

A thrill of excitement runs up my spine. With itching fingers, I reach for Sebastian's smooth neck.

An awakening, feral instinct guides me, with the greatest of ease, onto Sebastian's back. The powerful water energy courses between us, mingling with jittery excitement. Wildness surges through my veins as my kelpie turns to face the open water. I inhale the wet air, and my lungs burn with an all-consuming need. I need to be as free as the water beneath me. I must be free of this restrictive skin.

I need to be free.

"Lexi."

The glorious sound of crashing waves and the water's gurgling swirl drowns Killian's warning.

I don't listen.

I won't listen.

Sebastian launches against the rolling waves. I marvel at how the water crashes against us, how each pound is like being shocked with paddles. Someone is calling for me, trying to pull me back to land, back to restriction and dulled senses. I happily ignore them.

The kelpie launches into a strange gait, swimming, no more ground beneath his feet. With the next wave, my comrade releases a high-pitched keen and crashes into the sea foam.

We dive into the water, like a rock shattering glass, and we separate. My fingers slip from Sebastian's silken skin. Thousands of tiny, shimmering bubbles rise between us. Their heavenly glow chases the darkness from the murky water until it gleams, clear and unpolluted. My eyes follow the source of the glow to my arm, where light bursts from my veins. The bubbles are my flesh, consumed by my own light.

I gasp, but I have no voice, and breathing water causes me no pain. I should be frightened, but I feel only relief. Like I've been holding my breath for a long time, and now I can breathe.

With one more churn of the waves above my head, I close my fleshly eyes and let the current roll me away.

It's like letting go of heavy weights I didn't realize I was carrying. One moment I am a solid thing with limbs and skin holding me in, and the next there's only my mind, or at least the sensation of awareness. Instead of disappearing, as I thought I would, I find I am the water, the very essence of it. I feel strong, unhindered. Neither blind nor deaf. The earth grumbles below, echoing through me. I hear the air above, how it tickles and dances over my surface. I hear the longing call of the land, its distant voice the only thing enough to remind me of what I left behind.

The whole expanse of water is my vision, the dark depths and the wavering light of the shallows. I see the animals hiding in the coral, seaweed, and rocks. I sense their cold blood and how their lives are tied to the water's energy. My energy.

For a time—uncountable, because I don't have need to measure it—I simply exist, stretching and filling up the whole of the lough. Finding mouths of rivers that feed into it, and where it joins the ocean. I could continue to follow the currents, travel farther, go beyond just this little place, but as my essence touches the very bottom of the lough and roams over the surface, I become aware of something new. Not earth, or rock, or anything natural. It's crystal. Strange crystal; not an element of this world.

A wide basin of crystal stretches for miles under the surface of the lough. Intrigue draws me deeper. I reach into the gloom, my free form dancing over the jagged, crystalline basin. Like a fogged mirror. I settle over its blinding surface, searching for a reflection, only to catch a glimpse of a fish swimming on the other side.

This is no mirror. It's a window to another world.

My world? The matrix between us and them?

A doorway to the Veiled Lands?

The waters beyond that crystal basin sing to me like a siren call. I want to flee into that place, into that powerful current. I test the surface, searching for a crack or chink in its armor to slip through, but there is none.

The key. . . I need that key.