Sink or Swimchesters

by wolfie180g

Summary

Sam and Dean were little Merkids when a shark attacked Sam. Dean' sacrifice gave Sam a chance to escape. 200+ yrs pass and Sam grew to be a Sea giant, but never forgot his older brother. Sometimes he would feel this pull back to that awful place. Ignoring it every time until it would vanish decades later, only to return after 9 months.
But it was never this strong. He'd sworn never to go back, but the itch under his skin made him.
Sam saw something up above and swam hard. Heart racing, fins straining towards it, the pull feeling like home. The dot grew in size until he was right under the floating thing that was only a little larger than his hands. Sam pulled it down for a better look but discarded the strange driftwood because he was still drawn to the surface. A small two tailed creature was crying out for help and trying to swim away from him. Sam gasped at the tiny being, and needed to know what it was. It wasn't able to swim very well so he reached up again and carefully wrapped his huge clawed fingers around the tiny struggling thing, pulling it underwater and staring at it in amazement.
He thought he'd never see his brother Dean again.
Sam held him tight and wouldn't ever let him go.
Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Casting out from the Pod

Chapter one:
Casting out from the Pod

The ocean is a hell of a place to grow up in. The currents are the only fairly predictable thing down here. Everything changes daily and nothing is ever permanent. Especially not for those of us who live longer than most under the waves.

Our species had called this place home for a millennia. At least, that's the general knowledge we have to go by. In reality, we don't know how long we've been here. It's not exactly like we have easily accessible records we can go through. And what size would those messages be? Our kind get pretty big down in the deeps so the older and wiser ones would need half the ocean to write it all down if they even knew how to write in the first place. That's more a human thing I've come to realize and accept.

Besides that, our history has been passed down more reliable methods than marking things down in stone. Stone isn't all that either when it's underwater and battling currents. Nothing and I mean nothing is permanent down here. The oceanscape changes often and we tend not to stick around one area for too long. We have to move with the food and to keep away from the humans if we want to survive. Anyway, what I was saying is that with no other option to pass on our history lessons, we have to rely on what I later learned was, Genetic Memory.

At least, that's the working theory I came up with. My bro doesn't know enough of the human concepts to argue it with me or set me straight. Big guy just knows what he KNOWS and that's that. I don't exactly know if genetic memory is accurate, but I think it's pretty close. It's been awhile since I've been linked up directly to the Merp history myself. It's all a bit fuzzy around the edges since I've been away from it for a hot minute.

Oh, by the way, don't let them know that Merp is my nickname for them... us... whatever. Merpeople is just a mouthful if you ask me. Sounds too much like a politically correct fairy tale if you ask me. Merpeople. Ugh. Maybe there was a proper name but it's been lost to time since we're basically going extinct. So I guess it doesn't matter what anyone calls us. Course, I hate being considered as a Mermaid since I'm obviously a dude. I'm jumping ahead, sorry. Just uh, don't get too caught up in what Mermaids traditionally look like, ok? Open mind.

Where was I?

Right. I wasn't born yet, but I do know that we'd migrated here when the waters started to desalinate in our previous territory. Making it unpleasant to live in. Our kind evolved for the deeps, where food is abundant but just as deadly as we are. Our kind never really stop growing, and even though I guess we start off at a mere two feet long as eggs, the elders have measured upwards of three humpback whales long head to tail fin. Fucking huge. I'm glad they generally turn herbivore when meat gets scarce. We aren't immortal, we just live a long ass time and if we survive our preteen years, there's not much that can take one of us down. Growing up fast is an understatement. We do like most underwater mammals and pack on the pounds those first few years of growing. It doesn't look like it though. The weight being distributed evenly and turning to muscle when we're
three years old and about the same size as an average bottle nosed dolphin. I hate to say it, but, most humans are the size equivalent to a two year old. No wonder my brother still treats me like a fragile kid even though I'm in my twenties. But I'm jumping ahead. You need to know our history. We are counting on you. Our lives depend on you. Heh, no pressure.

So uh, yeah, we grow fast and then it slows way down in our preteen years. Once we hit the double digits for length we can slow down the feeding frenzy. I mean, I guess we could theoretically keep eating like there's no tomorrow, but, we would outgrow our environment and die much earlier than everyone else.

My brother says that finding mates had become harder and harder for them, pollutants in the water drove their food sources away but by then, they'd already settled into the new territory and decided that their small group would stick it out there. Tired of migrating and running away from their problems. My brother never really got the chance to try and find a mate. Long story. He'll get to it later.

Eventually, nature filtered the waters of the pollution and the place was comfortable again. Neither my bro or I know what that pollution was exactly, just that it took awhile for it to go away many hundreds of years ago.

The cause of the disturbance in the environment was discovered by a handsome couple of Merpeople that were only seven decades old at the time. Fairly young by Merp standards and still adventurous. The two had known each other for most of their lives and formed a strong bond with each other. They were both unique in that they were very close in size and age compared to the rest of the Pod. The few others that were born at about the same time had died from fin rot at a young age. Cast out from the Pod at the first sign of fin rot to keep it from spreading to the others. Sounds heartless, but, there was no cure for fin rot and it would sweep through the Pod, killing the weaker members slowly. It was entirely possible that they could have healed themselves of it, but, once cast out of a Pod, they don't let anyone back in. The worry that the fin rot would return was too great and even if they stayed and luckily healed themselves, they'd be treated poorly by the others for the rest of their days. Seen as weak and diseased. Never allowed to mate or even sleep near the others. It's anyone's guess which fate would be better or worse. Glad I don't have to really worry about that. I've had my shots.

Sorry I keep getting side tracked, I promise I'll stop interrupting so much with my shitty commentary. It would be easier if my brother was here to help me out, but you got me instead. He told me all this before so if there's like, glaring errors, it's all his fault.

So these two lovers knew that they were destined to be together and wanted to have many kids of their own. At the time, they had been practically forced into perpetual babysitting the spoiled offspring of the elders since the elders were nearly too large to interact with their own kids. It's not like there were dozens, but still, Pod politics dictates that the eldest had priority over the younger ones since they had more knowledge to pass on. They were granted more offspring than the others and that's just bs if you ask me.

The young couple were unwilling to wait for approval from the rest of the Pod to have their own family unit. Told to wait many decades for the hatchlings to grow up to an 'appropriate' size. Determined by the elders of course. Everyone knew that the elders would have the couple raise them till the oceans ran dry just so that they don't have to lift a fin to help. Having all the fun of making offspring with none of the work to raise them afterwards. At least they kept their numbers to reasonable numbers, but really, who needs 12+ kids if they weren't planning on raising them themselves?
The couple didn't resent the kids of course. It's not their fault they had shitty gigantic parents. So they put up with it until the kids were old enough to take care of themselves. Most insisted on it anyway which helped a lot. They had formed their own miniPod within the bigger one and it was rumored that they would all run away together and start their own group somewhere. At least they weren't all related... I don't know the morals of Pod culture myself, since I was kinda out of the loop having not been born yet. I'll have to ask around. Getting back to the story...

The couple knew they had the practice and knowledge they needed to raise their own family and didn't want to wait and see what the general consensus was between the elders and the rest of the Pod. Unless you were an elder, you had to wait for someone to die to have a kid. Established compatible couples would need permission to bear offspring, due to the longevity of their lives, they found it necessary to keep their numbers small or else they'd consume the food sources faster than they'd replenish. Most of the time, the answer was 'no'. It was rare to have more than one offspring, but they wanted more.

Away from their Pod if necessary.

The couple..., you know what? I'm just going to go ahead and name them after my parents. My brother forgot what their names were so I'm just gonna take the lead on this. I'm sure he wouldn't mind.

So, Mary and John were impatient, and they knew they'd have to leave and start their own Pod elsewhere so that no one found out. It was dangerous to go against the elders. One of their children might even be killed for the infraction to their laws and tradition and they couldn't bear the thought. It was a risk they were willing to take because they could see that their Pod was damaged and unwilling to listen to reason. I'm sure they didn't realize it at the time but I think they knew instinctively that they needed to diversify the gene pool for the species to grow instead of stagnate. Just the fact that they'd rather treat their fin rot survivors as second class citizens is really telling how backwards their thinking is. I mean, I'd WANT my people to be immune to that horrible disease. To strengthen the gene pool with survivors. Right? John and Mary had it right and I'd have been right there cheering them on.

Mary especially wanted at least two children close in age because in her experience, young ones survive and thrive better when they're equal sized and aged kids. If a predator was to hunt one of them down into a tight cave, neither giant parent would be able to fit inside to rescue them. However a similar sized sibling would have better luck at going in after them and help drive the predator back out where the parents could take care of it.

But besides all that, she found that her life with John was far more fulfilling because there was no difference in size between them. They were equally matched and could explore and hunt more efficiently together. She was older than John by only a few years so her overall size was just a scale longer than him, but he didn't care. Nearly everyone else in their Pod were so large that they constantly felt like hatchlings despite being in their seventies and nearly halfway as large as their kind generally gets.

John didn't need much convincing to leave their home Pod and their outdated traditions. He was in his prime and ready to show the oceans his strength and prowess. They'd hold to some traditions of course. After all, there were a few tried and true guidelines to living in the deeps. However, most of those laws were meant for large Pods. Once he and his mate found their own corner of the world, they could make up their own rules and start new, fun and exciting, traditions.

Mary had talked a long time with the elder's offspring, and got their blessing for their secret departure. They would be the ones most effected by their absence and Mary especially needed for
them to know that it wasn't anything that they did wrong. That the kids weren't the ones to drive them out. This was voluntary and mutually beneficial. All of the kids were supportive of their decision for several reasons, the main one being that with their 'sitters' gone, they could finally show their parents what they're capable of and take their rightful place in the Pod instead of just seen as perpetual children. Eager to prove their maturity and worth. Mary made sure they knew enough to stay with the Pod until they were also big enough to move out on their own if they so choose. That would be a few more decades at least.

John and Mary gathered up their few belongings, things collected from the ocean floor that were useful and shiny that drifted down from the surface time to time. A few of the things were sharp curved metal with barbs at the end like a stingray's tail. It fit in her palm well enough and she kept it sharp by rubbing it along smooth stones on the ocean floor. They were perfect for defense against sharks and killer whales. She wasn't delusional enough to think that it would all be smooth currents and kitten-fish for her own offspring. A shark or killer whale would be no problem for her or John to deal with but they might not always be around to save their kids from every single predator in the ocean. They'd need to learn how to hunt on their own at an earlier age and how to defend themselves against things bigger than them. Those hooks would be invaluable so she managed to tie some strong kelp braids around them and placed them into one of the woven kelp bags she had made when she was bored as a kid. The bag went around her waist so that she doesn't have to carry her things in her hands and it wouldn't bog her down or slip off if she'd tried carrying it over her shoulder, constantly billowing open and slowing her swim. Fun fact, Mary had invented the first fanny pack centuries before humans did.

She gathered a few trinkets to remember her family by, and knew that she'd likely never see them again. Abandoning your Pod was seen as betrayal and they rarely forgave it. John had been orphaned a few decades back and really had no one besides Mary. He spent far less time preparing to leave than she did. Ready, willing, and waiting to get out of this place. The day before, he'd given away his shiny stones to the kids to remember the two of them by. Tonight, he nearly caved in his determination when he saw that the kids snuck out of their beds to deliver a parting gift. They had made him a length of strong kelp rope. Thick enough for him to handle it without breaking it. It must have taken the little ones days to make it big enough for them to use. The kids were only as long as his forearm, from wrist to elbow, so it would have likely taken all of them working together to make it. He could only imagine. John wondered if the kids somehow knew what they were planning awhile back or if the kelp rope was last minute snitched from their elder parents stash. Either way, he felt loved, and hugged them all. Mary joining in the somber farewell.

Mary’s mother woke to the scent of sadness in the water. She chirped a few soft calls and found the shapes of two Merpeople that could only be John and Mary at that size surrounded by smaller ones of the adolescents. She carefully got up from the pile of massive sleeping bodies and swim over to the small gathering. The kids all bolted back to their holes and nests, but she paid them no mind. Eyes only for her daughter and her mate. John straightened up and Mary was quick to follow, showing that she's by his side and wont back down. Mary's mother wasn't quite old enough to be an elder, but she was close. She saw in her young ones eyes the determination and regret that by leaving, she was leaving her family behind.

Mary saw her mother's face crumple in sadness and let her massive form sink down to the ocean floor to be able to face her little girl as equals. Mary swam forward and stretched her arms out wide but still barely managed to reach her mothers shoulders with her fingertips. She then felt those wide comforting arms wrap around her for the last time. Gentle and forgiving, the huge hands came up to carefully card through her blond hair.

Mary wiggled out of the grip and swam up to her mother's face and ducked her forehead to hers. Closing her eyes and putting this whole night, this tender moment to deep memory. The soft touch
was one of respect and farewell. Mary's mother, Deanna closed her eyes and inhaled her daughter's scent deeply before looking back into her little one's face. Barely longer than her arm, but determined to set out on their own. Deanna peered over Mary's head at John who was swimming in wide circles, looking all around at the sleeping titans to make sure no one else woke.

A few of the new infant hatchlings swam up towards him and he chuckled sadly at them. He and Mary were the only ones in the Pod that were able to play middle ground between the elders and the hatchlings. He was confident that the older kids would take the lead now. He wasn't much older than them when he was trained in how to survive on his own. They all would still have a stable and sound Pod to look after them. They still would have to become more independent in a hurry and he hoped that their leaving didn't hurt the babies too badly. Theoretically, the newborns should be able to fend for themselves, but in practice, no one wanted to find out for sure. They relied on the larger adults to scare off sharks but some of the sharks were too persistent or too stupid to know any better.

John hugged the extra small ones and told them to go back to their nest and their older cousins and wait till morning. He swore to himself that he and Mary would have at least two children the minute that they find a new home. He didn't want to grow too large to be able to interact with his own kids. He wanted them to know what a proper hug feels like. Seeing his beloved Mary up against her mother... it never felt right. That his mate was so strong and independent and fierce but looked so small against someone older... John clenched his fist. He will not let the age and size gap become too great in his family. He wanted what he had with Mary for his kids. Someone of equal size and age to grow up with. Such an odd concept for their kind, but, he wanted this. He knew Mary wanted this.

Mary had bid her mother farewell and swam after her mate as he made another quiet loop around. She jolted him out of his thoughts and back to the task at hand. They will have to swim through the night to get enough space between them and the Pod before they could rest and continue on. They simply couldn't cover as much ground as an elder, and were constantly looking over their fins to see if they were being followed. Chirping out their calls and listening for the echos. John led Mary up a little higher in the waters. Closer to the surface to help see better without relying on their echo location as much. The pressure from the water lessening and making them both a little light headed. The waters were warmer too and felt so nice that they drifted for a little ways, soaking it all in. Maybe the higher altitude would be better to live in. The Pod wouldn't think of looking for them up here.

Mary blinked at the gradual rising light above the waters as they ascended. Stopping to watch as the area continued to get brighter and brighter even though they weren't moving closer to the surface. They had been warned against the surface their whole lives. Stories from the elders of predators that stayed above and snatched up any young Merperson that dared to go up and take a look.

Mary shivered in the warm waters and John pulled her back a few extra tail lengths. They watched as this bright shell kept on rising until it was nearly overhead and then it seemed to actually drift down in that same unwavering path on the other side. By now they were both starving hungry and decided to stop speculating on what it is and just find something to eat. They had to dip down to the deeps again and ate their fill of the new plant life. It didn't taste like anything they had before but their stomachs didn't seem to care much and rumbled happily at the full feeling.

Mary was eager to get back to the warm bright waters before continuing on. The bright shell was going down again when they saw a shadowy shape actually move along on the surface. She nudged John's side and pointed it out. It was similar to the wrecks they'd explored in their youth, but this one was skimming along on the surface. There was a clanking sound and then something
was dropped from the side of the strange long oval shape. It had a hook on each side and swayed from a long vine. Muffled calls were heard and drove their curiosity upwards.

John poked at the hook and it spun in place. He cautiously pinched it between his fingers, finding it half as wide as his palm. Mary came up alongside the floating thing to better hear the muffled calls. A few long sticks were plunged into the water and had those same strings attached. After they drifted for a second, they were hauled back up top only to be thrown again. This time closer to her shoulder. She gave the floating thing a bit more space and lifted her head above the waterline to see what was going on.

The strangest sight greeted her there. Her eyes went wide with disbelief. Her tail stopped moving underneath her, and that immediately alerted John to her distress. She started sinking back under again when she made a sharp cry of alarm. John was at her side in an instant, forgetting that he still had the hook in hand. It cut a gash along his palm and then the line went taught and yanked at the floating thing. It wavered dangerously in place before settling again at an awkward angle. Waves crashing around it and more and more of those sharp needle sticks were being thrown at both of them.

John pulled out the stick from her shoulder and turned hate filled eyes to the thing that dared hurt his mate. He took and held a breath of water and breached the surface to better see what he was up against. The floating thing wasn't as large as them, but, that didn't mean it wasn't dangerous. He nearly spat out all of his liquid breath at the sight of hundreds of tiny hatchlings on the top of the thing. All scurrying around on two tails, covered in a strange materials. His first thoughts were that someone had cut their tails in half, removing every fin and bending what was left into those frightful shapes but saw that every single one of the small hatchlings looked like that. It was terribly unnatural to look at and he felt his stomach churn at the sight. Abhorrent. Abominations.

Their shrieks of terror hurt his hears and he shoved the floating thing away from himself. Many of the small beasts were still throwing sharp sticks at him and landing a few into his thick skin. His tail bent upwards beyond the other side of the thing, curled around it and swept down in a rush with a mighty wave that threatened to flip the floating thing onto its side. All of the little beasts were thrown to the floor of it and a few went into the water.

Mary tugged him back underwater before he could do worse. Her eyes traced the path of the ones that went into the water and saw that they were being hauled back up top by super thin lines. They probably couldn't even breath water. Splashing and panicking, John turned to watch them in interest. Mary forced his head back to her own. Foreheads touching and breaths racing.

“It's ok, John. I'm not that hurt. Let's just leave them alone.”

“They're just frightened. It's fine, let's just go.” she pleaded, giving him a comforting hug.

John growled under his breath at the thing but could see how distressed Mary was. He'll have to find it again when Mary wasn't looking and take care of this threat. He scowled at the hook still in his hand and he yanked it out of his hand. He tried breaking the thread but it was too strong. He would have yanked it right off of the floating thing but that would make it sink to the bottom and he and Mary would have a whole school of monsters swimming around them. If they wanted to stay above the water, all the better.

Blood clouded the water from their wounds. He chirped out a few times to see if the blood would draw in any sharks so that they could do his job for him. A few changed course and headed for the
floating thing and he smirked at that. Nature will take care of these unnatural things.

He turned and nodded at his mate and swam back to the surface. He was an arm's length distance away from it. Too far for their little hooked sticks to reach him but not too far for him to toss the hook back at them. The hook was much heavier out of the water than in it and it smashed a chunk of the structure that was located towards the rear of floating thing. His blood dripped from it and towards the floor. He glared down every one of the small creatures. Daring them to try another attack before he felt Mary tug at his wing fins. He couldn't stop himself from reaching forward and flicking his clawed fingers at the front. That little move managed to break through the side of it and saw water gush up into the thing. So fragile of a structure. How those creatures were able to get anywhere was a mystery to him.

He smirked at the renewed cries of alarm that were annoyingly high pitched out of the water. He was satisfied that he'd apparently disabled it, because as the pair started to swim away, he saw the thing leaning heaving to that side. Half of it was sinking into the water. Panicking cries muffled overhead as he went below, signaling that he made his point clear enough. Even if he didn't find it again, those hundred or so small two tail monsters wouldn't easily forget their enemy.

He let Mary drag him further along, thinking back to all those wrecks they'd explored in their youth and knew now that they were once things that floated on the surface too. Long long ago.

Mary was on the same wavelength. Shuddering at the fact that those floating things had managed to make their way all over the ocean's surface. The tools they had used seemed more advanced than she'd seen before. Worried that it was only a matter of time before those creatures multiplied and invaded more of their waters. “John, we have to find a place safe from those things.”

John hummed in agreement. They found the much larger destroyed oval things only in the deeps, so, logically, they should go to more shallow waters. This way, they'd be able to see them coming a long ways off and prepare for the attack. They didn't have a Pod anymore to watch their backs so any advantage was necessary.

They headed for the warmer currents and marveled at the diversity of new sea-life. Colors of all kinds flit by in schools of fish that they'd never seen before. All shapes and sizes. Sure the food was smaller here closer to the surface and warmer waters, but, that just means that it would be easier for their offspring to find their own meals. The deep sea giants were always tricky to hunt down for even skilled hunters, so there was no way a kid would be able to take even a baby one out. But these tiny fish would be literal child's play. Of course, they'll have to test out the different species first for themselves to make sure that they are safe for eating. A lot of the tests would be observing other animals eating habits. If one kind of fish is eaten by many, then it's safe to assume it's safe to consume. If it's avoided, then it is probably poisonous or not worth the trouble. For now, they decided to remain on a kelp and seaweed diet until they get settled in. They still needed shelter of some sort and set about hunting one down that would be perfect for their tiny babies.

It would be a few decades before they'd have to move back to the deep to feed the family's growing appetite. For now, they'd settle somewhere close. With the ocean floor deep enough to get comfortably dark, but not too deep to no longer feel the surface's warmth. Clear view of the surface to make sure nothing is going to sneak up on them from above.

They found the perfect place, right next to a very steep rocky cliff. The rock face was nearly solid and withstood their punches into it's side. They had to make sure there wouldn't be an accidental rock slide if one of them bumped into it.

John and Mary took turns digging out a little alcove for their young. The hard rock chipping and wearing away at their claws until they were nearly blunt nubs. It would take years for them to grow
back, but that's alright. It just means that they don't have to worry about handling their newborns as much. They piled up the removed rocks and busted coral for their own bed directly underneath the nest. Keeping close to help protect the babies.

John and Mary christened the nest after only being there for a few days, anxious to get their family started.

Their first egg was laid and endlessly fusses over. Making sure that the kelp lining the nest was soft and entwined around it in case it suddenly decided to roll around on its own. Mary would prop herself up against the cliff so that the nest alcove was level with her shoulder so any move, any twitch at all, wouldn't go unnoticed. John insisted that his mate go and take a break to eat something substantial. But she wouldn't budge until he promised that he'd take her place standing guard. He thought it was at first boring but eventually found himself humming to the egg some songs that he'd made for the other kids back at the Pod. Nonsense songs that carried in the waves and drew in a few curious dolphins that had been wandering not far off.

He was reminded of the young kids back home due to the similar size and playfulness they showed.

John smiled at the funny group and allowed them to get close over the course of the day. Knowing that dolphins were very intelligent and protective of other smart young things he wondered if his offspring would get along with them alright. He toyed around with a couple of brave ones and knew that he'd just made good friends with the neighbors in the meantime. No telling how they'll react to his overprotective mate or even the baby when it's hatched. As it was, they swam off in a hurry at the sight and sound of another massive being coming in fast. Mary barely slowed down enough to keep herself from hitting the cliff in her haste to get back. He assured her that all was well and left the space so that she could resume her vigil. He couldn't blame her for her nerves. These were new and exciting times for them. No one to tell them what to do, how to do it. Every decision had to be theirs and they would soon have a tiny fragile life depending on them to do the right thing every day.

Mary nudged the egg around to make sure that it wasn't laying on one side for too long and finally sighed with relief that everything was alright. John would have taken offense to that but in all honesty, he was also relieved that he didn't screw it up before the baby was even hatched.

Now that a week had passed, Mary let herself relax a bit in her self imposed duties and noticed the group of dolphins that John had talked about. Guessing that their relaxed attitude had everything to do with her newly relaxed attitude. They came close again at John's urging and Mary giggled at the sight of the little dolphins checking out the egg with reverence. Chirping and swimming in happy loops. At least they had nothing to fear from the neighbors.

The egg was always a hint at what the offspring will come to look like when they are finally hatched. This was to help the parents get used to the colors and traits of their babies so that they are not going to be mistaken for another's. The babies in Merpeople's Pods were usually raised together till they reach a certain age and size for them to move out of the hatchery and into the main living areas of the Pod. It was always a good idea to know who belonged to whom. There was no chance of baby-swapping in their society. Many new parents would save the eggs as mementos, along with their first shed scales.

This egg started to form its colors on the surface after the second week. A little late start which worried them for a few days but John assured her it was likely from the stresses of laying the egg right after moving and settling in a new area. So long as the baby was born healthy with ten clawed fingers and ten tail fins he was ok with a little late coloring.
Tiny, near invisible dappled brown spots appeared scattered all over the shell turning into larger splashes of medium brown colors spread all over the top areas. The brown marks and spots faded into a sandy color for the underside of the shell. This is perfect coloring for them as it means that the baby will blend in seamlessly with their new surroundings of rocks and sand.

One long ridge formed along the top of the egg to make way for the one very flexible back fin. This little one is going to take after their mother. John was beaming at that. He loved seeing how agile she could get while swimming. Always beating him in races despite the fact that he had two fins to her single one, on his back that were similar to a manta-ray's wings but angled up from his back instead of off to the sides. He would gently stroke the long ridge with the tip of his index finger, imagining how fast his little nimble one will be.

Just when they couldn't take the waiting any longer, the dappled brown egg hatched after only a few months. A squirming little boy emerged from the shell, flicking his cute pudgy little tail around until he figured out how to right himself. Mary extended her gentle fingers towards him and he latched on and blearily looked up into the wide grinning face. His plump lips started to wibble before crying and she held him close to her cheek and hummed a soft lullaby to calm him down. He sniffled a few times before settling down and letting his tight tail grip loosen around her fingers. His tail drooping down and if she wasn't holding on, he would have sunk to the ocean floor with as relaxed as he was.

It was always hilarious to John that a hatchling's tail would be far more coordinated than their arms and fins. And he couldn't wait to see the flailing hands waving about while their own tails tried to course correct the erratic movements. He made a mental note to add a LOT more padding to the nest for the future head bonks. The soft sandy colored hair stuck up at all angles from the little one's head. True to form, he had one long fin on his back and the colors matched the egg. Tiny little brown dots were speckled all over the baby with darker brown patches all over the top side, that faded into a light sandy colored underneath. His boy could lay down in the sand any way he wanted and still be camouflaged. He sighed in relief at that. At least one of the kids will have a fin up in surviving out here. At least until they are old enough to not have to worry about great white sharks and the deep sea squids. Only 20 years till they're big enough to rival their biggest predators. Smooth swimming after that.

John had no idea what to name the baby so he let Mary name him. She missed her family more than John missed their Pod so she named him Dean after her mother, Deanna. The only other older Merperson that he deeply respected from their old Pod besides his Mate.

John's eyes were full of pride and he hardly left the cliff-side for days after Dean was hatched. Barely longer than his finger, John was careful as he taught Dean how to swim. How to use his speckled skin to hide in the sandy ground below. Encouraging him to wiggle his fins enough to dislodge the plume of sand, and to wait patiently for it to settle over top of him. Mary stifled a laugh at how only Dean's head ended up being covered since the rest of him vibrated with enthusiastic energy. Eager to please his father. Dean popped back up after only a few minutes to swim circles around John's arms and head. Joyfully calling out that he was 'the best hider ever!' Startling several schools of fish nearby into swimming for the hills.

Mary taught Dean how to hunt his own food, which fish to pursue, which to avoid. Dean loved the red fish the best, insisting the meat is sweeter than the grays. John took over training in the afternoon, showing his new son how to defend himself against larger animals. Dean beamed at his parents, knowing nearly nothing else in the world besides them. However, sometimes he'd have an instinctual feeling that there was supposed to be more than just the three of them. That they were somehow vulnerable here. But that was impossible, his mom and dad were the biggest things in the ocean! He had nothing to fear with them around so he let those uneasy thoughts slide away. The
dolphins left soon after, their migration urging them south. Mary and John got the impression that they had promised to return when the currents warm up again.

A year passed and Dean was now as big as the dolphins that returned. He'd play with them sometimes when they ran across each other. Making friends easily with the members of the dolphin Pod that remembered the young infant from before. His parents were worried when Dean got a little rough with the tough male dolphins, insisted that they were not to be attacked or eaten. That they were just as intelligent as they were and to be left alone if they wanted it. If the young males needed disciplining, it was up to their own parents to do it. Regardless, Dean felt the need to keep order to the other Pod and would swim in if their parents didn't catch what happened. Acting as if the youngsters were his own kind. A balance was eventually met and Dean was accepted into the dolphin Pod as a kind of older brother babysitter. Seeing as how he was so adamant about defending the youngsters from every conceivable threat. Which, usually, ended up being lobsters and prickly crabs and the occasional arm long shark. All making pretty good meals for the 'monster' hunter.

Mary didn't want to annoy the dolphins into leaving since her boy seemed to care for them so deeply. So she limited his play time with them to just half of each day. The rest of the time was spent with either her or his father in lessons. Dean would pout and sneak off to hunt alongside them after bedtime. Swimming with their group and having the time of his life around others his own size.

His parents weren't oblivious to the reasons why their little one spent so much time trying to befriend the neighbors. And figured that it was about time to try for their second child. Hoping for a girl this time. If they came across more of their kind, it would be easier to find a mate for at least one of their children to help build up their small Pod. They tried every day for an egg to take but it was starting to look like Dean would be an only child for a while. Mary struggled to remember the old Mermaids tales about getting female offspring instead of male, eating kelp under a full moon. Combinations of fish or mineral rich rocks. Even going deep into her genetic memory in her dreams where their connections to their own kind were growing more and more dim with every generation. And they still came up empty.

A last resort they both had was to call on the ancient memories buried deep within themselves of the time back when their kind were still connected to the Great Trench Spirits. The place where all Merfolk were born and evolved from the monsters that never saw light. When their ancestors were torn apart by wars and the loosing side had to retreat to the surface while the winners claimed the deeps. Evolving along two different lines until there was little more than a passing familiarity between them. Their kind and the other, separated by hundreds of millenia of evolution.

No Merperson really knows what happened to the ones that were banished to the surface. But there were rumors that they'd evolved to live on the ground that actually rose up out of the waters. Different Pods had different stories. Some said that a few of their children would venture up to the islands and see what was there, and reported back the strange sights they found. Caves made out of wood. Creatures on four stiff tails and tube like fins with round claws that scuttled around on wide plains of short plant blades. Bleating and yowling above the water. One brave Merchild stayed when the other's had fled back to the safe deeps, and swore that they saw it. A Merchild that was wrinkled as if old, but the same size as a himself. It resembled a Merperson but it had no gills, no fins, no variation of colors at all in it's hide. All one uniform sandy color. It wore strange coverings around its waist and below that, the most disturbing aspect, the Merchild reported seeing a set of longer thicker arms protruding from underneath the coverings to the ground below. The elbows bent the wrong way and it ambled along as if it wasn't an abomination of nature.

The creature shouted something unintelligible at the child when it turned and spotted him, and
started to run at him, waving a crooked stick at him in a threatening manner. Even though it had no fangs or claws to speak of, the child was terrified of it. It was a monster, plain and simple.

The child naturally fled from the sight and was questioned endlessly about what the creature was. If the child hadn't belonged to the elder leader of that Pod, they would have likely been ostracized for being crazy. Worried that the sickness would spread to the rest of the Pod. It was anyone's guess if the child returned, and what happened afterwards, but, the fact was is that after returning to his Pod, he disappeared again after the name-calling and jeers started. His friends claimed that he went back to the land above water but no one was brave enough to follow. The whole Pod moved soon after and never returned. The warning stories spread and with each telling, became more garbled and mistaken.

John delved into the memories from his parents, and likewise, Mary to her own. Back and back from grandparents to greats and then to the large Greats. Each muttered what they saw in the genetic memories out loud for the other, and together they tried narrowing down their findings. Struggling to keep the stories of monsters and old warnings to the background while searching for their desired goal. Finding out if there was a way to hasten the laying of a fertile Egg.

However, their fears kept rearing their ugly heads and both kept on reliving the traumas of the long past. Being separated from their old Pod for over a year was starting to wear on them and their sanity. John worried that they'd go mad. Dean didn't seem to mind being with just his parents but then again, he never knew a life other than this. One's ability to delve into ancient memories wasn't an instinctual trait. It had to be learned when the Merkids became of age. Many years of meditating and communing with their Pod helps strengthen the bonds between the living and long dead memories of the whole. Simply put, each Merperson needs the community to share memories otherwise they stay hidden and buried in their subconscious. The bigger the Pod, the more memories can be shared, the longer they live in the minds of the living members to be passed down to future generations.

Trying to force memories to come up can put too big of a strain on one mind, and the usual result of it is madness. One gets lost in the past and stays there.

John was starting to get scared for he and his mate's sanity. There was a real possibility that they'd go mad and then Dean would be left alone to fend for himself. But, this was the only way they could think of to get Dean a brother or sister. Someone to stick by his side so that their odds of survival increase. They never heard of a three person Pod before, and needed more of their kind to make it work. The risk was worth it to them.

They had to put aside the incident that happened to a few of the insane ones in their old Pod. A Merperson would spend too much time alone without another living soul to converse and bond with, and start hearing voices of long dead relatives. Driven crazy by the silence and loneliness until they either killed themselves or others, and had to be put out of their misery. Most of the time, by then, the Merperson would have grown too large for just one other to take them down, and it became a Pod effort to rid the ocean of the crazed menace.

Assuming of course that they could get to them before they destroyed too much of the local ecosystem. If the crazed Merperson wasn't contained, and wasn't suicidal, they'd keep on killing until their food source died off, and then they'd starve to death.

Thankfully, madness was a rare thing in their society. They had laws and traditions put in place to keep Pods together, healthy, and growing. Growing slowly, of course, to ensure that their food sources wouldn't be depleted.

Lone Merpeople were almost always assimilated into a passing Pod to reduce the risk of madness.
Regardless what that Merperson had done or looked like. They'd be watched after and cared for and hopefully brought back from the brink of madness in time. Or else, be mercifully put down. John and Mary knew the risks of separating off by themselves, and thought that the risk was worth the reward. But at the end of the day, if one of them died, it was a death sentence to the surviving one as well. Might be centuries or mere decades but every Merperson goes mad if they're all alone.

After their 20th failed attempt at having a second child, the two stole some private time alone from Dean to discuss what should happen if one or both of them were dying and Dean was left alone. Swearing to return right back to the Pod immediately, regardless how they'd be accepted. It wasn't worth risking Dean's life. They planned on teaching Dean how to return to the Pod when he was old enough for a massive trip like that. For now, Dean wasn't big enough to move further than a few miles from the nest. A trip like that alone would kill him. Mary insisted that since Dean was already friends with the dolphins, that they could look after him long enough for a passing Pod to find him and take him in. Or, that the dolphins themselves could seek out more of their kind. They wished they could communicate with them, but, that was for another time. At least they seemed to care for Dean as much as he cared for them. It made it easier to relax and sleep at night.

The two were exhausted and went back to the cliff to hunt for some supper and sleep. They told each other to stop worrying so much about what they can't control, and that it might be good for Dean to have a couple years on his younger sibling. A few years wasn't that big of a deal to their kind after all. John was younger than Mary and they made it work. If nothing else, John thought about how nice it would be to only have one hatchling to train and teach than if he had to round up two little bundles of energy. Mary agreed and they would try again for a baby next year.

Mary woke in the night to a new warmth in her body, and nearly cried for joy at the knowledge that their fears were unfounded. She was pregnant again. After all those discussions and sleepless nights and worrying about what would happen to Dean if he were alone, she didn't even care if it was going to be a girl or boy. So long as Dean wouldn't be alone one or both of them died.

Things were looking up for the growing family.
Life Lessons

Chapter Summary

New baby!
John teaches his sons how to survive in the shallows, what he should have mentioned was how to survive sibling squabbles.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter Two:

Life Lessons

Months pass and Dean was taught his lessons much faster now. John had a feeling that once the baby is hatched, then Dean won't get as much one-on-one time for training. Mary assured the little one that he won't be ignored or be loved any less. Dean hadn't even thought of that but decided to dismiss it anyway. He knew his mom and dad loved him very much! The new baby will be a perfect addition to their little family. He would spend most nights curled up around the egg that was about a third his size and whisper to it as it laid there like a rock. Dean had started to doubt that it was a real egg at all when it refused to even wiggle to his very clever jokes.

John pointed out the double ridges along the top and then showed Dean his old egg with its single ridge that they'd saved under the sand to protect it from scavengers and the waves. John explained what the ridges meant and the new colors that formed all around it. Dean paid extra close attention to the egg after that and would excitedly swim about, letting every sea creature around know that his baby sister was going to be awesome! Of course it was going to be a girl. He was a boy but took his mom's single fin, so that means that the baby was a girl since his dad had two back fins. It's logic. Pure and simple. He didn't believe it when his parents said that it could be a boy or a girl and that fin numbers didn't mean anything but he just made a face at that. The baby was a girl because they already had two boys in the family and they needed a girl to even it out.

John sighed and didn't bother correcting him again because it could very well end up being a girl. No one would know until the baby hatched. All they knew for certain was that there was two ridges that hinted at two back fins, and that the baby was going to be brown on the back just like Dean, but blue and tan tones on the underside. Dean scoured the egg for spots but there was only one towards the front side, going by where the ridges meet. He didn't really count that spot. Dean pouted for half a day, pudgy arms folded tight over his chest. He wanted his baby sister to be spotted just like him so they'd match.

He distracted himself from the tragic disappointment by playing with his dolphin friends. Bemoaning his woes to their ears when he failed to let it go.
“Dean?” Mary approached him slowly, trying not to startle the pod of dolphins.

Dean shrank back once he saw his mom, away from the nest. He thought he was in trouble and hid behind some of the dolphins who caught on what he was trying to do and bolted in all directions. They knew enough not to get in the way of a gigantic concerned parent and their young vulnerable offspring.

Dean scowled after his friends before facing his mom, barely meeting her eyes. “I was just playing.” He whined to no one in particular.

“Shhh, it’s alright, Baby.” Mary softened and settled down on the ocean floor so that she had to look up at him hovering there. “You’re not in trouble.”

Dean swished a few of his tail fins around, causing him to turn back and forth a little in the water. “I’m not?”

Mary chuckled softly and lifted up her hand to cup underneath Dean's small form. Lifting a finger to gently stroke along his side. He settled down into her hand, tail extended down low between two of her fingers with his elbows propping his head up onto her wrist. Making sure he could fit his upper body on her hand at least, because he was nearly too long to fit, head to tail tip. Growing up faster and faster. His tail curled up to drape over her pinky finger.

“But I just wan the baby to look like me an she's not an she's not even gonna like me 'cause I don’t have two fins an she does, an she doesn't have spots an I do, and she's gonna look so different! She won' believe that I'm 'er big brother!” Dean breathed rapidly, wiping his eyes of the thick tears.

Playing a little with the tears in the water that stuck to his fingers, suddenly fascinated that his tears were like a clear goo that he remembered his dad explaining that it was there to protect his eyes from the salt in the water. It was almost enough to distract him from his fretting. He didn't cry too often but this was just tragedy!

Dean huffed and slouched forward on her palm, burying his face into her wrist. “I just want us to be the same.”

Mary shushed him again, “Dean, Sweetie... look at me, please.”

He shook his head on her skin.

“Please?”

He finally angled his head up, arms folded in front of his face to hide everything but his eyes.

“Sweetie, our kind... almost none of us look the same. And that's ok! Look at me. Do I look like your dad? Or you?”

Dean lowered his eyes to her body that she stretched out a little underneath him. The smooth featureless chest that was pale blue that turned dark green towards her back. She twisted slightly to show him how dark it was next to her single fin. She flipped her tail up to shade him and moved her hand with him on it off to the side to better show off the long fins that ran next to her hips that later turned into her first tail fins. She had 8 tail fins altogether, four on both sides that led down to the two large ones at the end. Her fins were more ripply and wider than Dean's or his dad's. Like those fancy fish he'd seen in the coral reefs. She brought her hand back towards her front and relaxed her tail along the ocean floor. Plumes of sand swirled up around it and settled on most of her side fins.

He could just make out his dad sitting next to the nest and realized that he never really looked hard
at either of them. It was always their face's and hands that he focused on. Now he could see that there was barely any resemblance at all between just the two of them.

John's overall colors were deep sea-moss green and dark browns with near black hair. The two fins on his back were smooth and appeared stiff until he moved them with a purpose.

Dean looked up again at her raised eyebrow as she used her free hand to stroke through her long near white sand colored hair. Tucking it behind her side fan ears to keep it out of her eyes. She used the same fingers to very carefully tousle his own hair. He pulled down the longer strands to see that his was slightly darker than her hair, but not nearly as dark as his dad's. “Like pebble sand.” He mused quietly.

“That's right. We all look different but that doesn't mean we can't blend in.” She wiggled her tail in the sand to bury it's pale length under the grains. Making it nearly invisible to Dean's widening eyes. “It doesn't mean that we don't belong.” She raised an eyebrow again, willing him to understand.

He blushed when he finally got the message and twisted his tail around in front of himself to play around with his fins on the sides of his tail. Five on each side. Counting them up and moving each one independently.

He noticed that Mary did the same behind him. Lifting each of her fins and giving them a little wiggle to send waves of sand up and about in the current. Dean laughed and dove off of her hand to swim around with his fins on the sides of his tail. Five on each side. Counting them up and moving each one independently.

He noticed that Mary did the same behind him. Lifting each of her fins and giving them a little wiggle to send waves of sand up and about in the current. Dean laughed and dove off of her hand to swim through the plumes of sand. Kicking up even more sand and empty shells into the water and holding out his hands to see what fell into them. A pretty purple shell landing in his palm and his jaw dropped. His excited eyes went up to his mom's who beamed down at him.

“I think that's a good luck shell, don't you agree?” She leaned forward to try and see it better. All she could really make out was that it was purple. “Those are super rare.” She stretched the truth a bit. Knowing that there were indeed hundreds of thousands of them from the journey they'd taken to get here. However, there were few of them this close to the shallows where Dean's spent his whole life so far. So it wasn't entirely a lie. They were rare here.

Dean's fingers closed around the little purple shell with far more reverence than one would expect from a toddler. He beamed up at her, nodding enthusiastically and then suddenly swimming hard and fast back towards the nest. “DADDY! LOOKIT WHAT I FOUND!” He called out, little pudgy arms held in front of his head to better streamline his swim, but also to show his dad his find asap.

Mary laughed and turned around to follow at a much slower pace. She got there just as Dean was placing the purple shell onto the egg. Pushing it slightly into the egg as if he was rubbing it into the shell while excitedly saying, “Now you're going to have a purple spot and it will give you luck!”

John squinted at the logic behind that statement but kept his mouth shut.

Mary waved her hand at his cute but slightly misinformed statements and watched over them as John went to go grab something for them all to eat.

Months pass and it almost looked like Dean forgot that they were waiting for something to happen with the egg because when it moved for the first time, Dean was jolted out of his nap and backed up away from it in sudden fear. “Mom??” he pushed his tail against the egg and it moved again. “Ahh!” He yelped and swam for it out of the nest, running headlong into his mom's hair and waking her up with a start. “Help! It's got me!”

Mary sniffed and jerked her head left and right, feeling something caught in her hair and quickly
realizing what... or rather who it was. “Calm down Sweetie! It's ok! It's just me, Dean.” She tried to disentangle him from her hair and he managed to get more caught up in it with all his thrashing. Screaming about tentacles trying to trap him and eat him alive. Her ears rang. She huffed, dropped her hands and nudge her mate roughly. “John. Your son is stuck in my hair.”

John blearily blinked his eyes up at her from her lap and sat upright. “He's what now?” John's voice came out slow and confused. She just lifted up the bundle of hair and held back a chuckle at the situation. She can't remember if the kids back at the pod ever managed to get stuck in anyone's hair.

John angled her head away to assess the situation and found a knot the size of his fist with two terrified green eyes peering out of it. “You ok there, little clownfish?”

Dean's fear turned to indignation. “I'm notta clownfish!”

“Ok, ok, hold still.” He smirked and started to pull out a thin clump of hair at a time from his twisted form. Freeing him one fin at a time until he was able to wiggle out from it at last. John kept on combing his clawed fingers through her hair until there was nothing but smooth flowing locks.

Mary was pleased that they didn't need to cut it off just to get him out. Though she did consider cutting it a bit shorter now. If this was going to be a regular thing since they sleep leaning against their cliff. Maybe shoulder length would be better. She found Dean half a tail length away, swimming listlessly between the two of them. Coming to the embarrassing conclusion that nothing was trying to capture and eat him.

“Ok, what woke you up?” John asked around a loud yawn.

Dean pointed his whole arm up at the nest. “It moved!”

Both his parents looked happy at that and faced the nest and noticed that the egg did move a little. Their excited chirps made Dean curious enough to come back up and join them. Wary of the long blond hair that flowed in the water next to him. “Is it ‘upposed to do that?”

“Yes Sweetie, it means that the baby is ready to hatch!” Mary said and rubbed a finger along the side of the egg.

Dean swam up to the nest again and curled himself around the egg. “Don't wannit to fall!” He proclaimed and made sure that the purple shell was place back on top of the egg again.

Two days slowly creep by with hardly any of them getting any rest. John set about finding enough plant based food to store, so they wont have to leave the nest at all until the kid is a few weeks old. The hatching is late again and Mary hoped this wouldn't be a trend. She was scared that it was something that she did wrong but John reminded her that neither of them are very old as Merpeople go. Perhaps the older the Mermaid is when they lay the egg, the faster the hatching. All of their experience with reproduction was centered around the elders and their mates having top priority.

Mary let John's words wash over her panic. The egg was still moving, still viable. All they had to do was wait. She wasn't sure if she wanted Dean to be here for it or not, should something go horribly wrong. However, Dean wouldn't be dissuaded or bribed into leaving and they couldn't exactly abandon their kid to the care of the dolphins till the egg hatches, so they tried to brace Dean's little mind about the possibility that his baby sibling might not live.

There was always the chance that the infant wasn't fully formed, or, their gills were underdeveloped. Perhaps water wouldn't pass through the lungs as easy. Or any number of things
that could go wrong. They were lucky with Dean's healthy hatching, maybe they wouldn't be so lucky this time.

Dean bawled after their talk about the stages of life and death, and how everything must eventually die. Their kind live longer than most everything else in the whole wide ocean, and Dean would have to witness death many times during his life.

Dean looked at the fish bones scattered about on the ocean floor and was near inconsolable. It took the rest of the day to calm him down, and promise that there was nothing wrong with the baby and that he or she will live a long happy life. Both parents regretting bringing it up to the little Merchild. He obviously wasn't old enough for that talk just yet.

Dean wrapped himself around the egg even tighter than before and refused to eat or sleep apart from it. “I promiss. Nothin bad's ever gonna happ'n.” Dean swore to the egg in exhausted whispers. “I'll aways be here.”

Dean's tired body slipped from the sides as he finally fell asleep. John was about to pull him away from the egg but Mary stilled his hand. The nest was big enough for the both of the babes and so long as one of them sat with their backs against the opening, there was no way either would fall out of the dug out crevice.

In the middle of the night, the egg jolted to the side and a crack formed along the top. Dean startled awake and at first pushed the scary moving thing away from himself before he woke up all the way. Then he dashed to the entrance to the nest and repeatedly slapped his tail against his dad's shoulder to wake him up. Dean was almost more nervous than his dad was as they watched the egg twitch and jerk. Mary was nudged awake and quickly pressed her face towards the nest opening alongside John with Dean resuming his curled position around the egg. The movements were more erratic than before, so he made sure to keep it from rolling around too much. Mary and John knew that when eggs hatch, it's supposed to be a solo job. The newborn has to use their new muscles for the first time while pushing the shell away from their bodies. It strains the muscles for the first time and gets the blood pumping through the body better. Teaching the body how to function with the fresh water and space given to them.

John hated having to pull his son back from the egg. Mary's hand replaced John's in keeping Dean from returning to the nest just yet. Her gentle grip kept him still.

“Dean, sweetie, this has to happen. The baby needs to exercise to live. It's how you were hatched, how I was, and your dad. This is how we are all born.”

“But baby needs help!” He bawled, scrabbling tiny claws against his mom's hands.

Mary worried her lip as she turned to her mate for advice.

He shrugged and said to Dean. “Listen little Lionfish, if you can promise to not help, we will let you sit in the nest with them.” It was a good thing that Dean was already becoming attached to his sibling, before they're even born. Neither wanted to dissuade that connection whatsoever. But the fact was, was that the offspring had to hatch on their own... right?

Mary watched Dean nod his little head a little over exaggeratedly and let him go. Dean swam straight for the egg, bumping into it in his haste and shooting terrified eyes up to his mom for the contact. She grinned and nodded once to say that that bump was ok, that she knew it was an accident.

Dean sighed heavily, his whole body put into the motion and made his parents chuckle. They
watched and waited and gasped when the first fin emerged from the cracked shell. Pinched between the two halves. There was a tiny squeak before the fin was pulled back into the egg. The infant was heard shuffling around in there and tiny breaths made the small bits of sand grains on top move with the new tiny currents.

Dean was in awe. Peering down at the small one that was fussing and squirming.

“Baby is scared to come out.” Dean proclaimed looking behind himself to his mom. “Nasty egg pinched the fin and it hurted her.”

Mary hummed at that. Straining to hear what was going on in the egg that was so small to her. Relying on Dean's commentary.

“Breathin ok.” Dean muttered, putting his side fan ear to the break in the egg. He looked over to his dad to see the relieved look in his eyes.

The little one pushed against the shell from the inside but the part it was pushing against was wedged up against the back stone wall of the nest so it didn't get far even after minutes of struggling. The egg went still for minutes more and everyone started to get worried that it wouldn't be able to get out of the egg without help. A whimpering cry heard from within spurned Dean on into ignoring his parents words and warnings and pulling the little shell open the rest of the way. Easily breaking the egg open wider until it was in pieces inside the nest. Dean pulled the little squirming crying bundle into his chubby arms.

Mary held up her hands to help out but dropped them at the sight of how large they were compared to the tiny baby. Seeing how her son was better suited for holding the baby than she was right this moment.

John pulled her to his side and kissed her deeply. “Another baby boy.”

Mary wiped her eyes of the tears. Her fingers stroking the edge of the nest close to Dean's tail. Both of her babies were so small and this moment so tender, she wanted it to last forever. Feeling like she finally had what they'd wanted for decades. A family of their own, their freedom to live wherever they wanted, a chance to start new.

Dean checked over the little baby and counted up his fins, brow pinched at the fact that the baby had two extra arm fins than he had. The baby had a fin on their upper arms as well as their plump forearms and he just had ones on his forearms. Dean flipped the baby over and played with the two fins along the back. They were different than his dad's too. These had long muscle covered bones and joints along the top edges that bent like his arms did but where he had fingers, these just had one long bone in place of a hand. Thin fin like skin stretched between the fin bones to the baby's lower back.

The fins looked kinda like the wings he'd seen on something that dad once called a 'bird'. A whole school of birds would eat fish in the water and go back to the surface again to ‘fly’ off. Dean didn't have enough courage to ask his dad for more information about 'birds' because whenever he mentioned the surface, his dad would get cross with him. Warning him to never go up there. Ever ever. Dean played around with the baby's wings for a bit, seeing how far they stretched. The baby flapped them a few times and it moved a lot of water. Dean shrugged and flipped the baby back around.

Mary had to keep herself from diving in and taking the baby from Dean's hands. She would have, too, but the baby didn't seem to care that it was being manhandled so soon after hatching.
The baby even seemed to enjoy being held, and curled its tiny little tail around Dean's own. Or what he could of it. Dean was five feet long and the baby was two and a half so Dean had a bit of difficulty maneuvering his baby brother. Every fin twitching randomly in every direction. Kicking up the sand from below the kelp lined nest. Dean spit out some of the sand that billowed up from one such tail swish and held the baby up to let the tail droop down.
The baby fussed at the loss of contact and started crying loudly. Dean gaped at the sudden noise and instantly pulled the infant to his chest, stroking his hands over the two long wing fins along the back to keep them from flapping out and around. Nearly taking out his eyes. He pressed one arm against the baby's back to keep the wings still and tight to the body as he quickly flipped the baby around to lay down on the kelp.

Dean looked to his mom for direction on what to do now but she just hid a chuckle at their antics. Sand continued to settle all around the two little ones.

“You're doing great.” She assured and he smirked at that. Pride in those little green eyes.

Dean had a slight stammer when he's flustered, and tried to say, “Baby is sandy.” as he brushed off the sand that stuck to his little brother's new scales. But all John and Mary heard was, “Baby is Sammy.” and thought that that name was adorable and perfect.

Mary looked to John and he shrugged slightly. Sammy was good of a name as any since they completely forgot to think up new baby names. They'd been so worried about if they were able to have another offspring to worry about the trivial things that would happen after they had the second offspring. Like names, colors, and fins.

Sammy had more than any of them with the surprise addition of the upper arm fins. Almost no Merperson they'd met had those. She delved back into her genetic memories and found one distant relative with them, but that was it. She dug around a few more ancient memories of that Great Mother and was impressed with how well she'd moved in the water. Coming back to the present she beamed down at the infant. He will grow up to be a very fast and agile swimmer. She didn't say it out loud of course, not wanting Dean to become jealous already.

Dean pointed excitedly at the baby's face. “Spot!” and she had to lean in close to notice that there was indeed one tiny brown spot next to the baby's nose. Huh. Dean put Sammy next to himself as he rooted around for the shell and pointed out the single spot that was on the one side of the egg shell. “Spot!!”

John said quietly, “I'm glad that's not what we decided to name him.”

Mary couldn't keep herself from laughing at that. Dean was so happy to have something in common with his little brother that she couldn't belittle the discovery. “My boys are exactly alike!” she smiled wide at how happy Dean was after that declaration. Mary stroked her hand along Dean's back, covering him from head to tail fin in her hand to keep him from bouncing up and down too much. Her thumb rubbing ever so gently against the newborn's soft wavy brown hair and small jointed back fins.

Dean suddenly frowned up at his parents. “Don't worry Mom! He's like you too! He's got your eyes and Dad's hair!” worried that they'd felt left out.

Dean continued to describe the baby to them since he wasn't sure how much they could see. “His colors is blues on the bottom sides and browns on top! He can hide in front of you while swimmin!”

John was happy to hear the descriptions and noticed that from above, predators and prey alike wouldn't easily distinguish his shape among the sandy ground below, and from underneath looking up, Sammy's blues will match the ocean waters above. There was enough mixed contrast between the two colors that blended well that it will be hard for anyone to easily spot the little one.

John was able to gently coax Dean into letting little Sammy swim for himself for a few minutes,
and the baby managed to get a few feet out into the water beyond the nest with both parents splayed hands underneath. He had just a few minutes of free swimming before Dean was right there again, pulling Sammy in close and backed up towards the nest with an adorable scowl sent up to his towering dad.

“Mine!” Dean declared and spun around with the squirming baby in his arms. It was tricky because Sammy was half of his size and weight and Dean struggled to hold the squirming baby upright. His tail swishing beneath the two of them doubly hard to keep them both from sinking. Even Dean’s back fin was waving in the water to correct the angle he was taking them. Grunting at the hard task he’d given himself.

“Dean.” Mary admonished playfully. “Can I hold him for a little while?”

Dean's scowl didn't last long when it was aimed at his mom and he sighed heavily before letting his grip on the baby loosen. Sammy uncurled his tail and his fins, sporadically moving each one and discovering how they felt in the water. Mary's hands were always underneath and formed a large cup in case the baby decided to stop keeping himself still.

Dean's breathing evened out again from the tough strain and his tiny fists kept clenching and unclenching at his sides. Eager to dive in and hold Sammy again should the baby need him. Sammy babbled and discovered his hands and stuck one in his mouth, the other nearly poking out his own eyes. Sucking on the fist he blinked wide hazel eyes up and around at the new world. Finally seeing it without his brother's head in the way.

John held his mate tight as she kept her hands steady underneath their kids. She leaned her head back to rest on John's shoulder and sighed happily. Things were perfect now.

For a long while after the hatching, Dean kept Sammy from exploring further than fifty feet from the nest at any given moment, and it was actually hard for John or even Mary to get some alone time with the baby. Resorting to bribery to get Dean to leave Sammy long enough for the badly needed training sessions that John had to teach the little one. They can't rely on Dean to always be there for him, and he'd need to know the basics if he were to ever want to venture off on his own to hunt for food. John gave up the solo training sessions and invited Dean along too. A refresher for the older brother as he taught the younger. John put Dean to work, telling him to play the part of a predator so Sammy could learn how to hide properly, and later, when Sammy grew bigger, how to take on a predator, and always, taught him how to become a decent fish hunter.

There were hundreds of species of fish in their territory and both of his sons needed to know which were safe to eat and which would try and hurt them instead. John even went miles and miles away to bring back a few of the deep sea creatures. Small ones that he could carry without killing right away. Sammy nearly threw up his lunch when he saw the big squid, and Dean nearly joined him at the sight of the large sea snake. Terrified of the squirming long tentacles and tails. John had his work cut out for him since the boys would need to know more about the deep sea creatures than they would these local fish and crustaceans. How to properly prepare the snakes and venomous fish so they don't make contact with the venom or poisons. Everything here in the shallows was very small and easy to kill, they needed to know how to defend against squid much larger than this. Against sharks and whales. Jellyfish were deadly even to Merpeople. John would wait for the jellyfish lessons until he was absolutely sure the boys could handle themselves against the more basic animals. Jellyfish weren't known to be very fast, so for now, he just told them to swim away from them and never to touch.

Time passed quickly, and after a few years, Sammy was finally big enough to join Dean and the
dolphins in their playtime. Sometimes several different games were played at once. The dolphins were good at kelp twirling and bubble blowing among others that involved the surface and their favorite; air jumping. Dean was nested for a week when he tried to follow the dolphins up to the surface to join in the air jumping games. He couldn't even go for some air to blow bubbles like his friends and he declared that that was just not fair. He got another day added to his nesting for backtalk. Sammy stayed close as he could to his brother without incurring the wrath of their dad.

Neither had seen him so mad before. Mary had to come by and explain why they weren't allowed on the surface. That air was dangerous to them and that they should never spend time up above. Dean suspected that there was something they weren't telling them but didn't want even more time added onto his sentence. So he waited it out, grateful that Sammy chose to stay nested with him.

Since the surface was out of bounds for them, Dean had to settle for the daily play hunt. He wanted to have Sammy play with them for the longest time but their mom kept saying “Not yet.” She and their dad talked a lot in secret but never brought it up with them. 'Grown up' stuff is all they'd say, then warn them again to stay away from the surface.

Today, their parents went hunting for their own food and put Dean in charge of taking care of his little brother. Dean was thrilled to be able to take him further away from the nest so he wasted no time in dragging him to where the dolphins had claimed their territory.

It was Sammy's first time so far from home and even thought he'd played with the dolphins before, they hadn't included him in the hunting game until today. It was a game that the dolphins and Dean invented the year before, where they'd find a colorful fish and take turns 'hunting' it down. A modified hide and seek game since there were very few places where a dolphin could hide without going 'out of bounds'. The pod members that caught the colorful fish would let it escape for a few seconds to get some distance first. A chirp would alert the next one in line know when to start swimming, thereby passing the hunt over to them. The trick of it, was to make sure that it was the same fish and not some other one that another random dolphin would catch and bring over.

Dean was excellent at the game because he was able to catch the fish without injuring it. If the fish died, the game was over and whoever killed the fish was the loser. Sam picked up on the more subtle rules of the game and caught several colorful fish in his wing fins and waited for Dean to get close before releasing them all at once in Dean's face. Laughing the whole time that Dean's left spinning in circles trying to pick out which one was which, in the group of fifteen.

Dean lost the game fish in the swarm as they all darted away too quick to follow. Dean spun angrily at his little brother. Hearing the dolphins click and whistle merrily at his embarrassment. Dean felt like a fool in front of his friends for the first time ever, and it hurt.

Sam was still chuckling and rolling around when his older brother grabbed a firm hold of his left wing fin and spun him around to face the taller boy.

“That's not how the game is played!” Dean shouted and hissed. Releasing Sam's fin with a jerk to make Sam's shoulder drop to the side. Tears started to form in Dean's eyes as he fumed but he blinked them back.

Sam's laughter stopped abruptly at the sudden change. Dean's never been this mad at him before. Ever. They had their arguments and disagreements sure, but he's never been so angry. “I - I just thought -” Sammy stammered. Backing up with tiny twitches of his tail fins and wings.

“Go back home! You can't play it right, then go home!” Dean backed up and he felt his face grow even hotter. The dolphins, startled at the quick movements and thrashing claws in the water sensed the change in the atmosphere and quickly moved off as well.
Dean had grown larger than nearly all of the dolphins and they were honestly a little scared of him in that moment. All of Dean's fins were splayed wide in a threatening pose. His fingers spread out to show off his claws and his lip curled in a snarl. Dean had seen his dad look like this before a few times, when he'd seen some shadows moving overhead.

Sam's eyes widened and his lips trembled in fear at the sight. He turned and sped off as fast as his fins could carry him. Feeling hurt, embarrassed, and above all, he was furious with himself for ruining the game for his big brother. For ruining his chance at joining in on any future games as well. For ruining everything. His brother didn't want him anymore. Didn't trust him.

Sam's cries were kept muffled under his hand as his wing fins were pushed to their limits. To get away from the pain and shame he felt. Dean never could catch him in their racing games and Sam knew it was the best way to escape this crushing feeling.

To escape the hate filled eyes of his own brother.

Sam used every one of his fins to swim far and fast. His heart beat thumped loudly in his ears and his eyes blurred with so many tears. Resorting to chirping to see where he was going since everything was too loud in his head.

He didn't even hear Dean's panicking desperate calls after him.

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Chapter End Notes

My Babies!!!!
It's gonna get bad... sorry!
Sam kept up the fast pace on towards home. A thudding sound echoing in his ears that he assumed was just his heart or his fins and ignored it. The cliff was in view now through his tear filled eyes. It would still be a bit before he could reach the crack in the cliff where he usually hid out when he wanted some alone time or when Dean was out with his friends and his parents were busy talking to each other. He's pretty sure Dean knew he had a secret place, but he never said anything about it. Sam briefly wondered if Dean had such a place of his own then forced it out of his head just as quick. Dean can do whatever he likes now. Sam told himself that if his older brother wanted to be left alone, then he should be. Sam wouldn't force Dean out of their nest. He'll just move out on his own. This crack in the wall is his own space and he can live here now instead.

Sam angled his swim now that he made up his mind, to the crack instead of home. Hoping that Dean didn't know exactly where it was before today. Fresh tears spilled across his cheeks to be swiped away by his angry fist. He's not a baby anymore. He's not. He's moving out tonight. He just has to wait there long enough for his parents to forget about him too. Maybe they'll give Dean a better younger brother instead. Or little sister. Someone that Dean can play with and not be embarrassed by.

The cliff was larger now that he was closer and that thudding in his side fan ears was growing incrementally louder. He cursed it out. He's too big to be scared of his own heartbeat. He suddenly realized that it wasn't coming from within when he slowed to avoid running into a school of fish. The loud thudding remaining even though his fins slowed their frantic pace. His muscles burned now that the cool water stopped flowing around him. The water warmed slightly from his body temperature. His wing fins angled horizontally and flapped slowly to let his tail rest as he tried to suss out where that thudding was coming from if it wasn't caused by him.

Sam slowed to a full stop when he noticed a shadow moving along the ocean floor. Draping everything in darkness. He looked up, expecting to see his parents overhead but instead found a massive shape skimming loudly over the surface of the water. It was such a foreign shape, he was struck dumb by it. It was too far away to make out clearly but that didn't stop him from seeking
shelter among the rocks and tall coral that laid between himself and the cliff. Hidden along with all of the other colorful fish on the reef. There was a deep trench not far away that his parents warned the boys away from but now it actually started to look inviting as a hiding place. He felt terribly exposed curled up around a coral umbrella and hoped that his coloring would hide his shape down here. Freezing all movement as best he could after a hard swim like that. The thudding was near deafening and shook everything around his hiding place.

He saw that not even predator fish were going after the distracted littler fish nearby. Even they were scared of the thing overhead.

Sam held his breath and tried to remain calm through the panic. Remembering the many lessons that he was taught by both parents, that when he sees something strange to hide immediately. To not call out to anyone and wait for the danger to pass. His parents said that they'd come find him when the coast was clear or would call for him if it was safe. So he stayed still and waited. Hidden underneath a large coral umbrella and hearing the deafening, relentless, thudding sounds above. Putting his hands over his side fan ears to block out the painful percussion's when they became even louder. Crying harder when even that didn't stop the bone shaking thuds. Splashes were heard like the dolphins make but times a thousand. Sam was too scared to look up, curling tighter into himself with his wings straining to hide him from sight but only managing to grip around his sides and part of his front. His tail curled up and over his head to help block it all out but he couldn't escape the feeling of dread the longer this attack on his senses went on. His head ached with the sounds and pulses of pressure against his whole body. Several fish around him actually died because of it and started to float away. He was startled into looking at them when several brushed by his sensitive fins along the sides of his tail.

He'd only seen that happen when his dad showed him a neat trick he'd learned from some special specie of shrimp. His dad quickly clapped his hands together next to a school of fish and nearly every one of them were stunned into stillness for several minutes. A few of those had simply died from the large thump of pressure so close to their fragile bodies. Dean thought it was awesome and kept on trying to recreate it but he just managed in scaring the fish off.

Now... Sam is watching through squinting eyes as fish after fish start to float away in the currents. His fear kicking up again that he'll soon join them.

He stayed there. Curled up and scared. Waiting. After the first half hour, the splashing and thudding slowed in intensity but never fully stopped. It became a distant pulse of pressure. Telling Sam that the danger hadn't left yet so he should remain hidden. The splashing sounds weren't as loud and he tried to take comfort in that. Whatever that thing was, was calming down. It helped ease his mind slightly but he refused to let it lull him into a false sense of security. Thinking it just wanted to draw him out of his hiding place. He wanted to come out though. His tail muscles were cramping painfully from the strenuous swim and then being pinned to his body for so long.

Distantly he heard thunder and thought that that was strange since it wasn't raining. A weird clanging sound echoed in the water, like nothing he'd ever heard before. Chancing a glance upwards to see that the thing that floated on the surface was almost out of sight beyond the cliff face. He wasn't in a good position to see further in. His mom and dad told him not to venture onto the cliff side in the very shallow waters. That the warm waves and the light would burn him. He wished that the floating thing would learn it's lesson in those warm waters and be burned and scared off but it seemed as though they wanted to be there. Figures, they were above water after all. Maybe they liked the warmth. Sam shivered at the thought. He hated that they were so close to his home. He couldn't risk going there, ending up closer to the floating thing, so he waited and remained hidden. The splashing sounds kept coming from the floating thing and he wished that it'd just go away and leave him alone.
Once, he thought he could hear Dean's voice but it must have been the sea echoing weirdly. Maybe one of the dolphins was the one clicking and chirping due to the overhead intruders. He worried for their safety but wouldn't dare give away his hiding place to call or say anything back. He felt like a coward but his dad warned him with a beating if he disobeyed those rules specifically. Especially while he was still a dolphin sized kid. He was not to try and 'be a hero' when he's in danger himself. Sam wasn't big or strong enough to help anyone but himself right now, so he was forced to wait it out. He hated every second that he heard those chirps and clicks. Telling himself that it's just his imagination that he's hearing them as Dean's calls instead of some dolphin's. They faded even more, never being strong enough to clearly hear from his spot anyway.

A minute later, Sam could smell and taste blood in the water. His fear escalating when he realized it was the same blood scent as his parents. He first recognized his dad's from their training sessions. Teaching young Sam how to hunt down injured fish by following their blood trail. It was easier for John to keep Sam from wandering off if he himself played the role of bait. Injured fish rarely stay in the area of the one that injured them, and Sam needed to practice multiple times before leaving the safety of the nesting site. He learned how to detect that scent very well after the months of training between lessons. Those days, he was almost thrilled to find it because that meant he was doing well. Now? He's terrified that it means what he thinks it means.

Sam hoped that he was wrong, that maybe his dad's blood was smelled because John had cut himself on some coral while getting dinner. Or maybe his dad cut himself while hiding just like Sam was. But, the longer Sam stayed there with his head tucked into his tail and wings over his head, the stronger the scent became. He could even see it in the water now, drifting softly down into all the coral pits and cracks. Red tinged swirls dancing in the water that spun out away from his panting mouth and gills. Soon it was all he could smell and taste. It left his senses burning and even hurt his lungs and gills with just how dense it was becoming. Disgusted with how much of their blood was getting into his mouth since he couldn't filter it from the water.

He choked on the thick red cloud. Sam just couldn't take it anymore and came out of hiding only to wish that he stayed put. The sight of a massive body greeted him nearly directly above his hiding place. Thick blood clogged the waters, scaring most fish away but drawing in tooth filled others. The red soaked waters made it hard to see beyond a hundred feet in any direction. A deep sea moss green and brown arm dropped down and Sam cried out in alarm at the recognition. Long gash marks and wounds dotted and dragged along his forearms as if he'd been fighting something vicious off. Each wound oozed blood into the water but at a much slower pace than he'd seen before with injured fish. His dad's heart wasn't beating anymore. The blood wasn't pumping though his body. Now it was just spilling out of him like sand from between his fingers.

His dad was dead. Floating lifelessly in the water, tied to that horrible floating thing that was even larger than his immense father. Several glinting vines connected to poles were embedded deep into his dad's body. Each poll dug in deep into his dad's flesh all over the limp body. He was being towed along behind it as the thing started loudly thudding in the water again. Sam could just make out a series of circular fins all along what he assumed was the back side of the thing. Every one of the circular fins spinning fast and hard to get it moving.

He stared at the sight of them dragging his father away from him. Away from their home.

Sam was just about to chase after his dad when another massive floating thing appeared from the shallower waters above the cliff. He'd known vaguely that there was a wide plateau up there, but didn't realize just how big until he saw that both of those floating things had been up there this whole time. Doing who knows what and for how long, battling with his father. All those massive splashes made more sense now. It was his dad fighting for his life. Sam swallowed thickly at the thought that he was so close. He could have gone up there. Caused a distraction. Done something
to help but he just hid away from the strange scary sounds.

Sam knew the floating things didn't come from up in the shallower waters because his mom and dad would never have settled here if they knew they'd be in danger.

The rest of the second floating thing was half hidden from view as it waited for the first to get far enough ahead of it. His dad's body drifting behind, tugged along by those metal vines and poles. The things went around the old sharply rising rocks that climbed above the surface of the water as they headed deeper into the ocean.

The second monstrous floating thing was lower into the water than the other, and he realized why when the full shape appeared overhead. It was weighted down by another Merperson. Sam sunk down to the sand, sharp coral biting into his tail fins underneath him but he barely felt the sting. That Merperson had the same coloring as his mom, the same blond hair that dragged listlessly behind the floating thing. The shape of her body was distorted by the waves above, but he could still tell how she was positioned. She was folded nearly in half with the ends of her tail fins dipping down to the water. Leaving red eddies in their wake. Mirroring how small and compact his body had been while in hiding. Blood poured down from three sides of that second floating monster. There was no way she was still alive.

The same smell of death in the water. Both of his parent's blood now clogged his senses and his chest heaved painfully, struggling to breathe. He couldn't sit here any longer. Couldn't bear to see this. To smell this. To taste. To know without a shadow of doubt that they were dead. They were dead and being taken away to be eaten like they'd eaten so many fish themselves. Sam's mind tried to come up with a reason why they had to die. Why they, of all the beings around, had to die. They never bothered anyone! What other reason would they have for taking them away? Sam didn't think they'd needed to kill both of his loving parents just for food. Those floating monsters were only slightly bigger than them! There was no point in killing his mom and dad when there was so many other animals that were stupid and slow and easier to take out for use as food. There were plants and things that are far more abundant than two Merpeople! Sam's rational mind tried to make sense of it but his mind kept swimming in circles.

Sam stopped and just swam away from it all, desperately heading to clearer waters. Hoping that clear waters means a clearer head. He had to figure this out, he had to think things through like his dad always said. But... his dad was wrong. Wasn't he? He made up the rules Dean and he were supposed to live by but the rules didn't save him. The rules kept Sam safe but did nothing to protect them! What good were they anyway? Why did they die?!

Sam kept on swimming away only fleetingly aware that he was heading over the deep trench. What did it matter? His home wasn't safe, here isn't safe, nowhere is it safe! Panting hard and fast at the horrors he just witnessed. His parents weren't supposed to die! They were the biggest things around! The ocean currents themselves change course at their passing! They are invincible! His thoughts and feelings crashed around in his head at the absurdity of it all. This wasn't supposed to happen. He must be dreaming all this. A nightmare. If he just tires himself out, he will stop this restless dream and sleep peacefully and wake up and it'll all be ok.

The sting of his eyes told him that this wasn't a dream. The ache in his lungs was never felt before, so it couldn't have been repeated in a dream. The bone crushing agony felt in his trembling heart is unmatched. Those floating monsters were so alien to him... there was no way even his craziest dreams could have made them up. This was real. His mom was dead. His dad was dead.

Wait... there. There is a shape up ahead, a long fin on it's back. Sam sighed in relief that at least his brother was still alive. Thoughts and worries flashed through his mind. Dean must have seen him
and was swimming as fast as he could towards him. Dean must have been looking for him. Sam felt biting fear at having to tell his older brother exactly what happened, but at least his older brother was alive to hear it. To be warned to stay far away from the floating monsters. No matter what Dean says or wants, he needed to know about the threat they cause. Sam would tell him and then let Dean decide what to do. To lead them both now that they're all that's left of their family. Two small young Merkids in the ocean. Sam refused to think about it right now. His brother was swimming towards him. It'll all be ok.

Sam would promise anything Dean asked if he would take him back. To not be angry anymore at him because he just saw his parents d-... and he couldn't take it if Dean hated him for it. For not saving them somehow. Sam choked on his emotions and pushed at the water to get himself over to his brother. To reunite that much sooner.

“Dean!” Sam cried out, everything burning hot in him. Swimming as fast as his aching muscles could towards his brother.

But Dean wasn't stopping or calling back Sam's name. He was unreasonably moving even faster. His head and shoulders must be down. Can he see where he's going? But that's also not right... Dean wasn't swimming normally at all. Almost like he wasn't even using his hands or all his fins correctly. Is Dean just using his tail in a too smooth side to side motion instead of his usual up and down and ...

Sam's eyes widened at the realization and was too stunned to stop right away. The smooth gray shape was getting dangerously larger and too fast for him to dodge. Sam's wing fins snapped out in surprise at the rows and rows of sharp teeth as the giant red jaw of the Bull shark opened up.

Sam's tail beat once from shock alone and the Bull shark missed the first bite that would have left him with a hole in his chest. The side of the shark's nose still ran into Sam's chest at full speed and knocked the young Merman spinning to the side. The vicious 11 ft long shark then spun around itself, and found it's prey floundering in the water gasping for breath. Unable to react fast enough to get away, the bull shark took the opportunity and circled wide around to come back in for the next try. It's jaws slammed down hard onto Sam's exposed hip, tearing up the fin there and making Sam scream in terror. It latched firmly on and dove down quickly to keep it's prey from orienting itself enough to fight back. The Bull shark was nearly twice as long as him and far wider. The sheer strength and bulk of it meant that Sam was near powerless to stop the attack. The bull shark was the breed most known to the Merpeople as infant killers and Sam's racing mind added kids to that list as well.

The realization hit him that the shark was only there because it was drawn in by all the blood in the water. That meant more were sure to follow. Bull sharks don't often hunt alone and he knew he was powerless to stop even one. He frantically dragged his clawed fingers along the side of the shark, trying to dig in as far as his small claws could go. The pain in his hip all consuming. He flailed about when it changed directions and headed upwards. Sam twisted his arm down and around and was able to claw at it's nose and eyes and that distracted it for only a few seconds before it spun and bit at him again. This time further down on his tail where he couldn't easily reach it. It jerked Sam's weak body around and he flipped and spun with each wild jerk. Sam screamed for help. Tail thrashing, wing fins arching up and back in a hopeless attempt at swimming out of the firmly locked serrated teeth.

He could taste his own blood in the water now, and knew that he was going to die right here right now. The world spun around him as the bull shark changed directions yet again, disorientating Sam into forgetting which way was up or down anymore. All he knew was pain and terror.
Just as he was giving up hope, he felt the shark's jaw come loose from his tail but left a few teeth behind. He reached a shaking hand to the back of his tail and couldn't believe that he was free of it.

Sam hazily looked up and around to see where it was going to come from next, but saw a light brown shape tangled around the large gray shark. He blinked the thick tears from his eyes and saw his brother suddenly there, clawing and ripping flesh from the shark with his clawed hands and sharp teeth. Dean kept clear of it's toothy maw, faster and more agile than the bulky predator. Dean's time spent playing with the dolphins had taught him how to maneuver around the smooth super fast bodies and this shark was no contest.

Its huge bulk meant that it couldn't twist out of Dean's grip fast enough to avoid having it's skin and fins shredded. Dean went after the arm fins next after the vulnerable gills. The shark's gills were easy to get his claws into and dig the tender flesh out from underneath the thick skin. Dean twisted his own long tail and wide fins around the shark's cone-shaped tail to keep himself attached while the shark bucked and thrashed. But Dean just kept on going. Hissing and growling curses between bites of his own. “You dare attack my family?!” Dean shouted, clawing and punching wherever he could reach. Dean wasn't as big or round as the shark but he was almost as long and far faster. Sam had to back away when the shark blindly started to swim towards him but Dean used most of his frilled tail strength to keep the smooth gray muscular tail from moving them forward. “Oh no you don't!” Dean growled and tried head butting the shark but became dizzy himself instead. “Crap!” Dean blinked away the spots in his vision and saw Sam's shape ahead. “SAMMY GO!” The shark bucked again and was nearly free of Dean's grip.

The shark wasn't alone, there were more smaller sharks and predator fish, snakes, and eels coming in fast. The majority of them were drawn to the massive shapes that were slowly thudding away from the reef, but a few took notice of the bloody fight. An opportunistic shark that was only as long as Sam's arm came in to bite at his fresh wound but he just instinctively grabbed it in his hands and bit it's head clean off, spitting it out as more came in for the frenzy.

Sam's tail throbbed in time with the dwindling thudding sounds above, but he kept on killing every single shark and fish that came in for an easy meal. He wanted to go help his brother but his tail refused to bend without agonizing pain shooting up and down his whole flexible spine. Even staying upright with his remaining tail fins was torture so he relied on his wing fins to keep himself from sinking into the abyss below. Best he could do was to take out these little bastards.

Every chance he got he would look over at Dean to see the fight drag on and was glad that the Bull shark was gradually loosing the battle. Chunks of it falling off as Dean continued his relentless attack. Finding and tearing out the more tender areas as it made moaning sounds in the water.

Dean managed to take off the big shark's back fin, but just as he turned to help Sam, the shark used up the very last of its energy to get free of Dean's grip, swing its huge head around and savagely bite Dean's chest.

Dean's mouth hung open as his eyes were filled with intense pain as he looked over the shark's twitching head towards his little brother. His claws struggling to push the head away from himself but only managing to make the shark's teeth pull more at his skin. He wanted to pry the mouth open but his hands refused to move. Claws scrabbling weakly at the sides of the shark's head. Pain so intense his vision was blanking out.

Dean was loosing blood far too fast and the swarm that had been around Sam changed course and went after Dean instead. Blurring even the outline of his brother's shape with just how many went in for an easy meal. Dean, helpless to stop it. To stop any of it. Blood came out of his mouth in wispy tendrils as he soundlessly gasped for breath. The shark made one last jerk of it's head that
tore a large chunk from Dean's chest before it finally died.

Sam clawed frantically at the water with his hands and ignored the burn in his body as he struggled desperately to reach his sinking brother. The shark's entrails floating up past them to be attacked at eaten by the ever growing swarm of fish and smaller sharks.

“Dean! NO! Deeaan!!!” Sam cried out, muscles burning, tail bitten deeply, and right hip fin shredded. He watched as Dean's pain filled eyes lost their light. A low moan escaping his bared teeth before his mouth went lax and more blood seeped out. Dean's hands drifted up from the shark's head, giving up on prying it off of his chest where the teeth were still buried past the bones. Dean reached up towards Sam but it was too late. A column of blood rose from the sinking bodies as more and more fish engulfed the area. Pushing the bodies down faster with the force of their feeding frenzy. Some returning to bite at Sam, but most going after the easier meal made from the shark and his brother.

Sam absently tore at every fish and shark that came to attack him. Thankfully, the other large Reef and Bull sharks were bypassing them altogether. A far bigger meal on the horizon. His parents... his brother... reduced to food for bottom dwellers, scavengers. For creatures he hadn't ever seen as dangerous before with how small they were.

Sam could feel himself dying inside. His aching wounds should have been the worst pain in his life right now, but they paled in comparison to the fact that his whole family was dead. They were dead and he was all alone.

Sam let himself sink down, angling himself slightly towards home, if it could even be called that anymore. He had no where else to go. He could try and follow Dean into the deeps, but he wasn't as good at echo location as his big brother was. He'd get lost for sure. He was too young to be alone. Dean said so. Dean said he'd always be there for him anyway and there was no need for Sam to worry about it. To worry about anything dangerous.

Dean said he'd be there. He promised! His mom and dad, they said they'd be together, forever! That they would find other Merpeople to bring into their group. To start a new Pod. He was told about the old Pod a little while back, but no one in their family told him where it was exactly. He had no idea where to even go to find help. No one to tell that his family had died.

Sam found himself just outside of the nest and painfully crawled in and curled up into the kelp and sand bed they'd made. His hand covering the still bleeding wound at his right side. The one lower down his tail couldn't easily be reached until he was curled up and laying still. He remembered his mom using some kelp as a wrapping for his finger cut before, and knew that if he didn't wrap up the bite wounds, that he would get infected. Or bleed out. Bleed out just like his family did.

As Sam's hands worked at the long strings of kelp that made up their beds, he paused briefly. Wondering if he should even bother trying to heal. His family was dead. All of them. By things from the surface and things from below. He wasn't safe anywhere anymore. Maybe it was better if he just gave up and laid down and let the fish eat him too?

Sam's face burned at that thought and he cried hard into his arms as he curled up tighter. Desperate to know what to do now. He didn't know any other Merpeople. He'd only known there were more from his mom and dad. Dean never saw any either.

The day turned to night and finally the stench of blood was mostly gone from the waters. The thudding sound long since faded into the distance. Sam felt a tingling sensation on his side and discovered a few small fish, actually eating part of his torn hip fin. He hadn't felt it before because apparently they were eating the parts that were nearly torn off already and they were now biting
into still living tissue. He grabbed the nearest one to stare blankly at it. Blood on it's teeth and a small chunk of his blue and brown scales floating away from it's mouth.

Sam's eyes never went too clear as he regarded the fish before shoving it towards his mouth and biting it in half. Chewing it up and swallowing it, bone and all. He finished it off, and his stomach stopped growling as much. He reached down blindly while still laying on his good side and discovered the next opportunistic feeding fish, and ate that one too. Anytime a fish, eel, or sea snake came by, he ate it. Soon becoming stuffed. It was an odd sense of justice to him.

He pushed aside the thought that he was eating the fish that had probably taken a bite out of his family. A sick feeling sinking in his stomach at the morbid thought. He killed the next half dozen and let the remains float down and away instead. Not daring to look at them and have his mind compare their dead bodies to how Dean's and the shark's looked when they sank away from sight.

Sam shuddered and decided to take care of his wounds better than letting them lay open and raw. He wrapped up his numerous injuries with the wider strips of kelp to cover as much as possible before his energy waned again. Doing it as best he can because feeling those nibbles was more annoying now than anything. If they weren't going to kill him in one go, then what's the point?

Sam turned to his stomach because he couldn't turn to his right side or back without that sharp pain shooting up his spine. His wings draped over his shoulders and sides and he tiredly pulled over a bulk of the kelp bed to cover up the rest of himself. He rested his head on his folded arms and peered out at the dark ocean. Without his parents around there was a lack of sounds he'd known his whole life. The soft breathing, loving murmurs to each other, the huge forms bumping and brushing against the cliff side or ocean floor with their every move as they relaxed. And even if they were swimming, the sounds of the currents changing course around their forms was a comfort. Knowing that with them, nothing in the wide ocean could hurt Dean or him. But those things that killed his mom and dad... they weren't from the wide ocean. Couldn't be. Too noisy and unnatural.

Sam sighed and didn't want to think about it anymore. Didn't want to think about anything anymore. The ocean was silent.

The quietness of it should be frightening but he was just indifferent to it now. Drained of all emotion, he finally fell into a deeper sleep. Thankfully, he didn't dream.

Chapter End Notes

I don't know when there'll be delays in chapters. I do intend on working on this as a kind of therapy. (things are not good irl wolfie-land)
But this chapter in particular was HARD for me to re-edit. I wrote the basics for it months ago but that wasn't enough for a proper chapter imho.
I don't know if I want help on this or not. for the dramatic parts. I just need time, I think.
Love you all, have a good day, be well.
Traveling Riverside Blues

Chapter Summary

Sam sets out on his own.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter Four:

Traveling Riverside Blues

Days pass in quiet loneliness. Sam hadn't so much as stuck a fin outside of the nest in all that time. If he was hungry he simply uncovered his wounds and waited for the damned fish to come by, and eat at them. He played with some of the opportunistic fish in his claws. Tearing off a specific right fin on their tails and watching them try and swim without it. Studying their movements in a detached kind of way. Sam's eyes were barely open, his thoughts straying away from the horrific events that happened all too recently, and now focusing on more simplistic things. As if he were protecting himself from taking it all in at once and loosing his mind to either grief, anger, or despair. His mind couldn't yet process so it went back to basic problem solving.

An eel came by his nest, drawn in by the still lingering scent of blood, and that one was caught and maimed as well. Sam stared near absently at the way the tail flipped about after loosing it's fin where Sam had lost his. Its head was caught tight in his fist as he watched it flip about before growing bored with it's squirming, and eating it.

After the fourth day, Sam saw his first dolphin. It was the oldest female of the Pod if he remembered right. She came in hesitantly closer. Bobbing her head at him and swimming slower than she usually would. A few more dolphins came up behind her but she clicked a soft warning at them to keep back.

Sam huffed a little water at that. Like he was a danger to anyone right now. He was about the same size as one of their juveniles, Dean had grown larger than the largest dolphin. Sam was told he was a runt several times by Dean, pointing out on the cliff face where his mom would mark out their progress and growth.

Sam knew Dean was only teasing and didn't mean any harm in it, but it did sting a little. Sam told himself that he will grow up bigger than Dean ever was and then choked back an unexpected sob at the realization that that was depressingly true. Unless he died here, he was going to outgrow Dean because Dean was dead. Sam was going to outgrow even his parents because they were dead.

Their parents had told the boys about other Merpeople, how they keep growing and growing, and that they didn't have to listen to the grand elders. Sam and Dean could find a mate, make a nest,
and have their own kids at merely 70 years old if they wanted. A fifth the age and size of the elders. So Sam knew that even his parents, as big as they were, weren't even full grown yet. That there was no concept of 'full grown' among them. That had to be taught to them when dealing with every other species out there, save for special cases like lobsters and some hard shells.

Lobsters will keep on growing older, shedding their shells to get bigger until the day comes when they become too exhausted to shed their shell and they will eventually die in it from being constricted. Sam wondered if he stayed living in this nest if that could happen to him. He shook his head and idly watched the old dolphin swim in a few circles a dozen tail lengths away.

The fact that dolphins won't get any larger than they were now made him wonder what that would be like. To have their prey stay the same size relative to their own. They wouldn't really have to worry about finding new food sources as they grow older. The ocean was full of fish and it didn't look like it was going to run out any time soon. Dolphins could spend their whole lives perfecting their hunting methods for each specie of fish and creature but Sam wouldn't be able to do the same for more than a dozen years at a time. His hands wouldn't even be able to reach into the coral reefs for the fish and eels hiding there when he reaches 40 feet long.

Merpeople have to constantly change their diets to deal with the ever growing need for food. Many elders went mainly vegetarian with only the odd shark here and there. To non Merpeople, it may sound absurd, but, for them it's normal. It is easy for them to say that they occasionally eat something as deadly as a shark because sharks were only as long as their hand when Merpeople get to be in their hundreds.

The dolphin clicked at him and Sam realized that she hadn't just left out of boredom while he was stuck in his head. He clicked back for the dolphin to mind its own Pod and leave him be. The old dolphin and the few others kept a respectable distance but stayed within eyesight of him, despite his grumblings and the few rocks he threw at them. The younger dolphins didn't quite grasp his intentions, and mistook the rock throwing for him wanting to play a new game.

Sam wondered if it was deeper than that, and that they were trying to play with him now since their last game ended so abruptly. That they remembered, and maybe felt guilty for how it all went down. Laughing in their own way at Dean's failure to find the right fish.

Forgetting that it was all Sam's fault to begin with. He's the one that screwed up the fish catch game. Not them. He's the one that made his brother angry. He's the one that ruined everything.

Sam threw a few more rocks but he purposefully aimed them out at the open waters instead of towards the dolphins. Until he remembered that they laughed too. They may not be completely at fault for angering and embarrassing Dean, but, they didn't stop their joyful whistles and clicks either. Sam turned a different glare at them again.

They had laughed at his brother when they should have been scolding Sam for messing up the game. Sam threw another handful out towards them but the rocks just drifted down in an arch towards the ocean floor. Several of the young dolphins dove after them after a moment's hesitation and swam around with them in their mouths, clicking around the rocks at their friends. Sam didn't know what was said but he saw that they were now organized and taking turns dropping and catching the rocks all around his alcove. Having the rocks fall from above his nest to be within reach of him if he chose to play along. They seemed to want him to throw the rocks some more, but he caught on to their trick and hissed through his teeth at them.

They clicked back at him before resuming the new game they'd made up. Sam could see out of the corner of his eye that several of Dean's closest dolphin friends were whistling and clicking at each other and looking back over at him. Sam didn't have to speak the language to know that they were
talking about him. What he didn't know was if it was good or bad. If they were blaming him as much as he blamed himself. Or, if they were mourning the death of their friend and felt sorry for Sam loosing his whole family. It seemed to be the latter the more he watched them interact and how listless they became. He decided he didn't want to know what they were saying to each other.

Dolphins still needed breath at the surface, so nearly the whole pod took shifts in watching him. All hours of the day.

Sam just turned in place to face the wall and ignored the occasional tapping of a small rock falling down the side of the cliff, and the corresponding whistles and clicks to entice him into playing along.

After two more days, it wasn't the dolphins, or silence, or knowledge that there was nothing for him there anymore, that got him out of his old nest. Try as he might to ignore it, his hunger won out in the end. His wounds had sealed closed yesterday, and the fish stopped coming to take a bite of him, therefore, his convenient food source had finally dried up.

The dolphins were still within eye and earshot of him, but had to move on one half of the pod at a time to go hunt their own food. Each half also taking turns going up to breathe before coming back down and trying yet again to get him out of his nest.

Sam's stomach grumbled again and started to hurt the longer he was curled up in the nest. So, he swung around his stiff and sore tail from the deep bowl of the nest to lay it out straight on the hard floor of the shelf. It was narrow but free of rocks now, and only a few hand lengths to the drop off of the cliff. Sam was tired of laying around in the soft kelp that was slowly rotting away in the water. He hunched over himself to reach his tail better with his hands. His tail hurt from being curled still for so long and now that it's stretched out straight on the flat surface he could feel the muscles twitching under his scales. His fins along the sides of his tail rippled and stretched and it all felt odd to him now.

Laying in bed, barely moving for too long had made his muscles seize up on him a moment later. He massaged his fingers into his tail to get the cramps and kinks worked out of his muscles. He lightly scratched at the edges of the healed wounds and frowned when they didn't bleed right away. He had hoped for one more day of rest using the excuse that he's still healing, but his stomach protested the thought. He was very hungry and food wasn't going to just appear in front of him anymore. He had to go get it. That, or, get the dolphins to feed him. He shoved that thought away the second it entered his mind. He's not going to make them do his job for him. They had their own mouths to feed. Sam's fully capable of finding his own food. He simply didn't want to... just yet. Sam knew he was pouting and being lazy, but did it anyway. Not like he cares that he has an audience for his foul mood.

He's tired, he's hurting and he's hungrier than a grouper fish.

Sam swung his tail down the edge of the shelf to wave in the water around his sitting form. Not yet ready to swim yet, he turned his head to see how far he could stretch his wing fins out behind him as well. Slowly flapping them in the space around him to work those muscles as well. The movement created by his fins made the kelp of his nest cloud up around him and drift away. Sam noticed that without all that kelp, it was looking more and more bare and less like home. Sam flapped his wings harder, tears starting to form in the corners of his eyes at the sight of the nest drifting away piece by piece. Telling himself that it's for the best. If there's nothing here, nothing comfortable or comforting, there's even less of a reason for him to come back here. Why weep over a small shelf carved out of a cliff? There's dozens of these all along the cliff, this one
just happened to be big enough for them when they were younger. It was never meant to be their home permanently. Sam had to talk himself out of the idea of carving it out bigger when he himself grew larger. He knew that one day, he’d simply be too large to sleep here. His parents were proof of that. They would never have been able to fit inside the cliff, to use it as a sleep shelf nest. Sam's just leaving the nest before he outgrew it. He doesn't need it anymore.

Sam swiped the back of his hand across his eyes, smearing the thick tears off of his face and taking a few steadying breaths. He's not a baby anymore. He's in charge of his own life now.

Sam twisted his tail in the water some more, flexing it up and down, side to side and curling a far backwards as he could while still sitting on the shelf. He nearly had to remind himself how his fins should move in order to swim and keep himself upright. His wings felt better now that they were able to move properly for the first time in days.

The sudden shift in movement had nearly every dolphin there take notice and swim excitedly closer. Urging him on while clicking happily.

Sam scowled at their renewed joy and was tempted to go right back to sleep but his bed was drifting down to the ocean floor and he didn't want to sleep on the hard rock. Besides, his stomach was gnawing at him painfully now. He reluctantly swished his tail around, stretching out the muscles and he toyed with the dwindling wrappings around his wounds. Lifting the kelp ropes and cushioning up here and there and finding the scar beneath. Clear jagged teeth marks in his skin. A line of dashes that curved around his tail, marking out where every one of the shark's teeth had entered his body. He closed his eyes to will away the memory of that fight and opened them again to assess the wounds. They had healed pretty well considering what had happened and how inexperienced he was at bandaging such a brutal wound. He didn't even have any of the salves that his mother knew how to make. All he knew was that it had smelled bad and stung whenever she put it on his small cuts and bites.

Sam traced a finger along the bite marks and noticed something white laying in the place where the kelp nest had been. His gaze revealed a few of the shark's actual teeth laying there where he'd slept. They must have worked their own way out of the wounds. Sam had been too distracted by everything to notice that he'd actually had them embedded in his tail from the fight, all the way to the nest. He remembered now that he didn't get them all earlier. He was in far too much pain in that area to pinpoint exactly which hole had how many teeth remained inside it. He thought he'd gotten them all on the swim back. At least they're out of his tail now.

Sam picked them up and turned the sharp triangular shaped teeth in his fingers. Each one the length of his little finger. Sam toyed with the idea of simply throwing them off of the cliff into the deeps but he stopped himself. Staring at the two little teeth and blinking at them. He tore off a bit of the fresher, stronger, strings of kelp and braided them into a long thin rope. Remembering his mom's lessons in how to do so. His jaw tightening at the memory that came to mind. How his mom had to use full lengths of kelp instead of some of the stronger internal strings. Since her hands were so much larger, it was easier for him to follow along with his own scaled down braided rope.

She mentioned while she worked that she saw this kind of rope a long time ago when they were still in their old Pod. How that braided rope was shining in some areas and dark red in others. She said it was something called 'metal' and that it didn't last forever in the water. She said it was attached to some overturned things that had once floated on the surface and it was very useful to Merpeople because even though it was thin in their hands, it was much stronger than their usual kelp ropes. Problem is, is that Merpeople rarely went to the sunken wrecks to scavenge around. Most said that they could become sick from swimming in the tainted waters around the wrecks. Pointing out the dead areas that often surrounded the sites.
After a moment, Sam remembered her shaking her head in worry and warning him away from investigating those places or else he'd be sent to the nest for two days as punishment. That material, 'metal' wasn't worth his health or his life. Sam felt like it was his decision to make for how he lives his life now. If she could use the metal ropes, he could too if he found any.

His eyes unfocused for a second before widening a little. His mom was talking about the same kinds of shining vines that he saw wrapped around her body, as well as the lines going from the floating thing to his dad's dead body. Blinking at the new knowledge that those floating things can and do sink. That they had to be the same sunken wrecks his mother talked about. Trying to remember what that 'metal' stuff looked like so he'd know to grab it when he saw it. If it was stronger than the strongest Merpeople he knew, then surely it was strong enough to use against his parent's attackers.

Sam looked up at the surface, past the dolphins and the schools of colorful fish towards that bright circle above. Those horrible things can die too. Sam let that idea swish around his head for a few minutes. Encouraged by that fact. All he had to do was find more metal things and make similar weapons out of it. Then he'd need to find those big floating things again. He had to make sure they never float again. That they never hurt anyone ever again. Had to make sure that they pay for what they did to his parents. His family.

Sam felt something stir inside him, a half formed plan being made. He had to avenge his family. He had to avenge them all. Not just from the floating things, but for Dean as well. He vowed to take out every single shark he can. But in order to do that, he'll have to grow up to be bigger than them. He'll have to eat a lot more, exercise, become stronger and a fierce hunter to be able to take them all out.

Sam's heart started to beat with a purpose again. He grinned a little to himself. Part of him glad that he didn't give up like he wanted to a week ago. Of course, there was no one around to blame him if he did. Sam shook his head at that. He can't change the past. He wishes like crazy that he wasn't alone but that doesn't stop the facts staring him in the face. He is alone. He's going to be alone. He might never find another living Merperson again.

And he's just going to have to deal with that. Deal with it... or die.

Sam peered back down at his hand where the two shark teeth were poking his palm. Nearly drawing blood. He narrowed his eyes at that. No more blood will be shed from him. No more will he cower in this dark nest. He's not going to let it bring him down. He has to keep going to kill those that killed his family. What kind of a son would he be, what kind of a brother? If he just lets them go free? Who knows how many those floating things killed? It might not just be his parents. They might go after other Merpeople too. He's gotta find those floating death traps and bring them down.

Sam's attention went back to his braiding and found it was mostly done already. His hands working away while he thought about his life now. He took his time in wrapping the teeth individually with a bit of the thinner strings, and then binding them into the longer kelp rope, turning it into a long necklace. He stared at it in his hands for a few moments, ignoring the curious dolphins diving in closer and closer to see what he was doing. He lifted it up, gaining the attention of the whole Pod who clicked and chirped at him in questioning waves.

He lifted it over his head and laid it over his chest. Fingers grazing over the teeth and straightening and tucking in a few of the stray strands to look better. Chin tucked to his chest to see how it looked on him. Then facing the dolphins who were watching his every move. He gave a slight nod to them and they bobbed their heads back at him. He guessed they approved.
With that done, he braided another length of kelp rope and made a loop of it to tie around his waist. He grabbed a small bag that Dean had woven and put in all of the sharp carving stones that his brother fashioned. Dean didn't like eating the skin of the purple fish so he figured out how to cut it off using a nearby sharp edged rock before eating the meat underneath. Quickly figuring out that he can make more of those cutting rocks for other needs as well. Enthusiastically teaching Sam how to do it too.

Their parents were very impressed and congratulated his older brother on his ingenuity. Sam was a little jealous of the attention and grabbed one of his old sharp stones and wrapped one end of a long blade with kelp to handle it better. It was perfect! Their hands wouldn't be cut when they held on tight making it easier for them to swing the stones around with more confidence. Together they had a secret competition to see who could make the best knife. Most of the early knives broke into pieces if they were careless in their handling, but, that only spurred them on to making stronger ones next time. Not sacrificing strength for sharpness. Of course, there were a couple that were kept thin and brittle for tiny detail work. These Sam wrapped up separately with some seaweed leaves. Hoping they'll stay together in the bag when everything's gathered.

Sam grazed his hands over them and remembered how proud Dean was of each one. Not just the ones he'd made but the ones Sam worked on too. Sam could swear he could still hear an echo of the round palm sized stones hitting the cloudy black see through stones and making a perfectly straight line with a sharp edge. Both brothers spent days figuring out which stones worked best for each task. Sam made sure to pack every one of them. If they can cut skin off of a fish, they can cut a shark's hide just as well.

In all, he had two small detail blades, three different rounded tool stones, and four different sizes and styles of blades with handles. He left the broken things there. Already his woven bag felt a little heavy and he can't pack up every little rock shard.

Sam turned to the side to look at the only place he'd called home. There were very few things there that his parents had brought with them from their old Pod. Left leaning on the cliff face far below where they'd slept.

He was tempted to try and take them with, but they were just too heavy for him to maneuver easily. All except for the shining hook with the barbed end. It was in the far end of the nest site. Sam figured that Dean must have snatched it from his dad's stuff at some point to play around with it without any of them knowing. Sam can see why Dean took an interest in it. How useful it would be.

The hook's handle fit into his fist perfectly. He swung it around in the water and admired how impressive it looked. Much stronger than any stone blade, the hook wouldn't break no matter what it strikes. Not like the stone blades where if they hit another stone the wrong way - no more blade.

He made another length of rope from his nest kelp and tied one end to it. Not wanting to have to carry it around in his hand the whole time he's swimming, he tied the end of it to his belt and tucked it next to his ruined hip fin. He sighed at the sight of its sharp edge. That's just an accident waiting to happen. Sam decided to wrap up the point with more kelp to keep it from stabbing himself. Of course... It's not like the hook could hurt his shredded fin any more than it already was, but still, he didn't want to tempt fate and hurt something else next. The hook could be turned into a weapon just like he saw on those floating things. He firmed his jaw and imagined himself using it against sharks. If only he'd had this...

Nevermind that now. It's done. Now, he's on a mission.

He finally, finally, got off of the nest and hovered in place in the water. His muscles all burned a
little from the lack of use, but it also felt good to stretch them out again.

Sam had to relearn how to swim without his right hip fin. The torn parts were still scabbed over and hurting when he tried to use it to keep himself straightened out and upright. His right wing fin soon compensated for the lack of thrust and he bit his lip at the pain the newly sealed wounds were making. It would still be some time before he could stop his instinct to use that ruined fin for swimming. He put his hand over it to keep it pinned to his side for now.

Sam adjusted the bag towards his left side, with the hook on his right to even the weights out on his belt.

Sam turned to face his home one last time. Taking in the sight of it and memorizing what it looked like from a practical standpoint. It was always something that had just been there. He never had the need to study it's composition. The sand that his parents brought up from far below, on the ocean floor, was a kind of base that was softer than the hard rock beneath it. Filling in the gaps in the rock and smoothing out the edges. Sam took in the kelp bed on top and noticed that it was comprised of long strands of kelp that had been folded over itself many times before woven together with more kelp rope that his parents made. They must have to be replaced often or so or else disintegrate or start to smell. Sam never really paid it much attention when his mom was fidgeting with the nest site. He'd have to know how to build a nest in the future. Because now... now there was no one around to teach him.

Sam wiped his face and ran claws through his hair lightly. Combing it back. He knew how to make the other things there already. Sam lifted up his barbed hook weapon and made sure his shark tooth necklace was on straight. He was the last surviving family member and the only one to represent them now if he did happen to run into other Merpeople. He didn't want his appearance to dissuade others from meeting him. Already he'd have to make up for the ugly wounds on his tail and hip. Seen as weaker than them, no doubt. His hand clutched tighter at the ruined fin. Sam knew he had his work cut out for him. Surviving on his own. Out into the open ocean. He'll have to fight every day to survive to see another. He firmed his jaw and swam up straighter.

Sam turned in place and faced the vast dark blue water ahead. Taking it all in as if seeing it for the first time. He took a long pull of water in and out and set off. The dolphins seemed to be cheering him on as they sped alongside him, diving up and over and around him. Sam knew that he had to make a decision now. He knew that the dolphins would probably follow him and keep him safe till the end of his long days, but he felt like he had to prove his independence now. Merpeople live for hundreds of years and dolphins don't.

Sam slowed his swim as he regarded the young ones that played around them all. Slowly realizing that they'd be the ones to continue traveling with him and then their kits, and their kits after that. For generations. Forgetting why they ever started following him in the first place. Dolphins were loyal and smart but he felt he didn't deserve to call them family. He'd be responsible for them when he grows larger than the largest one. Likely becoming their leader. Sam scoffed at that thought. He was no leader. He didn't want to be, and he felt he wasn't cut out for the job, now or later. No, he had to do this alone. He was not going to be responsible for them and on the flip side, he couldn't rely on them to save his scales. They had their intelligence and small sharp teeth but he's got those too, as well as sharp claws on his hands. He just has to practice using them and the blades the next time a shark comes around.

The floating things traveled to and from far away and he would hate himself for dragging the innocent dolphins along on his dangerous mission. Their food and home was here along the cliff face and he'd never forgive himself if any of them got hurt or died because he led them away from safety.
Sam angled his swim closer to the ocean floor and the dolphins had to take a few deep breaths of air before attempting to join him down there. He could hear their distress and urging him to get closer to the surface but ignored their chirps and whistles. He wouldn't attack them just to drive them away in case he accidentally made contact with them with his claws. He can't do that. He won't. So, he pretended he didn't hear them, and kept swimming downwards and away.

He rubbed his free hand over his face as he tried to keep his expression blank and mind set when a couple of the dolphins darted down far and fast towards him. Panicking that he was going too far for them to reach. One swam underneath him and pushed him upright and the other caught on and did the same when Sam tried to dodge. The two dolphins taking turns pushing and bullying him higher before they ran out of air and had to dart to the surface again to breathe. Sam looked up and saw them telling the others the plan and Sam wouldn't be able to stop the whole Pod from shoving him back up if they put their mind to it. There were so many of them, they could keep it up in shifts for days.

Sam took the few moments he had alone to swim hard and fast straight down and managed to avoid being seen by the dozen that came down looking for him. He twisted around and doubled back in the water, heading home again. They kept searching for him in the direction he'd been going and soon were lost in the blue current and swarms of fish.

He hated having to deceive them like this, but he just couldn't endanger Dean's friends. His life wasn't going to be easy whatsoever. So he waited for them to move on away from him, watching silently as they turned back and started searching for him closer to the safe cliffs. Glad that they came back towards their home. Their clicks and whistles dying out in the water. He waited for a little while longer before moving from his spot on the sloping ocean bottom.

He sang quietly to himself, a few of the songs that his mom would sing to him when they were sad or lonely. Tales that had been passed down from the elders in the old Pod. He ran out of songs when he ran across a long metal pole in the sand. There was a lot of strange things laying around in one area and he surmised that they must have been dumped there by the floating things. Recoiling back from it for a short while as he waited for the things to spring up and attack him.

Nothing happened, and he flicked his tail at the pole and felt how sturdy it was despite the barnacles on its surface. He reached forward and wrapped a hand around it and noticed that the barnacles actually made it easier to hold on to. He flipped it around and it clinked on his hook and he had an idea.

He felt uneasy about using any more of the floating thing's stuff, but the simple fact was, was that he couldn't use a wooden stick underwater for too long before it disintegrated. Sometimes driftwood would sink and it would loose its sturdiness. He never knew what the sticks looked like when they were alive, if they were ever alive, he just learned that they came from the surface somewhere and would collect at the ocean's floor or float along up top. His dad taught them everything he knew about everything. But even he didn't know where those wooden things came from.

In the end, this long metal stick would be a better choice for his hook.

Sam used his handmade rope to bind the large sharp hook to the end of it and swung it around in the water. Learning how he could use it effectively as a weapon against things bigger than him. Getting a few scratches from the hook's sharp end in his fins and wings before learning to keep them pulled tighter to his body for the moves. Jabbing it at an unseen enemy, and after a lot of patience and practice, actually managed to catch a large fish with it that tried to hide inside a deep crack in the ocean floor. All he had to do was dip the hook stick into the crack and swing it along...
and upwards and suddenly he had a meal ready to go. Watching the fish writhe around that was skewered through it's middle. Smiling for the first time in days at his accomplishment. He caught a fish without even using his hands.

Proud of his skills, he had a feeling that it will be alright. All he has to do is get better with this weapon and keep his senses open for trouble.

He was exhausted after all the excitement and traveling he did in the last couple days. Since he hadn't really moved during that first week after his family died, he knew he'd need someplace safe to fall deep asleep.

Sam found a little rock pile close to a larger boulder. He dug out underneath it to see what was underneath and was happy to find that it could be used as a makeshift cave. He spent a bit of time moving the smaller flat rocks around the boulder that formed one over hanging wall. Satisfied that the rocks should protect him from view of larger predators, he gathered up the surrounding sand and shoved it over the rocks to help hide it's overall shape. A lot of sand fell down into the hollowed out center and he grumbled as he had to remove it again or he'd never fit in there. He had no way of closing up the entrance so he'd just have to face it and have his hook ready as defense.

It wasn't much, but it'll have to do. His hook was held tight to his chest in his fist, and his tail curled up and around himself as cover to keep the overhead sand from falling on his face. His left arm pillowed under his head while his wings came up and around both sides to protect himself as best he could. He wondered if this will all come crashing down on him while he's asleep, but, he had to trust it will hold. Too tired and worn out to try and find a better spot to sleep. His body demanded it.

In the quiet darkness, his heart ached. He missed his family. Missed his dad's teachings, his mom's singing, his brother's teasing. He missed everything, but, he had to go on living. His life was no longer pointless. He had a goal and a mission to accomplish.

He will avenge his family.

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the lateness of this chapter. I lost two family members within weeks of each other and it has been devastating to me and mine. My uncle and brother in law - both to different and multiple cancers. it hit hard and fast this time around, and I'm just taking it one day at a time. Hopefully it'll get better. I also recently adopted a young cat from the shelter and she's been doing good. Helping me out of my funk. I named her Dean because I already have a black cat named Castiel, a tuxedo female named Sammy and I knew that regardless the gender, my next pet would be named Dean. She responds to it just like my other babies respond to theirs, thou, they're usually expecting food from hearing calling it. Danny boy is the elder of the household at 12 and he's seen it all. He's looking out for the youngsters and me too.

anyway, so that's why I've been quiet lately. I'm hopeful that the next chapters will be easier to write out.
The Pull

Chapter Summary

Sam tries to make it on his own.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter Five:

The Pull

The first week was relatively easy traveling for Sam. He learned the hard way to not just eat fish he didn't know. His stomach expelling everything he'd managed to scrape together for the last day. He luckily found some kelp and chewed on it while he waited for the nausea to fade. It had been a couple days after that for him to taste test another fish, this one looked very similar to ones he'd had before and found it to be alright to eat. Taking the tiniest of bites from it and waiting to see if it would make him sick or not. When all seemed well he finished it and waited some more before chasing after the school and eating his fill.

Two days later and he wished he'd saved some of those fish in his kelp bag. He was hungry and there was nothing good to eat around here. Just more of those poisonous fish and tiny pockets of krill too small to make any meaningful difference. Taking him far too long to chase them down and pinch between his fingers to catch.

He settled for tiny scrapes of brown kelp that floated past him, nearly rotten in the water, trying to figure out where it had come from to get more meaningful meals out of it. Something. Anything.

He drifted back to the ocean floor when he was too tired to keep swimming and stared at his bag for a long time. Grimacing as he took out his knives and sharpening stones and eyed the bag one more time before unraveling part of it. Tears welling in his eyes as he ate a few bites of the tough strands. Knowing that if he doesn't find food soon, he will have to eat the rest of his bag and leave some of his things behind.

He wiped his face and stared hard at the knives and stones. Trying to figure out how he can keep them without the bag had him tying a strand around the knife handles forming a bundle. The stones were notched in the middles as carefully as he could without breaking them in half, and those too were tied together with one last strand attaching the knives and stones to his belt. They would bounce at his sides and it would be annoying and a drag on his streamline swimming but he wasn't ready yet to give them up. His bag was reduced to scraps that he bundled together as a pillow, guarding it from the ocean current. He fell asleep curled up around himself. The next day came with fewer stomach cramps and he decided he'd need the strength if he was to keep searching for food. Eating the rest of the kelp strands while sniffling sadly into his hands.
Five weeks since leaving his nest and he was starving. He made the decision to stop at a rocky outcrop to store his things while he goes out hunting for food yet again. He'd seen a school of some fish when he'd first woken up, but the knives and stones clattered at his sides and alerted the fish to his presence. Making the school dash away faster than he could follow. They were hindering him more than helping.

He placed a circle of rocks around the buried knives and pushed one tall rock into the center to mark the location better. Trying to memorize where it was among the many rocks and coral.

He finally turned away and gripped his pole hook tighter in his hands and set out. Determined to get something to eat, even if it tasted terrible and made his stomach turn, he needed food. He followed a long rippled trail in the sand, curious as to what it was and nearly tumbled fin over head when the trail stopped dead. He swam around in a circle and dipped closer to inspect and noticed that a thin stream of water was being sucked into and out of a hole in the ground. So tiny, but, the debris in the water didn't lie. Something was down under the sand. But, he didn't know what it was. If it was dangerous, eatable, angry...

He took his pole hook and angled the pointed end towards the tiny hole and backed up the rest of his body so that it was out of the way of the swift swing. His aim was true and his hook lodged firmly into the body of something dark gray under the sand. A swirling mass of sand and blood exploded up and around him and he nearly lost his grip of his pole hook but managed to firm his hold. The creature lurched away from the sharp hooks end and ended up moving his direction as a result. He yelped but a quick swish of his tail had him out of the way again, pulling hard and fast with his hook, it managed to pierce all the way through the thin flat body and he drove the thing back towards the ground, using his wings to keep himself steady and his tail to push at the water around himself to keep pressure on the creature. It twitched under him but eventually the blood loss made its struggles slow to a stop.

Sam dared not move just yet. Remembering the lessons his dad taught him. Never assume an animal is dead until you see the water stop moving from around them. So he stilled himself as much as possible and kept his eyes firmly on its mouth and gills. A few muscles twitched but that was it. The whole creature was nearly as wide around as he was tall. A weird looking fish with eyes on one side of it's flat body.

He hoped that it wasn't poisonous but at this point, he was desperate. He tentatively let go of the pole and watched it sink to the side, making the large round fish tilt upwards a little from the awkward weight. Now that his hands were free, he wasted no time in clawing at the back of its head, severing the spine from the head to make sure it wasn't going to spring back to life.

Sam sniffed at the fish and found it incredibly delicious smelling. He clawed out a chunk from the side, deeming it the safest spot to grab meat from and took a bite that was probably bigger than he should have but moaned at the flavors. Sure the thing was ugly and strange but hunger drove him to eat nearly half of it just sitting there. Remembering himself and his surroundings, he quickly looked up and around for sharks or other predators drawn in from the blood seeping into the water around him. He debated with himself for a few moments. If he should drag it behind himself in a hand by its tail, or keep the hook in it's side and carry it behind him that way. Opting for his hand to free up his best weapon, it flopped behind him as he quickly swam back towards the rocks that held his weapons. Sighing in relief that all were still accounted for. He dug a pit and buried the fish remains inside since he no longer had any real means of storing the meat now that his bag was gone.

The next day he ate as much as he could again and buried the scraps for dinner. Scouting out the area and finding a path that led to more promising waters. His rocky outcrop seemed to be the very
edge of a long field of rocks that hid a lush field of kelp just a little swim away.

Sam reluctantly turned back from the flowing green fields and vowed to himself to return straight away the next day. Having not eaten much in the last week and a half left him dizzy and weak. The food was helping, but food and a full nights sleep would do wonders. He also didn't want to rush into a new place without resting up first. So he stayed put until the whole fish was gone and he no longer felt his stomach cramping up. He gathered his things and a few of the fish's longer sharp bones and headed eagerly towards the kelp fields.

Trying to remember to be wary of new places where any number of dangers could be waiting for some unsuspecting Merchild. NO. He was not a child. He told himself that he wasn't allowed to be reckless anymore.

Looking back at his life with his family, how much he'd taken for granted. The safety that he had to be silly, to play, to explore. Now, his exploring was more focused on finding food and supplies. He settled himself next to the first outcropping of kelp he came to and looked around for a long while before deeming it relatively safe here. Sam started stripping the kelp of it's leaves and sorting the strands to start making a new bag. He added another pouch to the outer side of it. Patting himself on the back for having a separate space for his weapons and his food. He put another couple of loops on the other side to hold onto another pole if he ran across one, or, wanted to free up his hands of his pole hook as he swims. He harvested a bundle of lush green kelp leaves and packed them into the bags new pocket... just in case. He promised himself to always keep it stocked with emergency food. Never wanting to be that hungry again.

He saw a long dark gray shape in the distance and avoided it, swimming down to the ocean floor again and waiting for it to pass. Not knowing for sure if it was just a whale, dolphin, or deadly shark. He was no fool, he knew he wasn't nearly strong enough to take on anything bigger than a juvenile manta ray right now. He did however try out the mollusks and small squid hiding in the rocks and found a new favorite food in the clams buried upright in the sand. Learning to follow the bubbles to the source. Fascinated by the pearls within a few of the hard shells, he collected them in his bag when he found them, but wasn't going out of his way to save them. They just looked neat.

The clam and oyster shells were almost too easy to pry open with his knives and when one chipped on him in one particularly large shell, he beat it the rest of the way open among some rocks. Growling to it and himself for misusing his precious knife like that.

For weeks he learned all there was to learn about this area and how to lure out the fish from the narrow cracks. Tying a bit of clam to the end of a kelp strand and dangling it at the mouth of the hole and trying to be fast enough to snag it with one of his clawed fingers. Cursing himself out every time for not being fast enough when he had an idea while gazing at his pole hook. All he had to do was to make a much smaller pole hook and pin the clam meat on the bottom! Then, he wouldn't have to try and catch it in his hands! It will skewer itself on the tiny hook!

Sam spent a few days trying out different style hooks made out of fish bones before perfecting the shape. Accidentally snapping a few bone hooks on fish that were too big for it. He would have to figure out what he was hunting, and use the appropriate sized and shaped hook for the job.

He then reluctantly learned that it wasn't just the hook's shape and size that mattered, it was how strong his kelp threads were. Useless to make a beautiful strong hook if it just was dragged away by a strong willed fish when his weak kelp line snaps in the middle.

A few fish wisely turned right around when they saw a small Mer banging his head on the rocks ahead.
Sam was nothing if not persistent, and he ended up spending many months in the fertile kelp fields perfecting his fish catching methods. Luckily, the local fish were too stupid to figure out that this new creature sharing their space wasn't just here for the hell of it. He was training himself. Every time he saw a new bottom dwelling animal, he figured out what it liked to eat, and then used that knowledge against it to catch it. Eating it wasn't even important to him anymore. He found himself invigorated in the challenges ahead of him. Almost forgetting why he's out here all alone to begin with.

He'd remember suddenly, and painfully, when he would finally catch a sly eel or something tricky, and turn around to show off his accomplishment to his waiting brother. Pausing in mid turn to remember that he had no one to show. No one to share in the joy of his accomplishment. No one to feed his new catch to.

Frowning to himself, he sat hunched over his prize and ate it without any of the mirth he'd felt just seconds ago. Staring at the wide arrangement of tools and hooks at his new nest site. He'd even tied up a few larger fish by their tails to save for a later meal. Keeping them alive but strung up to make sure the meat doesn't spoil before he can get to it. He made sure that when he tied them up to not hurt them at all. If they cut their scales or fins on the kelp rope, the blood seeping out would just attract predator fish who would make short work of the trapped animals. But, there were no real large predators here that were big enough for him to be concerned with, so he let himself get lazy. A dangerous mistake that could have meant his end.

Sam chastised himself and looked far above him at the tops of the tall kelp that reached towards the surface light above. A few jellyfish floated on by between the kelp and he sighed at the beautiful sight.

Several more months pass and he saw his first shark. It was half his length but it jarred him from his sleepy haze. He felt his heart rate pick up and his breaths quicken at the sight. It was several dozen tail lengths above him and paid him no mind. Merely passing through.

He felt his face redden at the realization that he spent far too long here. Ignoring his mission. He was supposed to be out there, killing the things that killed his brother. Hunting the floating things that attacked and killed his parents. The things that threaten all Merpeople.

Sam scowled at the sleek predator and haphazardly reached for his pole hook and charged up at the shark, taking it by surprise as his hook lodged into its side. The pole was yanked towards himself to get the hook as deep as possible before Sam flipped himself up and over it, ending up closer to its tail as the thrashing shark kept whipping around. Sam let go of the pole once he got his prey into a good angle and dove his claws into its gills. Doing the same moves he recalled Dean doing in his own fight those many months ago, and ending the shark's life quickly. Sam kept growling the whole while, cursing it out for killing his brother and loosing himself to the frenzy just like a shark would. Coming back to reality when his arms were pulled from the shark's limp body. Covered in its thick blood.

Sam pulled away from the body and watched it float downwards in the water, moving with the soft currents. Memories he'd pushed back for months coming at him in rapid succession. Dean's plea for him to escape, the sharks that fed on the two bodies as they drifted lifelessly down to the abyss. His parent's bodies being dragged away and followed by thousands of predators in the blood red waters.

Sam turned and fled for his makeshift nest. Crying the whole way for Dean. For his brother to come back to him. To say it was all some elaborate joke. A training lesson their dad set up to teach them how to survive on their own. For Dean to come out and say he was proud of his brother for
making it this far, and that it was safe to come home. That his mother and father were waiting for him with open arms.

But Dean didn't come. Didn't answer his loud calls. Never again would comfort his little brother. Dean had died.

And Sam was still alone.

Sleep came eventually to him, but in the morning, he decided he no longer wanted to stay here. Stuck to catching these specific fish for the rest of his life? No. He had a job to do and he'd been avoiding it. Part of his mind speaking up and saying that he wasn't avoiding it, he just didn't have the skills to move on until now. Since moving to this area, he'd doubled in length and weight. Filling meals and little stress meant he could grow easier than before. His muscles filling out where there once had been baby fat.

He wiped a tear from his eyes when he realized he'd done it, he had grown bigger than his big brother. He was stronger and tougher than Dean was.

And if Dean could take on that huge shark, Sam would have no problem doing it too. It helped ease his mind. Make him less scared of the future out there. He made up a new improved kelp bag since his old two pocketed one had disintegrated awhile ago, and packed up all of his belongings in it, despite the fact that the knives that filled his hands before, were only as long as his fingers now. They were still very precious to him. Dean made a couple of them and he would not carelessly abandon them just because he didn't have to rely on them anymore. His first two claws were now easily longer than some of the knife blades. His shark tooth necklace was reformed again and he wore it with pride. It was time to move on from this place and hunt down his prey.

He headed out, packed bags strapped along his back over his shoulders, between his wing fins. He gripped the small pole hook in his hands. It was smaller to him now, but would get the job done.

He was done waiting, now he was hunting.

Sam had been on his own for nine months when he first felt it. This strange pull on his heart. He figured it was something stupid his mind was creating out of the boredom of swimming, and ignored the feeling. He had grown even more, filling out the lean fin and tail muscles with the new foods and challenges. Sam was teaching himself how to survive in each new environment. Killing every shark that he saw on the way. Only leaving the ones he was sure he wouldn't win in a fight. Memorizing the area to come back her later to take it, and others like it, out when he's older and larger. As time went on, that list grew smaller and smaller. There wasn't much that could harm him now. He bided his time before he'd head towards where he thought the Merpeople lived. His parents just said it was so deep, there was no real light down there except for the random patches of glowing plants and a few of the animals. Merpeople could still see down there, but, apparently not as clearly as he could now. Relying more on their chirps and clicks to find out where objects were. Sam knew he wasn't there yet because he could still make out his surroundings during the day. He'd just have to keep traveling, growing, learning and getting stronger. Until then, it was quiet and lonely.

Sometimes he'd talk to himself just to hear another voice in the waters, but after awhile, he stopped doing that since he had nothing new to add to the one sided conversations. Besides, his voice scared away the good fish.

Sam had searched for so long for those massive floating things but never saw one. Floating or
sunk. He waited and waited and heard no sign of another Merperson either. Even when the oceans were growing darker and darker as he went.

He felt that pull waver the next day before becoming slightly stronger again. Sam laid in his temporary bed and his brow scrunch together. Feeling a tingle of fear attached to it but nothing around him explained the feeling at all. He was unprotected sure, but, that didn't really bother him anymore. The pull on his chest, the feeling of dread... It was probably something he ate. He turned over and fell asleep again.

After only a week that nagging pull stopped abruptly. Sam was right in the middle of hunting down a decent sized shark when the absence of it hit him like a tail slap and knocked him back a few fins.

The shark got away and he scowled after it. Turning to face where the pull had been located. It had been so annoying at first, but it also helped him out in telling directions during the hunts for the last week. Knowing which way he's facing by using the pull as a guiding beacon of sorts.

He forgot about it a few days later.

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There was a bright light that blinded him. Deafening sounds coming from all directions and he cried a shrill piercing sound. Everything was cold and bright and hurt. Why does it all hurt? Then something wrapped around him and he felt gravity pull on him towards something large and pale colored topped with dark brown. Something was drying out his skin and he hated it. It scratched at his skin and made everything feel rubbed raw. He missed the feel of water, he felt like he was dying without it.

He saw images clear slightly but it was still so cold here and the lights hurt his new eyes. His cries continued, trying desperately to tell someone, anyone that he's in such intense pain. But all he heard between his cries was soft urgent hushing noises in tones and patterns he didn't recognize.

He was brought closer to a large figure that held him tight. Felt a few drops of something land on his forehead. Aiming his large head upwards towards the moisture. Pausing his cries in complete surprise at the scent and taste of those salty droplets when they fell on his face and into his mouth on accident. The being holding him cried almost as hard as he had and he felt such sorrow coming from them too. His own cries never really stopping, only lessening to aching whimpers.

He became aware of other beings hovering around and above him, shapes and colors that assaulted his eyes when they forced them open. He wailed and screamed, never-ending pain coming from within and out. Fingers prodded his stomach and those sounds the beings were making didn't help ease his mind at all. More fingers, more huge beings and finally his eyes cleared enough to see concerned faces all around him. Talking in sounds he didn't hope to understand. To others, to him, to the one holding him in her strong arms.

Her long brown hair hung from her head instead of floating around weightless like it should. Nothing felt right. He felt so heavy here. His limbs refused to move how he wanted them even when they weren't bound to his chest. His cried became more fearful at the thought of being tied down.
He tasted something warm and different in his mouth when something round was pushed into it. It had a strange thick quality to it but he couldn't deny that his body craved the white liquid somehow. Instinct drove him to suckle at the round thing in his face and he felt himself calming down for the first time after waking up in this terrifying nightmare.

He felt fingers card over his head and the very few strands of hair there. Blinking the tears out of his eyes to try and focus on where he was, the harsh brightness was blessedly gone now. A face was above him and he tried to make it out in the dark. It was unfamiliar to him but something told him that this was his mother. But that couldn't be. His mother had blond hair and was far far larger than this being. His mother certainly never had these round things on her chest that she forced into his mouth. Her ears weren't rounded at the top like this being, and from what he could see, she didn't have any means of breathing either. He felt fear of and for her.

He tried to figure out what was going on, but it was all simply too much trauma for his new mind, and he fell into a fitful sleep. The pain in his stomach lessening but never really going away.

The next day was more the same. His skin hurt from the lack of water and his chest ached with the dryness. But nothing, absolutely nothing compared to the pain coming from his stomach. He cried for a long time, hoping that these beings would understand that he's trying to tell them that there's something terribly wrong with him. But all he gets is more of the white chest liquid and finger prods. Questioning sounds from his new mother to other creatures that look similar to her but have hair on their faces.

They put some foul tasting liquid in his mouth and he spit it up before they did it again, holding his mouth open and nearly making him choke on it before he felt it slip down his throat. Gagging the whole while as his mother cooed at him with tears in her own eyes too. He swallowed just to get them to stop and they finally moved back away from him. Whatever it was made him drowsy and lessened his stomach pains for a short while. Drifting in and out of sleep but aware enough to know that those others were still there, hovering nearby, talking to each other with those low murmuring growls.

He was shocked when he finally woke up enough to see how these things were moving around. They had two long things below their waists and each one bent in the middle. He was so mesmerized by it that he forgot about his stomach pains as he stared in awe.

New terror hit him all at once as the blurred images came into better clarity. Whatever it was that they gave him to calm him down was wearing off as panic hit him again. He was surrounded by strange things, in a cave with too many unnaturally straight angles and creatures with two tails and covered in materials he'd never seen before and spoke in low growls instead of clicks and... and... all he wanted was to just curl up in his nest and be safe again! To be surrounded by sea water and just go home!

This isn't his mother, this isn't his home, he can't even move at all here!

His cries became more terrified and shrill and lasted for several days as his body gave up and started to shut down. His young mind was unable to cope with any of this and he almost welcomed the darkness that clouded his vision and pulled him into sleep for the last time.

The last thing to go was his hearing, his mother's weeping voice repeating his name and other sounds he figured out the meaning for days ago, from just hearing them so many times from her and the others.

“Dean, I'm so sorry, baby, I know it hurts. Please stay with me... stay awake.... Dean.... Dean.......DEAN!..... stay!.... stay....” and then there was blissful nothingness.
Chapter End Notes

WTF is going on?!

Dean's second life doesn't last long so.... try, try again!
Chapter Summary

Dean finds himself in another body, another life, then another and another. Sam can't figure out what that pull means, but is grateful that it's kept him company this last century.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter Six:

Growing pains

Sam felt the pull again nine months after it'd stopped. He could have sworn it had originally come from one direction, where the sun rose, but... that must not have been right because now it was a bit more to the left of it. No matter. He grinned at the idea that he could use that strange pull again when he hunts just like last time. He kinda remembers how helpful it was.

Sam started to wonder if it was just a sign of maturity for Merpeople. Growing into his internal navigation. He never heard anything quite like this tugging feeling from his parents or Dean before they died... at least, he's pretty sure he didn't. But, that didn't mean that they didn't experience it as well. It probably just meant that they died before they could tell him about it. Or were waiting for him to become of age. Sam grinned to himself. Becoming a Merman.

That night, Sam woke up with a start from a nightmare he was having. Remembering Dean's terrified face so clearly as he sank into the deeps, being consumed by fish and sharks. He wept hard that dark, depressing night when he added up all the months and realized that he was older than Dean was when he died. Not just larger than his older brother, but older now too. If Dean was alive again right now, Sam would be the big brother. That thought haunted him for the next few days. That pull ever present and reminding him on a daily basis now that he's older than Dean. His head kept on repeating the thoughts in different ways since he didn't really have anything else to distract him.

He'd grown more mature than his strong brother. Dean never had to face the wide ocean alone. Had to kill sharks on a near daily basis. Or to craft new weapons just to catch his food that liked to hide in tiny cracks and caves. Sam's life now was harder than his brother's ever had been. If only because he was doing it without anyone else around to help or to even just to talk to.

Sam longed for other Mers more that night than the ones previous. Feeling more alone every day. The pull was a constant feeling in his gut and he wondered if it will go away again after a week like last time. At least it's kind of keeping him company on this long swim. The dead fish in his
bags weren't providing much in the way off commentary. He hummed to himself a few songs that he remembered from when he was little. Repeating them on a loop so he doesn't forget.

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Dean's new life started much the same as the last one but this time he didn't hurt near as much. His skin was dry again and very uncomfortable, but at least his stomach aches were limited to just the lack of food, and that was fixed right away when his mother angled his face towards those round things on her chest. Dean suckled at them tentatively, vaguely remembering how it had helped ease some of the pain before, and was surprised at the sense of calm that settled around him. Letting his body take over the actions.

Dean couldn't see very well at all, but he sensed that she was smiling warmly at him and petting his head and hands as he drank till he was overfull. He was suddenly hoisted up over her shoulder and felt his back being patted harshly.

He had a moment of panic at the sensations, knowing that those moves were surely going to hurt his back fin but he felt nothing there. The pats continued and he felt something move up from his stomach towards his throat and fought it back down. Whining and starting to cry at the battle between the pats on his back and that foreign bloated feeling in his gut. He didn't have to understand the words to know that his mother was urging him to let it happen and suddenly out came a burst of air from his stomach along with a small dribble of the white liquid. His mother congratulated him and brought him back down to rest on her chest again. Wiping off his mouth with something soft and rocking him gently.

Dean listened to the all new set of voices around him and absently noted to himself that they sounded different. A different language altogether? His mother repeated the word 'Ina' at him and he quickly deduced that was the word for Mama. Huh. Ok. At least now he's got someone willing to teach him the important stuff instead of just poking and prodding him like the last time.

Over the weeks he'd picked up more and more of the language as Ina and the family talked around him. He picked up that his name was Dowan, because he sounded like he was singing when he was crying. Dean spent a long time trying to get used to the name. It never felt right though.

He was just so thrilled that he felt very little pain, and hoped that that meant that he could focus easier. His eyes were blurry, but he made out the face of his new mama and blinked at her light brown skin. She made shushing sounds at his confused whines and he settled back down, drinking the white liquid. He felt safe here, loved. Even if he only just met these people, he felt connected to them. His mind still trying to recall why he thought the things he did. Sure that the other beings wouldn't be so disjointed from their bodies like he is of his own body.

Dean was so very confused... but warm, and he let himself be lulled into a dozing slumber.

The biggest shock came when Mama lifted him up suddenly and brought him to his own soft nest that was made of that same material that he'd felt her wearing. She unraveled his own modest coverings to reveal his lower half and his two tails.

Dean couldn't believe what he was looking at. He sort of remembers the other time before, feeling constricted in that wide white material, and in such intense pain that he never really had the brain power to do a full study of his own body. Now since he felt no pain, he had the wherewithal to
really take a good look. It worried him and he whined pitifully. He wanted his tail back, his back fin, he wanted to swim in the water again. His hands barely obeyed what he wanted them to do but he got them to hit the two tails in dismay, grunting and whining that it wasn't fair. He startled when his tails began to move like he'd seen crabs do back home when they're on their backs. Staring in shock at how they bent backwards in the middle then forwards towards the end. Dean scowled at them. He'd be a terrible swimmer with these things.

His Mama lifted up each pudgy tail and wiggled them happily at his scowling face. He felt every one of her fingers on each tail and was soon entranced at how the sensations were lining up to what he was seeing. His Mama kept on talking to him in soft coo's and happy sounds as her hands trailed down his tails to the rounded fins at the bottom. Five on each tail. Each one stubby and bending strangely. Almost like... fingers. But... fingers at the end of the tails.

He watched as her hands very gently engulfed the ends of his two tails and wiggled them about all while she sang a happy little song. She repeated a few words as she fiddled with the tails and he soon learned that they were called *legs*, and the parts at the end were called *feetsies*. She moved on to the short stubby fins and called them *toesies*. Dean wanted to learn more about his own body but she just covered him back up again after wiping off his middle section and wrapping it up in white material called a diaper.

It was amazing to him how much more he was learning this time, now that he wasn't in such intense pain. Her soft brown eyes and medium brown skin matched his own as well as the few others that came by the next few days to see him. No one was any other color besides the brown and sand toned, and he wondered if he'd ever see anyone with blue, or green, skin and scales again.

A jolt went through him when he remembered the reason why he was thinking these things. *He had a life very different from this before.* A family. His mother and father, a little brother. He had to get back to them!

He struggled with the material he was wrapped up in and started to cry when nothing was working. His new mother hushed him and brought him back up for cuddling but he wasn't having it. Dean needed to go back to his first home. Needed to take care of his little brother. Needed to return to the ocean, not sit here in this soft nest with useless 'legs' and 'feetsies'.

He cried for hours from frustration. No one was understanding him at all. His mouth refused to work right. He couldn't click, whistle, or even speak, let alone speaking like they do. When he finally got his own hand into his mouth on purpose, to try and figure out why, he didn't even feel any sharp teeth. It was all useless gums. He sighed angrily at being so helpless.

His mother changed his 'clothes' again and kept on talking to the others in the room. He was suddenly passed around to the others that sat in a wide circle, and felt fear shoot down his spine at the new stranger in front of him. He fussed and complained but they kept on cooing loudly in his face as they pinched his cheeks and toyed with his claw-less hands. Everyone repeating his new name, Dowan, like it was supposed to mean something to him. He was passed around again, and again, until it grew late in the day and he was finally allowed to go to bed. His crying and fighting finally winning him a break from all the attention. Mama's solution was more of the chest liquid and he was just too tired to fight any more tonight.

All in all, he figured it could be worse, but, he missed his home. Missed his real parents and especially his little brother. He couldn't remember what happened though. Why he was here and not there. He hoped it would be clearer in the morning.

It wasn't.
Days and soon months pass in much the same way as the others, and Dowan was growing slowly into a young boy. Life here wasn't easy, but, at least he had food when he asked for it, homemade toys he could play with, and friends he had made in the crowded camp. Learning how to live in this new world was tough. For some reason, light skinned people he met treated him differently than they treated other light skinned people. Called him names like injun, muck, and savage. Dowan repeated them at home to have the weird words explained to him, and got a spanking for it. That wasn't fair at all.

He didn't understand what the big deal was in skin colors. He learned that the light sand colored people were 'white' and he was 'red'. Which, well, didn't fit either color description very well. He'd say, sand and clay, but, his friends just laughed at that and he dared them to come up with better.

Thinking about skin colors jogged a half forgotten memory of skins and scales of blues and greens. Usually coming to him in dreams, but it was getting harder and harder to put faces to them. Dowan knew they were very important and dear to him, but he just couldn't remember... it would be right there. Staring him in the face when he's dreaming, but the moment he wakes, it's gone. All he's left with is this feeling of loss and sadness. He knew he missed seeing them. But he couldn't really say who they were.

Mama never really understood. She kept saying it was just the way the world is. Everyone looses everyone. The People were being shoved out of more and more of their land. He felt like he was loosing more than just a place to call home. He felt like he was loosing more of himself the older he gets. Many things were being taken from the People. Like, the lake he went to since he was able to walk. Seven years spent playing there with his friends and now they're not allowed in it anymore.

He missed being in water. Bath time was his favorite now, but it never lasted long enough. The round metal wash tub never deep enough. There was a large wide well that they were allowed to use close to the white settlement, but he heard it was going to be filled in so a better one could be made further outside of the town for the People. Mama didn't look convinced, but still let him swim in the old one along with all of the other kids before it got filled up.

He hadn't been anywhere near deep water for years, and now he was ready to really swim. But his mama insisted that he never went into the deeper end of it where the big kids were. He was a natural at swimming and tried to show off his skills, but, his mama would chide him on being reckless and pull him back to the shallow end.

When Dowan was eleven years old when there was a fight that was going on outside. Loud angry voices that echoed everywhere. His mama was ticked off at the arguments that almost never stop. The whites coming more often and ordering the People to do this or that or else. She muttered to herself about the white General being a jackass as she set up the table and was just about to call him over to eat when a loud bang rang through the air from outside their home. A hole punched through the thick canvas walls, and then several more followed after in a haphazard line leading to the next home. A scream rang out into the night outside along with heavy thumping boots running away.

Dowan fell over onto his side, pain slicing up through his back in white hot waves. He screamed out for Mama. He couldn't move his legs at all and he felt his body quickly grow numb. His mama was at his side in seconds, cradling him in her lap as she cried out for help, for someone to go out and fetch the doctor from town. Pushing some cloth into the hole in his back to stop the bleeding. Dowan didn't feel much pain after just a few minutes and said, “It's ok, Mama. It doesn't even hurt now.”
Dowan gasped for breath and tried to smile at her to make her feel better but he couldn't feel his head anymore. Everything fading away. He died in her arms.

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A little over a decade had passed since this pull started up again, and Sam is now three times the size he'd been starting out. His growth spurt drastically slowing down now that he's roughly 14 feet long. That pull had become a constant in these years. So reliable and a comfort that when it vanished again, he felt it like a sledgehammer to his chest. The loss of it was great and he went into a grief filled rage at it's absence. Destroying the cave he'd called home for the last few years. Smashing it to rubble with his tail and fists. He thought he'd have at least that one thing to stay by his side. Reminded of other things he'd lost.

Sam didn't know why he felt so distraught over loosing that pull. It felt like he'd lost a part of himself. He dreamed of his family again. Having nearly forgotten what they looked like. Dean's face was still clearer than his parents. His voice in Sam's head when he's debating with himself. Dean's absence felt harder to bear now that the pull is gone. Like he was leaving Sam alone all over again.

The same nightmares playing out. Ones Sam thought he was over and done with long ago. It was a few weeks before he got back into his normal routines again. Searching for other Merpeople, the floating things, and, killing as many sharks as he can along the way.

When the pull happens again it's only a few months later. Sam wasn't expecting it so soon and was so surprised that he barely got a fix on it's new location before it suddenly stopped again. He was too confused at what that all meant. The other two times, it was nine months later.

He was deep in a trench at the time and had no way of telling where the sun was to get a good idea where the pull had been. He forced himself not to think too hard on it and went back to his hunt. That giant squid stole his lunch and he wasn't going to let that crime slide.

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Dean had learned a lot about all kinds of humans and the dry world in general from his 11 year long life before. Enough to know that this time around, he was definitively NOT a human. He was in fact, something small and furry, and that the thing that was swooping down on him wasn't his mother, but, a large brown owl. He squeaked out a curse he'd remembered hearing the whites say in the last life, since he wasn't in this one long enough to learn the new language, let alone its curses. The talons came down sharp and fast. 'Son of a Bit -!'
Nine months later and there's that pull again. Sam grinned to himself at the familiar feeling of it. How it was on time this time around. He'd grown to miss it. This time, the pull was closer to where the sun sets. He slept good that night and in the morning decided to head off in that rough direction for a few days before eventually changing his mind. Nothing much to look at that way anyway, and food was getting a little scarce. He turned north for better hunting grounds.

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Dean was born and raised into a fairly wealthy family that had owned a small business that specialized in nice horse carriages for small towns in the Michigan territory which had been Illinois territory just a few years ago. The maps were changing rapidly as the Americans headed west, gobbling up land faster than they can put a name to it.

Dean's young heart hurt whenever he heard of the displaced injuns, but couldn't explain why he sometimes felt more connected to them than his own family. Eventually growing used to the way things were, and adapting along with everyone else as things changed around them.

A few towns were established that grew to accommodate the many families that went west to stake their claims. Needing a place to buy supplies and trade goods. Dean's family just happened to specialize in horse buggies and stagecoaches, which were always needed and wanted, and were chomping at the bit to get a branch of their business established in the new territory.

Dean didn't care for the business end of the trade much. More interested in constructing, and figuring up new designs. Learning everything there was to know from his older family members and any old timer willing to stretch their jowls at him. Dean was a quick study, and soaked up the wisdom they passed down. He left the paperwork and letters to his older sisters, and took on the harder physical tasks of breaking in the wild mustangs. Dean loved getting out and followed his uncles when they went finding good lumber from the mills and even the local woods, for the latest carriage designs.

He also love riding their horses around to give them exercise and to see the wild lands around the growing city before it's all turned to farmland.

Each carriage had to be measured for the different breeds people may own, so they had a dozen of the more common breeds in the stable. Dean had the idea of a room to show off their best buggies, carriages, and stagecoaches, and was thrilled his family went with the idea. He liked painting the outsides black when they were done being constructed. Spending hours making sure the paint didn't drip and held a nice glossy shine to it.

Modest yet pretty little things that the average homestead could purchase and not break the bank. Each one was custom built and it was Dean's job to go out and find the best wood from a nearby forest for the seats. It had to be hardwood and his dad had a penchant for knotholes and 'character' in the wood.

Dean spent many days chopping down promising looking trees and splitting them lengthwise to see what secrets they held within. He had rigged up an old grain mill to sand the rough hewn lumber into a smoother finish as a quick and dirty way of prepping the wood. There was no sense spending hours getting it into the right thickness and size if the wood grain or knots didn't look appealing enough.
After decades, Dean could just about look at a standing tree and know what it would look like on the inside, and his skills expanded into other artistic fields. His friends told their friends about his talent and soon he was hired by a fair number of people to find the best lumber for their projects.

The territory had changed names two more times until it was finally named as the state of Wisconsin in 1846, and just days later, after the celebrations had died down, Dean's father passed away. The business was left to his uncle who let it slide into obscurity.

Dean insisted his sisters take over before their name was tarnished any more, since they were basically running it anyway, and they quickly agreed. It bounced back almost immediately once word spread that the old owner was cut out. They only needed Dean's good name on the papers because having a woman run business was just out of the question. He kept publicly praising his siblings for their many skills and knowledge, but some people were adamant that they'd rather have a man in charge than woman.

Dean made appearances when he had to, and helped where he could, but, his older sisters had it taken care of and he was so very proud of them. Spreading the seeds of change whenever he could to point out that the womenfolk were harder working than some menfolk and that they deserved equal respect.

Dean retired at 50 to live comfortably in the budding town of Janesville.

He met a lovely widower who he could talk to, and married her a few years later. Dean and Cassondra never had their own children, but their small house was a good place for the local children to play after school, before the coal mines switched shifts. Dean likes kids and they helped fill the void his wife said she felt sometimes.

Dean could feel his years adding up and wanted to explore the world, but, arthritis hit him hard when he was in his late 70's. He settled for looking at the world outside his sitting room window. Listening to the youngsters play in the downstairs sitting room. Cassondra acting the part of grandmother to anyone who walked in the door.

Dean would smoke his cigars with Robert on the front porch whenever the wily upstart would come by for more of Dean's ideas. Neither Dean nor Robert put a name to it, but they both knew that the kid was his apprentice of sorts.

Robert told the old man that he should really take a trip into town and see what the latest craze was. Dean reluctantly said yes, his curiosity getting the better of him. He was not disappointed.

Dean shook his head pleasantly at the notion of horseless buggies that were all the talk in the big city. He'd seen a demonstration of one of them there. Fascinated by the steam powered engine and that sleek black paint. Overall, it resembled a normal fancy carriage, but with a larger front compartment for the steam engine. He wondered if they will ever improve on the old reliable carriage design. Coming up with a couple ideas for them for fun. Drawing them up for his kin that were still making the buggies back home. Insisting in his letters to try and switch gears and work with the closest manufacturer of the horseless carriages. The future is there. He can feel it. It's not a passing craze like his wife Cassondra said.

Dean missed riding the horses in his younger years, but couldn't deny the allure of having a motorized buggy. Betting that they could eventually go faster than even his prize horses, getting up to 40 or even 50 miles per hour. What a ride that would be! He spent hours working fervently on the designs, writing notes and ideas all down on paper. Instructions for Robert to build his mechanical opus.
His medicine bottle was forgotten in the parlor in his haste to get everything written down.

Dean died at 87 in his sleep with a smile on his face. Knowing that the future looked bright.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was hard for different reasons. Mostly it was the RESEARCH I had to do. I didn't want to screw anything up and ended up rewriting like half of this chapter. maybe 3/4ths. I dunno. A lot of work went into it and I suspect even more for the following chapters. I'm still going to go off script history wise just because I don't want to turn this into a wikipedia. It's fanfic. I just wanted to set the tone.

I tried to be vague with Dean's history but there are many facts in there I tried to slip in. I know the years for the events I just couldn't figure out how to put in the year or date without it offsetting the pace of the story. Especially since it's rare to find people that know the exact date of things if they are just kids at the time. Dean's life as Dowan started in about 1803. Died in 1814 - many Native Americans died when the whites went west. Dean just got caught in the crossfire. He was Sioux, and Dowan is a popular Sioux name for boys that means singer. (Just now realized it could be like, Bobby Singer - later Bobby adopts him as pseudo-son... anyway.)

Janesville Wisconsin is where the Impala was first built. Dean settles there in the next longer life. It became a town in the 1830's. That area really did go through several different name changes within a short amount of time. when Dean's an old man, is about the time when the first steam powered automobiles were being introduced. Obviously Dean would be interested. Robert, his apprentice, is, you guessed it, Bobby Singer in a previous life. Sometimes souls just gravitate back to each other. At least in my world they do!

Cassondra is Cassie from season one of Supernatural, but I left her ethnicity out because it would still be taboo for a white man to marry a black woman in the late 1800's. Hell, people still have a problem with it hundreds of years later. :( If Dean can be Sioux in one life, Cassondra can be white in this time. And Yes, Dean was a squirrel in that one very very brief life. RIP baby squirrel. Dean hates heights from here on. (morbid thought)

Reminder that Sam grows more or less one foot longer every year so in the next chapter he'll be roughly 100 feet long.
Chapter Summary

Salty Dog: definition: A sailor, especially a man, who is older and/or has had a lot of experience on the seas. I think that defines Sam pretty well, considering. and well... Dean is literally a... - I'll let you figure it out ;)

The other potential chapter title was going to be "Sick as a Dog" but that didn't have pizazz.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter Seven:

Salty Dog

This time, the pull didn't stop for Sam for 87 years.

He had honored his parent's death again when he'd turned older than both of them. They said they were in their seventies, if he remembered right, and he was currently in his very late 90's. He was the longest living member of their little family and he hated it. He didn't feel as strong as they were in his memories and he was disappointed in himself for never finding the floating things that took his parents away.

He saw plenty of those vessels on the ocean floor but his memories were so fuzzy now for those specific floating things, he couldn't tell anymore if these were the same ones or not. They looked fatter than the ones before, with many strange metal and wooden containers strewn about of all different colors but the same basic rounded shapes with flat ends. Sometimes he'd run into a freshly sunken one and see and taste things that seeped out of the containers. It made his head feel fuzzy so he never stuck around for long. Burying them in sand and rocks kept the foul clouds of liquid and things from spreading. He felt the need to protect the areas from contamination. Making it a point to bury nearly every formerly floating thing to keep the area clean whenever he ran across one in his travels. It's not like the local wildlife can move several tonnes of sand and rocks to cover them up so he would take a day and help them out. If nothing else, it gave him something to do, and he felt better afterwards.

His nomadic lifestyle kept him moving. Hardly ever venturing close to the surface. Every time he did, he became immensely depressed. Thinking about his childhood and what he'd lost due to being close to the surface. So he decided to only go up and take a look at the lighter waters twice a year. There was no reason to spend every waking moment looking for a floating thing that probably sank decades ago. He was learning that the ocean is a mighty big place and the odds of finding his
parent's murderers were slim to none. He had no way of knowing how long those things would last, but he's seen enough now to know that nothing lasts forever. His kind lives longer than most, so he's already had experience watching the 'indestructible' fade and crumble.

In that long time since the pull started till ending nearly 90 years later, he had actually found another Pod of Merpeople a few years back. Alleviating some of his perpetual loneliness.

He had been on his own for so long that the Pod elders were extremely wary of him. For what reason - he didn't know at first, just they were pretty damned insistent that he leaves them alone. Several started to swim protective circles around the smaller, younger ones as if Sam was going to attack. They weren't outright hostile, but if they felt threatened enough, they could easily kill Sam. He was just one facing a whole Pod alone. They were more scared than anything so Sam knew not to push right now, and agreed to give them space.

With a sad heart, he had left for a few days. He couldn't stay gone forever though, his need to connect with someone couldn't be ignored. Not now that he FINALLY found his own kind out here in the vast ocean. He'd never met any of his kind outside of his family and was entranced at the diversity and behavior they showed in that brief meeting. So many sizes, shapes, and colors of Merpeople. He had to see more, to just talk to his own kind. To connect. His mind was buzzing with all the possibilities and refused to let it go.

Maybe Sam could even find someone special to bond with? That thought came out of nowhere and he couldn't say he opposed it. Latching onto the idea with a white knuckled grip. It would be wonderful to not be so alone.

Sam trailed behind the Pod when they moved to a new location. No doubt trying to distance themselves from where they'd met the over 80 ft long stranger. Sam felt that he could win them over if he could learn more about them and their ways. He had to admit, he was a little rusty on how Mers should act around others. So Sam set about watching and listening in on their conversations out of sight and hidden. Staying down current from them to hide his scent and presence better. His mind whirling and clutching at the chance to learn something new again.

Something called a 'humans' had hunted all the fish in their old living area and the Pod was down several members. There had been a stench in the water apparently, and several of them got sick after eating the few remaining fish in the area.

Something about a blight had hit the surviving Merpeople and now that he was looking closer at them, he saw the circles of dark scale rot on their tails and fins. Never realizing that it wasn't just their normal spots and colorization.

At that first meeting, he hadn't noticed the spots of scale rot because he was just so shocked to see others of his own kind. Sam feels a little guilty but, he's kinda glad they drove him away now. Sam had a brief bout of mild fin rot in his thirties and did not want to go through that again. Besides, this blight looked like it was far more extreme. Covering large swaths of area on a few of them, and only a few speckles on others.

Sam still followed along at a much larger, safer, distance. Silently trailing after the Pod for a few months and feeling a sense of calm come over his mind at the closeness. He was spotted a few times, but no one dared to go talk to him directly. Fear or something else entirely, he didn't know.

The elders warned their own against meeting with him again and again. A few of the teens and 20 something Merkids would rebel against the orders in small ways, conversing much louder than normal about where to find good food when he was noticed nearby or about anything they thought he'd like to hear. Everyone knows that loners go crazy and they didn't want that for him.
It helped Sam, more than he knew at the time. His whole being felt calmer, happier. Resetting him back to normal. He wished he could converse back, but settled for hand signals and gestures when no one else but them were looking.

Sam dared call them friends even if they all kept their distance. Sam sometimes would swim ahead of the Pod and leave gifts for them in conspicuous areas. Too small for the elders to notice but not for the Merkids. A pile of large flat rocks forming a cave for them to explore, or a freshly killed shark for them to dine on. Little things that were easy for him to set up and move back and watch them find. It amused him and he waited for them to look around at the horizon before spotting him and giving a friendly wave. He could see that their lives were getting rough, and wanted to make them happy in any way he can without adding stress to the sick ones. If he was found out, no doubt they'd panic and think he was setting up a trap when that couldn't be farther from the truth. Sam had to be sneaky to be kind.

However, when he witnessed the elders start to die, one by one, he felt like he was intruding on them. He wanted to help the elders too, but with scale rot - there was nothing they could do. It was a horrible disease that kills the Merperson slowly and painfully. If they didn't heal themselves, they would die. He finally noticed that there were no young hatchlings in the Pod at all, and after creeping closer to overhear a few more conversations, knew now that they died first. It wasn't fair. His few friends stopped venturing to the edge of the Pod to talk, growing weak very quickly. The spots covering nearly their whole bodies. He left more and more food gifts for them to run into, but saw that after just a few days, none of the food offerings were being taken. He swam around them several times when the Pod stopped completely. Sam was desperate for any sign of his friends. But sadly, the only clue he saw was a line of small piles of disturbed sand, surrounded by smooth colorful rocks that hadn't been there before.

Sam was devastated.

He left them alone for a few days, trying to come to terms with how cruel the ocean was for taking the children. His friends. It wasn't fair. They were just kids!

Sam figured out what he wanted to say, returning again to give condolences, only to find only a couple of them left. Muttering and rambling to themselves as their fins shed blackened scales into the ocean waves and small fish ate what drifted their way. Scratching at themselves to get rid of the sickness but only making it worse and worse. The bodies of the rest of the Pod were only half buried in the sand, as if the remaining two even forgot how to do that. Or maybe the surviving Mers just ran out of strength to move enough sand to cover them all. Fish were starting to swarm the area and drawing in a few predators as well. So far, the predators were ignoring the last two sick Mers, in favor of easier meals.

Sam couldn't swim around waiting for their turn to come next. They were too far beyond his help. He didn't have it in him to kill them either. Even if it would be a mercy, he might get infected too. The sickness didn't care who it came for, and he hated himself for thinking of himself first, but, it was the truth. He wasn't suicidal, and those two didn't seem to even be conscious of their own actions. Too far gone. Practically dead already.

Sam nearly threw up at the sight.

Too horrible for words.

Remembering how his own family were eaten by fish, he fled the area that night.

Screaming at the injustice of it all. No one deserved to die like that. For the whole Pod to die like
that. He couldn't even risk burying the dead because there was no telling if he'd get sick being that close to the dead. He had to leave and he hated himself for it. A part of him hoping that one day he'll be forgiven for his actions, but knowing that unless he finds someone else, he was the only one out here to do the forgiving. And that was not something he could do. Maybe not ever.

He was tempted to try and find another Pod, but after the tragedy that hit that other one, he was scared that he would somehow spread it to the new one. If he was immune to it himself, but still carried it within him. He had to keep himself distant to save others until he was certain that this version of fin rot didn't transfer from them to him.

He'd seen a lot in his years, and even spent a bit of time studying a small group of starfish out of boredom once. A similar blight hit them and he noticed that one was fine but all other's that contacted it became sickly looking. He didn't have a name for it, but that event stuck with him through the years. Pitying the healthy one that couldn't interact with any of it's own kind. He forced himself to kill it as well as the sick ones to keep it from spreading the disease any further.

It took him a little while to realize that this sort of thing happens all the time, and that knowledge came in handy now. He wouldn't risk spreading this blight to others. Feeling like that little starfish, all alone. How it might be better off for other Merpeople if he's left all alone. A few years pass with him sequestering himself away from the area he guessed the Pod came from and where they went. Making damn sure that the disease would die off without any new Mers to infect. Time seemed to move faster, tracked by the tides and temperatures of the water, the migrations of animals.

When the pull had stopped after those 87 long years from it's start, he took it as a sign that it was all over for him as well. All those other times that the pull started and stopped, might have been just because he was still growing. But now, he was just over a hundred feet long. And roughly 100 years old. There was no reason for the pull to suddenly stop now. He must have gotten the sickness from that Pod and it just took longer for him to show the effects.

He found a nice quiet place to rest and waited for the fin rot to finally take hold, but thankfully it never did. He waited another week before moving on, just in case. Checking his fins obsessively for weeks after that.

Two months after the pull ended, it was right there again. Shorter wait time this time around made him question if he really did loose it to begin with, or if he had been sick after all, and the sickness had dulled the sensation until he was well again. Either way, Sam was happy to feel it. He'd been spending his days in the deep, eating what ugly monsters he could to survive. Meat was better for his body than kelp even though it was the plant life that sustained his body for most of his life. He was trying to stave off his worry that he really was sick and would relapse eventually. It took a bit of time, but when it stayed strong and healthy, he felt he could relax. He resumed his trek around the ocean.

Learning the habits of each areas local sea-life helped pass the time. They were very small compared to his 100 ft length, so he learned to stay very still and wait for them to come to him as he laid on his belly to get as close to the ocean floor as possible. Resting his head on his folded hands on the ground. It was fascinating that it wouldn't take long at all for them to assume he was just another part of the ocean floor, like a smooth rock formation. It was anyone's guess what they thought of the mysterious water flow from him breathing in through his nose and out his gills on the sides of his neck. The tiny creatures resumed their lives like he wasn't watching.

Crustaceans and small fish sometimes would swim or climb right up to his eyes and it took all his
willpower not to flinch back from their tiny forms. They scattered when he couldn't help but blink and disrupted the water around them. He huffed a laugh at their antics but frowned when that scared off the rest of the little ones. He sighed and stretched his tired muscles and settled in again for another day of relaxing and watching them as entertainment. He wiggled a bit into the sand to help hide his form as best he could and let his eyes drift closed with his head resting on his hands again. He'd had a big supper of seaweed and was still full enough to laze about for a few days at least. Noticing that as he got older, the more sedate he was becoming. Shrugging to himself, life became less about struggling to survive and more to figuring out how to pass the time. Nothing could compare to his strength and intelligence save for other Merpeople, and he'd count himself lucky to have the company.

This time, the pull only lasted 8 years, and he's sad to see it go, but hopeful he'll have it soon. In the meantime, Sam was happy to watch the small animals, taking closer interest in them these last 8 years, as if he could sympathize with them a bit better.

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Dean felt warmth surrounding him but couldn't see or hear anything. He would have been scared at that, but he was too tired and content so he lay here and remained nestled in soothing warmth of wriggling bodies. Sometimes, something large would nudge at him until he was angled a new way and bathe him in saliva with a wide wet tongue. It took a minute to figure out that that was all it was because at first he was terrified he was going to be eaten alive again... what a weird thought. He shied away from the tongue and meddling nose to rest peacefully, until the urge to find food became greater than his desire to just sleep. He was nudged and prodded until his body was facing something quite large and felt the familiar heat and scent coming from it. His nose was starting to figure out his limited world, blind and deaf as he was, and the scent of what he was quickly identifying with 'mother' was never far. Instinct drove him to find the nub that would give him some milk and quench his hunger.

He wasn't alone, feeling no less than four other bodies all crowd around him also going for their own nub to suckle on. It was strange, but, not unwelcome. If he had to exist without sight or sound, at least he wasn't alone. The large body was felt relaxing into the ground and he nursed from her until he was overstuffed. Wriggling and squirming away from the others to find a space for himself that wasn't churning warm bodies. Soon enough, he guessed that the others had the same idea, and he found himself in the middle of their pile. Sighing to himself at their insistence to being so close. Sometimes he would feel much more narrow pokes and prods along his body caused by hands he guessed, even being picked up and away from the others to be turned around this way and that and touched all over. He couldn't hear his own cries but felt them all the same coming from his throat as he called out for his mother to save him.

Eventually, he felt himself being lowered again and retreated from where he thought the strange giants came from and found solace with his mother giving him another bath. He sensed one of his siblings being lifted up next and hoped that they'd return unharmed. Finding himself rasping a growl to the giants for stealing them away one at a time to terrify them before leaving them with mother again. He wriggled out and had to know if they were all safe and accounted for, counting them up and satisfied that they were all there and relatively ok. Nuzzling them towards mother's side again.
Days pass with the giants returning occasionally to pass he and his siblings around and eventually returning to mother's side. Large hands, small hands, cold, warm. Giants loved touching them all. For him, it was getting annoying but his siblings learned to love it.

After weeks, his eyes started to open and his ears could make out sounds beyond vibrations. Growls and yips mixed in with their high pitched whines. If he looked like his siblings, he now knew that he had triangle shaped ears that flopped over, and a black nose. He could now see his own fur and it was a mix of golden brown for most of the undersides of him, with black backs and long black noses. Looking up at mother showed what they will look like when they grow up and he was impressed with how big she actually was compared to not just him, but the giants. When she stood, she was half the giant's height, and if she got up on just her hind legs, she was actually taller than most of the giants that came by.

And boy did they come by. Giants of all shapes would come and coo at he and his siblings, grabbing one up at a time and prodding and poking them and making soft growling noises at other giants over their heads. He hid every time they came, terrified of what they could do to him. Eventually, he started to hear their speech and figured out what it was they were saying. Spending less time playing with his siblings and more time studying the dangerous giants. Names for things were coming easier for him to remember if he focused hard enough. The giants were called men. And his home was a pen off a little ways away from a busy street.

They were only a few months old when he saw his first sibling get grabbed up by a rough looking giant of a man and taken away far past their pen. He sat dumbfounded at the fact that his sister wasn't returned. He howled and whined and pawed at the door, desperate to escape all that he'd known and go rescue his sister. But all his attempts were for naught as she remained gone. His mother was sad but seemed to think that this was normal. He couldn't accept that and bit at the next hand that came after him. Growling and barking as viciously as he could so that no one else was taken away. Of course the giants were much stronger than him, and his siblings were gathered up in arms and gone before he knew it.

His attacks came more frequently, and even his mother started to reprimand him before the men could. Soon, he was the last pup standing and his temperament was as sour as ever. Growling at every single man that came by the pen. His mother was led away and never returned either. Left alone, he felt his resolve crumbling to dust. Whimpering in loneliness. Who was he supposed to protect now?

One day, a man came by and stopped in front of his pen, peering down at him with an appraising look. He'd seen it a thousand times and growled up at the man halfheartedly. The man laughed and made sounds with his mouth to entice him forward but he just growled louder and stood up, hackles raised and teeth bared. The giant wasn't deterred and if anything, seemed to take greater interest in him. Unlike all the others. The giant man got down on his knees and stuck his hand through the pen's slats and rubbed his rough fingers together.

He charged forward, eager to bite at the hand but stopped abruptly at the smell coming from him. Jaw wide open for the bite, he looked up and saw the startled face shift into one of kindness. He studied the face and there was something about it that was familiar to him. Like he'd seen this man before... for a long time. He tentatively licked the proffered fingers and heard a warm chuckle from the giant. Soon, the hand flipped around and ruffled his ears that were just starting to stick up on top of his head. His thick fur around his neck got a good scratching and he felt himself melt into the motions. Another giant man came by and started talking to the first and reached for him but he snapped out of the trance to growl and bark viciously at the newcomer.

He guessed that what he did was a good thing because his kind giant ruffled his neck again and
sounded impressed and very happy with him. He was lifted up and brought to the giant's chest and pet all over. He felt warmth and love come from this man and after just a moment of worry, knew that he'd be safe with him and no longer alone.

The trip to his new home was in one of those huge black metal beasts and he was equally terrified of the sounds as well as the smells. But... he found himself entranced by how it all worked. Realizing that it wasn't actually alive, even though it moved seemingly on its own. Sniffing and trying to inch his way around it to inspect as much as he could within his limited reach. His man watched with mirth in his eyes and held him close by the scruff of his neck as they lurched and jumped in the metal non-beast towards home.

His new place was warm and smelled heavily of his man. He was left at the entrance to the huge den and cowered back from everything that towered over him. The man set food and water in a corner and chuckled at his scared form before lifting him up and bringing him to another spot in the den. Pushing his back until he sat down and peered up nervously all around him. He ate eventually when the man sat next to him and started to softly growl and coo at him.

“I think I'm gonna name you Dean.” the man said to him as he nibbled at the dried chunk of meat. “My old mentor, Dean, was a little like you are, sometimes rough around the edges but fiercely loyal when he found someone he cared about. He also loved automobiles. He left me his life's work for designing automobiles, and I've been trying to figure out the best way to build his designs. It's tough work. He was always coming up with new innovations... I miss him. But I'm rambling to a dog. I don't know why you picked me, but I'm glad I picked you right back, Dean.” The man grinned and ruffled his neck fur again. “I wasn't intending to get a Shepherd mutt today, so I hope you don't mind the old beef jerky. I'll pick you up some proper things tomorrow.”

He understood a bit of what was being said but not nearly all. His man repeated the same word over and over with pats and scritches and he associated it to being a name. His name. Old and new at the same time. Hearing his man say it, sounded far more familiar than it should and he fell right into even thinking of himself as 'Dean'. He learned his man's name was Robert and that too sounded familiar but he couldn't say why.

It took a little while but Dean soon learned what it was that Robert wanted in a dog. At first it was companionship when he was home. And as Dean got larger and older, he was moved outside permanently, much to his disappointment. Dean was taught where Robert's territory lay and he determined by himself to protect it at all costs. It made Robert happy and got him an extra chunk of meat when he behaved well. Sometimes Robert would take him to 'work' and he found himself fascinated with all the large metal non-beasts that surrounded them. Smelling of oil and dirt and made his nose itch. He heard the name 'automobiles' often enough to associate them with the metal non-beasts and over the years got to see them evolve under Robert's clever fingers.

Dean grew older and felt his long years wear on his bones. Robert had taken him out less and less, leaving him to watch over the house while he was at work. There was a new pup added to the house and Dean was wary at first but learned that the runt wasn't going anywhere and decided to teach this young girl the ropes. Robert called her Daisy and she was smaller than him but eager to learn.

Dean was happy that he did such a fine job training her while he still could, and let her do the job while he watched from the wooden porch. Giving pointers and picking up the slack when Daisy wore herself out chasing after every person that walked by the fenced-in lot. Protecting all of the old automobiles and their rusting parts.

Dean felt tired more and more and Robert decided to bring him back inside the house full time.
Retraining him how to behave inside. Didn't take long, Dean did not want to go back outside. He was 8 years old and that meant too old to be chasing automobiles around. The days were getting steadily colder to him, even if no one else seemed to notice. His body hurt to move too much and Robert spent more and more time by his side, propping him up on the couch while he read and worked on his papers. Dean picked up on the fact that Robert was doing quite well for himself, and noticed that his territory grew triple the size it had been when he was a young pup. Dean liked to think he helped with that, defending his property well enough to earn them more space.

Dean knew something was wrong when he couldn't move his body much without pain, and Robert was making all kinds of sad sounds. He tried reassuring his friend but attempting to lift his head hurt and he let out a pained whine. His friend left him on the couch for a short while and came back with a chunk of warm delicious smelling meat. Standing in the middle of the room, cradling it in his hands and crying softly.

Robert sniffled and finally let Dean have the meat in his hands and he ate it gratefully. While he was chewing on it, he tasted something different inside but there was no way he'd spit it out now. Freshly cooked meat that was still warm was a rare treat and he loved every bit of it.

Robert waited and watched him eat and when Dean was done, he hugged him tight and cried heavily, petting his fur and apologizing over and over to him. Dean didn't know what for, but felt himself getting a little sleepy. This was the best day he's had in a long time because his pain was going away, his best friend was right here and holding him tight, and he had a young pup outside that was even better at being a guard dog than he was. And he did that. He showed Daisy how to be a good dog and she was the greatest. Pride and peace washed over him and he loved this moment right here.

He felt his head getting fuzzy and a deep drowsiness come over him. A distant memory of something like this happening before. Something that meant... he was was going to be leaving Robert tonight. Dean was startled at the thought, the realization, and memory of dying before, and squirmed a little in Robert's tight grip. Dean angled his head up and saw the look of agony in Robert's eyes and hated seeing it. He didn't want that to be his last memory of his best friend so Dean nuzzled closer into the embrace and licked Robert's cheek with the last of his energy.

A sad smile crossed his friend's face and it all faded away. Dean knew that Robert would be ok, he still had Daisy to watch over him. He let his sorrow and worry go, and died in peace.

Chapter End Notes

No promises when/if I'll post another chapter. But, thanks to Mystifiedgal, you guys have this to *tide* you over (arr arr)

BY THE WAY! I wrote Sam's part like back in September last year, this is not relating to Corona virus whatsoever.

We have just a hundred more years to go before we're at the present, I might end up skipping the a few of Dean's lives. Hinting at major events since the roaring 20's were interesting to read about in my research. At the end of this chapter, it is roughly mid 1920's.

And yes, I love animal transformation fics so that life of Dean's is a bit more fleshed out - sue me!
I had this little story sitting around after I drew a pic of a Giant Merman Sam holding onto a tiny human Dean. I wrote up a drabble to explain the events leading up to it and was going to leave it at that but I got a lot of encouragement to write the story and *hopefully* I'll be able to finish.

PS after the first couple years where they very quickly grow from 2 ft long babies to ten feet long toddlers, they will grow about a foot longer a year. It's not exact! This is just a good idea for how fast they grow to start then it slows down to a fairly dependable rate. So say Sam is 202 yrs old, he is 210 feet long.
Leave some comments, kudos, or hatemail!
Have a good one :)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!