath it.

She sighed. “We’re two people who care deeply about each other. We’re really close but we have a complicated history. We can be good for each other and also really, really bad for each other…” it was like everything that Rikki had been thinking was coming out of her mouth a mile a minute. She had a captive audience, but it’s not like she could leave either. “…We’ve done a lot to hurt each other, whether we’ve meant to or not. My best friends have mixed feelings about you and I honestly don’t know or care what Nate thinks of me.”

Zane laughed, whole heartedly he laughed.

“I thought we were supposed to be being serious?” Rikki smiled into his shoulder.

“I’m glad you don’t care what Nate thinks about you. You shouldn’t.”

“What do you think we are?” asked Rikki.

Zane took a deep breath. “We’re two people who keep coming back to each other –“

“- And then we leave.”

“- And then we come back.”

“So you think this is me coming back right now?” Rikki was a little angry, she hated people thinking she was predictable.

“I’m not saying that, I’m saying I’d like you to be.” It was no secret Zane wanted to get back together with Rikki, but saying it still made him feel vulnerable.
Rikki sighed. “Here’s what we’re going to do: we’re going to date on a trial basis. No going on dates in public, no spending the night at each other’s houses – full moons don’t count -, and absolutely no letting our friends know we’re seeing each other again.”

“I’m not talking to Nate about you.”

“Or Lewis.”

“Or Lewis.” Zane agreed. “Sure you’re going to be able to keep your mouth shut about me.”

“Believe me, I’m not ready for Cleo to grill me about how you’re treating me, or have Emma try and psychoanalyze our relationship, or get the others up to speed on our whole messed up history.”

“That’s good, because it looks like our boat is here.”

Zane put Rikki down as they reached the beach. She took her heels in her hand and to walk on the sand.

Lewis was unbearably cheery despite the early morning. “Hello friends,” he greeted them, “that’s some sunburn you got there Zane.” Lewis waggled his eyebrows.

“Nothing happened.” Said Rikki rolling her eyes.

“Yeah!” Zane backed her up.

“Nice try, you’ve got some lipstick on your shirt there, Zane.” Said Lewis.

Rikki and Zane both examined the shirt.

“Made you look! Rikki is not even wearing lipstick.”

They both rolled their eyes as Zane lifted Rikki into the boat so she wouldn’t get wet.

“You two seem a little chummy for people who say nothing happened. I saw you carrying her.” Lewis helped Zane get the boat into deep enough water to sail away.

“I’m wearing heels, idiot.” Rikki said lifting her heels up to eye level.

“What’s with him?” whispered Zane as Lewis started messing with the motor.

“He got laid and now he has sex on the brain. Watch this.” She turned her attention toward Lewis. “Lewis, what day is it today?”

“Thursday.” He answered matter-of-factly.

“What’s the fishing forecast today?”

“It’s supposed to be lovely, great to wake up early to.”

“What time did you wake up?”

“I don’t remember. Sunrise?”

“And what color bra was Cleo wearing this morning?”

“Pink.” Lewis turned the same shade of Cleo’s bra.
“Cleo told me the pink one is her favorite.” Rikki explained to Zane.

“Stop sharing intimate details of her life with Zane!”

“Stop assuming everyone is hooking up with each other. Anyway, you’re taking me home. I have a nap to take before my shift starts and I’m already exhausted.”

“You can take me to the café. My car is there.”

They made small talk for the rest of the journey until Lewis dropped Rikki off at her trailer.

“So, did you hook up?” he asked Zane after Rikki was out of earshot.

“For the last time, no. It’s the truth.” Zane really didn’t consider kissing Rikki once hooking up, not even if she was half naked, either way he had a promise to keep.

“So why does it look like you laid out in the sun all day? The last time you got like that Rikki kissed you and sucked the hydration right out of you.”

She didn’t tell him he couldn’t tell Lewis about the full moon, and Lewis needed to know, he cared about Rikki. “This stays between us…and I guess you can tell the girls too. She was really upset last night. I had to pick her up and move her into the moon pool.”

“Upset how?”

“I don’t know! The moon makes them moody. You know that.” Zane didn’t want to share the intimate details Rikki shared, he knew she wouldn’t like it.

“She was really tired afterward so we just went to sleep.”

“So she’s fine now?”

“Seems to be.”

“Great! Go mermaid damage control team!” Lewis held his hand up for Zane to high five him. Zane rolled his eyes and obliged.

Hours later Rikki started her shift at the café. She felt like she’d been hit by a truck. She was so tired from using her powers, hiking through the jungle, and sleeping in the open. It was the last place she wanted to be but she didn’t feel like letting her friends know how bad she was hurting. Sophie walked in about 30 minutes later.

“There you are! I’ve been trying to reach you all morning, don’t you check your phone?”

“I misplaced it.” Rikki honestly couldn’t remember where she put it. She knew the last time she had it she was at home right before being moonstruck.

“Bella had a really rough night. I told her she didn’t have to come in, but she said she didn’t want to let you down. She’s in my car and I’m turning around and taking her right back to my place if you give the word.”

Rikki looked out the window. Bella was in worse shape than her, she looked like she cried herself to sleep. Rikki instantly felt worse remembering how selfish she was the night before, even if the moon was partly to blame. “I’m fine with that, but she might not be.”

Rikki watched Sophie and Bella argue in the parking lot before they came inside. “Sit tight.
I’m making you a strawberry-mango booster smoothie.” Sophie walked Bella to the side of the stage so she could practice.

“You don’t have to be here, you know?” Rikki asked Bella.

“I want to.” Bella’s voice was hoarse.

“You don’t look like you can sing.”

“I don’t know where else I’m supposed to be.”

“Home, Sophie’s apartment, Will’s boathouse —”

“I’m not really sure I can see Will right now.”

“Well, you didn’t pick a great place to be if you don’t want to run into him.”

“You don’t know?” asked Bella, exhausted. “What did you do last night?”

Rikki knew. But Bella didn’t know that. “Went crazy, swam to Mako, got rescued by Zane, went to bed.”

“Zane did a lot of rescuing last night. Will’s cologne, it had something in it that I was like addicted to, I heard you’ve dealt with it before. Anyway, It was really scary, especially because… you know what we were supposed to do last night… and I barely remember anything. Even though they told me nothing happened it’s still —”

“- Scary. You want to take a nap in my office? You’re not singing today, but this way you won’t have to see Will.”

“That sounds great, actually.”

Rikki got Bella set up in her office and went back out to talk to Sophie.

“She’s not working today.”

“Oh, thank God. Is she sleeping?”

“Not yet, but she should. How is she?”

“Not great. I told Will he can’t see her yet, so hopefully he won’t come poking around.”

“Good.”

Rikki wished she could just sleep in her office, but she had work to do. She knew Cleo wouldn’t be that worried about her since she was sure Lewis would tell her everything that happened on the boat ride home. It was Emma she was dreading seeing. Emma always read her like a book and she wouldn’t take “I don’t want to talk about it” for an answer.

At the boathouse, Will was checking his phone every 5 minutes all he wanted to do was be with Bella and make it right, but Sophie told him to stay away. He was so mad at himself he couldn’t see straight. The only thing he could do now was stare at the wall and rehearse his apology, even if it was just a misunderstanding.

Back at the café, as predicted, Emma walked in with Ash and immediately walked over to Rikki.
“How are you? How’s Bella? Have you seen her? What happened last night?” Emma said, hugging Rikki.

“Hi, Rikki.” Ash said casually. “Can you tell Emma is paranoid?”

“I’m not paranoid, I’m worried.”

“Well, stop worrying. I’m fine. I just went full moon crazy and had to be forced to take a dip in the moon pool. Now I’m good.”

“You sure?” asked Emma, narrowing her eyes at her.

Luckily, Rikki knew she wasn’t the only thing worrying Emma. “Bella is in my office napping. She’s still really shaken up. She didn’t want to be left alone and she doesn’t want to see Will, so she’s laying low.”

“I’ll check on her –“ Emma started walking toward the back room.

“She barely slept last night.” Said Sophie, blocking her with her body. “She needs to rest. She’ll come out when she’s ready. Now what can I get you to drink?”

“Strawberry-banana smoothie,” Ash called out, pulling Emma away from Sophie and into him.

“Banana Beat Box.” Emma muttered in defeat. “We’re going to talk about this later, Rikki.”

The hard thing about later, is it comes sooner rather than later.
Rikki was never more happy to be off of work. Normally she loved hanging out at the café on Fridays. She liked seeing the band play, the crowds they’d get, and keeping an eye on Sophie. But today the lead singer felt like garbage, the crowds were slowly getting back to normal, and she wasn’t having any problems with Sophie.

Zane insisted they have their first official date tonight. He told her he still owed her some pizza and junk food. That’s when she realized she still owed him honesty. She really wasn’t sure how to tell him she remembered everything the night of the full moon. She also wasn’t sure how she’d tell him she lied to him before.

Rikki prided herself with being blunt and honest but she was quickly realizing she was the liar in the relationship. Sure Zane broke promise after promise, but he never outright lied, not to Rikki at least. She thought about it. Their relationship was founded on a lie, her not being a mermaid. She went to great lengths to deceive him the entire time they were first dating. She lied to him about where she lived, why she needed money, and how she was feeling, Especially how she was feeling.

She looked down at her phone. Several texts from Emma and one missed call. Rikki answered most of them, giving one-word responses and acting like nothing was bothering her. She knew if she said any more Emma would figure out she was upset. Rikki knew how it would go if she told Emma how she acted that night and that she lied to Zane. “Rikki, I know the moon is out but you really need to learn when to ask for help,” “You shouldn’t have let your emotions get the better of you like that,” “You could’ve really hurt yourself or Zane,” “And you need to be honest with him.” Rikki rolled her eyes at the Emma lecture in her head. Emma was great at advice most of the time, but sometimes she just acted like a scolding parent.

Meanwhile at the café, Bella was feeling a little better. Rikki clued Zane into their arrangement that Bella could go into their office whenever she needed and be alone. Just knowing she had an escape made Bella all the more cheerful. She sat at a booth with Nate going over his secrets song with him. It was actually getting to be a good song and Nate was so upbeat she couldn’t help but smile with him. It was a good distraction. She was also lucky Sophie went into full big sister mode, making her grilled cheese and smoothies and scaring off anyone who would give her a hard time.

Zane watched Sophie bring Bella and Nate their food. He noticed the gentle way she put her hand on Bella’s back and smiled at her. It was times like this he wished he had a brother or sister. “Have you told Will how she’s doing today?” asked Zane when Sophie came back over to the counter.

“No, why?”

“I think he’d like to know she’s smiling at the very least.”

Sophie took a long look at Bella. “She’s keeping busy. I don’t know how long she’ll have to be away from my brother before she wants to see him again.”

“Well, it must hurt not knowing how she’s doing –“

“You think I don’t know that?” Sophie snapped. “I want to tell him, but I want to respect her privacy too.”
“What’s so private about that?” Zane gestured to Bella laughing at one of Nate’s stupid jokes.

Sophie rolled her eyes. “If it bothers you so much, you can tell him. Just don’t tell him too much.”

Zane took a picture of Bella and Nate. “A picture is worth a thousand words.” He sent it to Will with the simple caption “Don’t worry, she’s doing a little better today.”

Will got a text from a number he didn’t recognize, it took him a minute to realize it was Zane since he never saved Zane’s number, or wanted to. “Don’t worry, she’s doing a little better today.” He knew it could only be about one person, he opened the photo and sighed in relief. Bella looked weak, but happy, kind of like she did when she was telling him stories in the moon pool. Maybe she’d be ready to talk to him soon.

Normally, Rikki didn’t want Cleo to worry. About anything. Cleo did the most worrying of anyone she ever met, but she grew so much this year, and Rikki really needed to tell someone the secret that was eating her up inside. She knew Cleo wouldn’t judge her for getting emotional and making stupid decisions. She wouldn’t lecture. She’d just listen and say what she would’ve done in the situation. Cleo’s advice was kind of hit or miss. But that’s what Rikki needed, to vent to someone, and if she somehow had an epiphany while talking to Cleo, so be it. She took a deep breath and dialed Cleo’s number.

“Hello?”

“Hello, Cleo. If you’re free right now, come over. I did something really stupid and it’s eating me alive and I have to tell someone.”

“Is this about the full moon?”

“Yes, it’s about the full moon. Listen, don’t tell Emma, she’ll just judge –“

“Oh. My. Gosh. You slept with Zane?”

“No! Did Lewis tell you that? He’s an idiot when it comes to those things. You shouldn’t have believed him.”

“Okay. Okay. What’s the emergency.” Cleo sounded a lot less interested.

“Look, I’d rather do this in person. Don’t tell Bella either, she has enough to worry about right now.”

“Okay, see you soon.”

Now all she had to do is pray Cleo didn’t tell Emma.

Emma was chomping at the bit for her friends to let her in. She needed to know what happened to Rikki. The one word responses were killing her and Rikki wouldn’t pick up her phone to talk. On Bella’s end, she couldn’t so much as eat in the same restaurant without Sophie watching her like a hawk. Ash tried to distract her with everything he knew. Swimming, hitting the beach, horseback riding, cooking, sex, basically anything he could do with her that could turn into a competition.

She and Ash were sitting in a booth at Rikki’s place. She was on her third banana beat box when Ash made some comment about her stalking Bella. Emma had enough, and she really did have to go to the bathroom after drinking all those smoothies. Emma used her best fake polite voice to let
ash know she’d be in the bathroom. He held his hands up in defeat and ordered her another smoothie.

Sophie noticed Emma was away from her booth so she took the opportunity to go check in on Bella. “You okay, honey?” it just slipped out. They weren’t really sisters but she saw Bella blush at the embarrassing nickname. It wasn’t uncommon for Sophie to call customers or friends “Hon,” but rarely did she go for “honey.”

“I’m fine, Sophie.” Bella looked down at the table.

Sophie left, not wanting to make it any worse for Bella.

“Honey?” Nate laughed a little too loud to be polite.

“I have to use the restroom.” Bella said, getting up and making her way over there.

It was quiet and dark. They had a small night-light on when no one was in the bathroom to save electricity. When the customers came into the bathroom, all they had to do was flick the light switch, to light up the room. But Bella liked it dark, it was easier to think and relax, and the night-light gave just enough light for her to see what she was doing.

She went into the stall, sat down, sighed and punched the stall door.

She heard a gasp on the other side.

“Sorry! I thought I was the only one in here!”

“Bella, is that you?” asked Emma from the other stall.

“Oh good, it’s just…” Bella thought for a moment, she didn’t want to talk about what happened, but at least Emma knew she was feeling bad so she wouldn’t exactly have to explain her reaction. “…you. Why did you leave the light off?”

“It’s silly, but I like the dark. It’s relaxing and it’s not like I can’t see. Ash was starting to get on my nerves so I needed to do some deep breathing and count backwards from 10.”

Bella laughed. “I like the dark too. Nate and Sophie are starting to wear out their welcome with me too.”

“Sophie?” Emma was surprised. Sophie was keeping her from getting close to Bella.

Bella figured she could vent about Sophie. “She cares about me, a lot. I know she’s rough around the edges but she’s grown to care about me because she cares about Will. And she’s dated some really bad guys and is actually really protective of girls that don’t threaten her.”

Emma scoffed “Ones that don’t threaten her?”

“I said she’s rough around the edges.”

“So is there a ‘but’? You’ve said a lot of good things about her, but you haven’t said anything bad.”

“She treats me like a little girl. I know I’m not helping any by sleeping at her house, having her feed me, and crying a lot, but It’s like she thinks she has to do everything for me. I know we’re at the café and she has to get me my food here, but she could send another server to bring it over.”

Emma took some time to reflect on herself. “Big sisters can be overbearing.”
Bella’s words just came out, once she started talking, she couldn’t stop, she just ignored what Emma said. “I can’t go home because I don’t want my mom and dad to worry, and I can’t see Will right now because, I just can’t see Will. I have no where else to go but Sophie’s.”

Emma thought for a minute. “You know where you can go when you have no where else to go?”

“That’s nice Emma, but I’m not in the mood for a sleepover –“

“The moon pool.”

“Oh. Yeah, that’s a great place to go.”

“Swim break? I’ll let you go by yourself if that’s what you want –“

“No, you should come too.” Bella decided she was enjoying talking to Emma.

They came out of the bathroom together and Bella skipped over to Sophie. “Emma and I are going to take a swim.”

Sophie heard the confidence in her voice and decided to let her go. “Come right back if you need anything.” She said hugging Bella goodbye.

Bella skipped out the door with Emma, ready for a change of scenery.

Meanwhile, Rikki had finished telling Cleo the whole she-bang of what happened the night of the full moon, minus the part where she and Zane got back together, but that technically happened the next day.

“Aw, Rikki, you got jealous!” Cleo smiled.

“Be serious, we all took Lewis’ thing with Charlotte seriously.”

Cleo’s eyes darkened. “Yeah, but they were actually together, Zane only has eyes for you. Well, Emma says he does, but I know he has zero interest in Bella.”

“So you’re saying I’m being ridiculous?”

“No. You were at a very vulnerable point in the night. I’m lucky, I’ve always had you girls or Lewis to take care of me during a full moon, even if it doesn’t always work. I’ve never had to go it alone, it sounds awful.”

“It doesn’t help that my Mom –“

“I know how you feel.” Cleo put her hand on Rikki’s.

Sometimes Rikki forgot Cleo’s mom left their family. Don was an amazing dad and able to eat dinner with his girls every night, and he got re-married to a pretty great lady. Still, nothing can ever patch up the hole that is your birth mother leaving you.

“Yeah, it sucks. Anyway, here’s the other stupid thing I did –“

“You promise it’s not sex?”

“Yes, Cleo, I promise.” Rikki rolled her eyes. “Nope, no sex. He just saw me half naked and we’re in a secret relationship now. Again.”
Cleo nodded for her to continue.

“I told him I didn’t remember what happened. Just getting hungry, seeing the moon, being called to Mako, and him putting me into the moon pool. I can’t keep lying to him.”

“Is that really how you feel?” asked Cleo.

“Yeah, If I want him to be straight with me, I need to be straight with him.”

“Then just tell him how you feel.”

Of course that was Cleo’s advice.

“Just tell him how you feel and say you weren’t sure how to tell him. I think he’ll understand. I never knew why he was such a mess until my mom left. And at least my Dad is nice, Mr. Bennett is a Jerk. He’ll understand the abandonment thing.”

“And the lying?”

“It’s not always easy to tell the truth right away, sometimes you have to distance yourself from a situation.”

“Thanks, Cleo. That was actually really insightful.”

“You’re welcome. So do you think you’ll get back together?”

Rikki was lucky Cleo couldn’t read her like Emma could. “I think we should focus on being friends first.”

Bella and Emma emerged at the moon pool. Bella was feeling a lot better. It was her first time swimming again since the full moon and her body needed it. She noticed Emma watching her, curiously.

“How much did they tell you about what happened the night of the full moon?” Bella asked sheepishly, afraid of the answer.

Emma knew her answer would hurt. “Ash and I tell each other everything.”

“Oh.” Said Bella, embarrassed for how she acted, and that Emma knew.

“I had a pretty scary experience with ambergris, and that was back when he didn’t know I was a mermaid.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, it was really embarrassing. I threw myself at Nate.”

Bella made a disgusted face.

“If that wasn’t bad enough, I nearly ruined my chances with Ash. And I almost gave away our secret, we all did. I know how scary it can be to lose control, but it’s better when you’re surrounded by people who love you and won’t judge you for it.”

Bella looked at Emma intently.

“It sounds dumb, but there’s a reason we laugh about it now, we’re so damn tired of crying
about it.”

“Really?”

“When it first happened, Lewis and Zane were so upset they hurt us they were apologizing for weeks. Cleo was already so vulnerable and tired of others telling her what to do she was really angry that something like that existed. I went home and cried from embarrassment, I was mad that my composure could crumble because of that stupid little bottle. And Rikki, she did what she always did, pushed people away until she exploded.”

“What happened?”

“She punched Zane in the gut and screamed at him, started crying and then let him hold her.”

Bella laughed, it was honest and then it turned bitter. “I cried my eyes out and hid from the person I love. But you know what’s funny?”

“What?”

“I was attracted to someone hot and kind like Will and you three were attracted to Nate.”

“That’s pretty funny.” Emma smiled. She knew the full moon made Bella’s experience a lot worse, but at least they were making progress.

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