







# VERA



## POWER

.\* ✨ VERA ✨ \*

The stars are beautiful tonight. I hold out my hand to the perfectly painted sky and connect each of them until a picture is in my mind.

*Taurus.*

*Aquarius.*

*Scorpio.*

The constellations come together effortlessly. Although the rooftop always allows access to this vast open sky, there's something different about tonight.

Perhaps it's the air. It's colder than the average March night.

Or it could be the sky...Something about it feels strange, too. There's this insistent pulling that begs me to keep staring. I search it for a sign of what that tug is, but it all seems normal.

The stars are out, the moon's brightness casts its usual glow across the tops of trees, and there isn't a cloud in the sky. Seeing the sky so clearly here is rare, but I would hardly think that's a reason to feel so odd.

A dull pain shoots through my wrist, and I let out a gasp. The



constricting feeling on my nerves dissipates not long after rubbing the area.

Maybe this paranoid searching is just the nerves for my party beginning in...What time is it?

I've been out here for a while, judging by the way my skin has grown as cold as ice.

The clock on the farthest wall reads 8:00 p.m.

I guess that means it starts right now. I climb back through my cracked window and rush downstairs to see the smiling faces of my closest friends.

"Way to keep us waiting, birthday girl," Rosalind says with an adjustment of her circular glasses. Before I can respond, she shoves a large present into my hands while everyone else does the same with their gifts.

"I only have so many hands!" I yell with a laugh. I love their thoughtfulness in always going above and beyond for my birthdays, but a part of me feels wrong accepting them. Frankly, I don't think I deserve it. I mean, I have everything I could ever need, so why should I be the one who gets more?

"You'll make do," Elliot says with a rough slap on my back, throwing me off balance. I nearly drop everything as I try to remain upright.

"Elliot!" I say exasperatedly, with a glare in his direction. He holds up both hands and his hazel-brown eyes widen as he backs away into the kitchen. "If you eat my food, I swear I'll make you sleep outside!" I don't actually mind, but there's something so fun about messing with him.

Somehow, within the span of twenty seconds, he manages to eat half of an extra-large chocolate bar sitting on the countertop.

"Okay, look, Vera, hear me out."

"I'm not hearing you out."

"Vera, Vera, VER—" Before Elliot finishes the word, I drag him outside and lock the door. He tries to give me a sad, guilt-ridden look, but with one glance past my face, he bursts into laughter.

Unsurprisingly, Liam had finished the rest of it. He smiles like I can't

see the brown smear across his cheek from where he likely missed his first attempt to shove it in his mouth.

“Liam, out,” I command with a terrible attempt at an angry expression. He slowly walks to the patio door and unlocks it, stepping outside with Elliot. “Inaya, please remind me why I still invite those two to my parties?”

“Because who else would make us laugh until our stomachs hurt?” she answers and takes my hand, leading us outside with the others. Rosalind makes her way to her favorite seat next to the pool, motioning for us to join her while the boys play...*a game?* To be quite honest, it looks more like two amateur wrestlers fighting while role-playing as horses, but to each their own.

“Did you bring your mom’s chicken biryani she made for us the other day?” Rosalind asks Inaya with a look of childish delight. I think she forgets how often she asks that same question.

“She only makes that when you come over because otherwise we would get tired of eating it,” she responds with a laugh. A look in my direction makes it clear she’s aware of the same thing I noticed. We usually ignore Rosalind’s forgetfulness because anything that can make her day brighter is worth it.

She deserves it more than anyone.

“What? I don’t go over there *that* often,” Rosalind says while sticking out her tongue.

“Rose, I can count on two hands how many days you haven’t come to my house after school this year. That’s saying something.”

“Okay, well, your mom just cooks the best food. What can I say? *Also...*” Rosalind pauses with a pointed finger. “She told me she loves my company, and I can come over for dinner anytime I want.”

Inaya’s mom knows how Rosalind is treated at home, and if it was legal, I think she’d kidnap her and never let her parents see her again.

“It just so happens that anytime I want is all the time,” she adds with a toothy smile. Sometimes, I wonder if Rosalind realizes how bad her life is or if she’s grown numb to it all.

Their conversation becomes a gentle buzz as I stare into the distant sky again. There is something out there—something different. It’s wrong, a disruption, but I still can’t pinpoint what it could be.

A voice calling my name breaks through the haze.

“Vera? Are you alright, honey?” Mom asks with a look of intense concern. She sits beside me and rubs my leg, waiting for me to respond. I feel her pity and wish I could tell her to stop without hurting her feelings. I hate pity.

“Huh? Oh, yeah, I’m alright,” I lie to ease her mind. Although I think she knows how troubled my thoughts usually are, she tries to ignore them. My parents are as perfect as they could be, so she knows it’s not her fault.

Still, I try to keep her from what I feel to protect her happiness. It’s better only one of us is in pain.

“The rest of your friends got in the pool. I think they tried to invite you to come in, but you were completely zoned out. Join them. Today’s a *big day*. Make the most of it.” Something about how she said those two words sends a shiver down my spine.

I know I’m overthinking it, but I can’t shake the feeling that something is seriously wrong.

*Don’t think.*

*Don’t think.*

I take a deep breath and smile, putting up the mask I’m so used to wearing.

I hop in the pool and grab onto Liam’s shoulders since he’s the only one of us who can touch the bottom with flat feet. That’s when I notice Inaya, angry yet smiling, while Rosalind cries with laughter.

“I have some very choice words I’d like to say to you, Rose.” At this, I notice Inaya’s hijab, still intact but soaking wet from getting shoved into the pool. I can’t hold back the chuckle that escapes at the usually graceful Inaya looking completely disheveled.

Her smile dips slightly and tightens at the edges, and I realize how



secretly angry and ashamed she is underneath the act. However funny it might have been in the moment, it isn't right for Rosalind to disrespect her culture, even if we are all friends.

"Liam and I have our eyes closed, don't worry!" Elliot calls out. The group knows how important it is to Inaya to stay modest, and a skin-tight, soaking-wet outfit is far from it.

"We didn't see anything! Tell us when you're okay with us looking," Liam adds. She crawls back out of the pool, but not before shoving Rosalind underwater. Grabbing a towel and roughly drying off, she calls out that the boys are good to open their eyes.

In the proper way of a proper loving friendship, Liam grabs me by the waist and throws me across the pool with his regained vision. I swim back to the surface, spitting out mouthfuls of water and aggressively rubbing my eyes.

I love this small group. Even when I feel completely alone, I know it's impossible with the four of them by my side, but would I even know if I felt complete if I never had before?

I think they make me feel that way, but how can I know until I'm sure I've felt it?

I shove away the thought. They're my closest friends, and they mean the world to me. That's all that matters.

We go inside to see Mom holding five unique towels for everyone.

Many years ago, I started the tradition of sleepovers on my birthdays with all of us, so she made each of us a towel representing our personalities.

Inaya's towel features flowers of all kinds coming together to make a beautiful bouquet. Rosalind's includes clefs, quavers, and other notes with quotes from her favorite songs. Liam's has horses roaming free on an expansive prairie. Elliot's contains many Hufflepuff symbols and paraphernalia from his favorite book series: *Harry Potter*. Finally, mine is a towel with paint splatters and brushes of every design and color.

Everything blurs together, from opening presents, blowing out

candles, eating far too much dessert, and ending on the rooftop where my night began. We all lie together beneath the blanket of stars, huddling close to avoid the chill of this strangely cold evening.

“Vera! Are you seeing this?” Rose asks with a look of amazement plastered across her face. I look up to where she points a shaking hand to a bright, copper-colored moon.

“It’s a blood moon. No wonder I felt there was something off about tonight,” I mutter, but it *wasn’t* a blood moon—not earlier this evening. It was a waning crescent, and the color was normal. The second the thought escapes my mind, my eyes go wide, and I reach to clutch my neck.

*I can’t breathe.*

The realization hits me as the last breath of air leaves my body. I heave for another moment before I regain a sense of stability.

What is happening to me?

Am I going into shock?

Am I allergic to something I ate?

Even as my breath starts returning, the anxiety lingers. I felt like there was something off about today, but I’m almost certain now.

“What the hell, Vera? What just happened?” Liam asks, placing an arm around my shoulder. I don’t know how to answer that because I’m left speechless. Never in my life have I lost my breath so suddenly and without reason.

“That’s not just a blood moon. It’s a supermoon as well. Look at the size of it,” Inaya states, never having moved her gaze from the exceptionally captivating sight.

I take a deep inhale but get cut short as an unfamiliar power floods through my veins. A dark, empty part of my mind explodes, with light flooding all around, but only I can see it. It lights up everything around us, the sky turning so bright I might’ve mistaken it for daylight.

*Energy.*

*Strength.*

*Freedom.*

My senses are bright. My mind is sharp. My body is strong.

I feel as though individual cells are exploding and expanding inside of me, leaving rhapsodies of bliss in their wake.

I feel so strange, yet I've never been more alive. I feel as if I could jump straight off this roof and fly.

As the hundreds of questions flooding my head slow down, my mind becomes a void of darkness. The world paints darkness as scary, the void of all light, the deepest of one's despair, but they're wrong. Darkness is a cloud of freedom and a blanket of protection.

As my metaphysical body drifts into a more profound state of pure relief, my mind floods with images of an unfamiliar world.

I see a young woman. She's crying—no, wait, she's *angry*. Her eyes glow a bright blue before fading out to be a deep emerald-green I nearly mistake as my own.

Her hair is pale flaxen with curls cascading past her shoulders. She's astonishingly beautiful, but I can see a look of affliction on her face.

She's speaking. Or more like yelling, but I can't understand it. The words are foreign, and the language is nothing I've heard before. This doesn't feel like a dream; it's almost like a memory that's been locked away for my entire life.

I try to turn my head to see the faces of the other yelling voices, but my neck is stuck, and my mind becomes blank once more.

I'm underwater. That's not right—I've been underwater this entire time.

I see the dark ocean all around with new voices speaking in the same peculiar language I heard before. What is happening? *Who am I?*

"VERA!"

I'm forced awake with four arms shaking me rapidly. I look around in confusion, eyes flaring after being ripped from an immersive dream.

"What just happened?" I ask no one in particular, rubbing my eyes to readjust my vision.

"You started shaking and passed out! Are you alright?" Elliot asks with

distress, putting the back of his hand on my forehead. I realize I'm no longer on the roof but lying on my bed. I take a long time to respond, sighing loudly.

Sitting up with a wince, I orient my thoughts enough to speak.

"I—I don't know. I think I got lightheaded or something." I've never lied to them, especially not so easily. What's gotten into me? "I think I'm going to go to bed early tonight. I'm sorry we didn't get to do everything we planned."

"That's completely fine. We care more about your health than having fun," Inaya says with a gentle hand on my shoulder before moving to the floor with Rosalind.

"We'll just play some cards and then go to sleep too!" Rosalind announces with her bright, girlish grin. I give her a weak one in return before falling back into a deep, trance-like sleep. Maybe I'll have a chance to reenter that dream—or memory—and find out what the hell is going on.

With the last of my consciousness, I hear a voice from a nearby television.

*"This is truly incredible! The last super blood moon was exactly seventeen years ago today. Many astronomers have said that this was a surprising sight, and none of their equipment predicted it until it seemed to change. All records and eye accounts claim the moon was nowhere close to full, but then it seemed to morph from a crescent to a sphere in the blink of an eye. Is there something else go—"* I can't make out the final words as I give my mind over to the relief of sleep, my body drifting into a calm, faraway land.









# KAILLEAH

## FORGOTTEN HISTORY

.\* ★ KAILEAH ★ \*.

(SEVENTEEN YEARS PRIOR)

I scream as the peak of labor hits me with an intense wave. I feel angry tears streaming down my face, washing away in the water that surrounds us all, but not from the pain. Being in a room with the three people you loathe more than anything would bring anyone to such a state.

I scream again, but this time it's not because of the pain rippling through my uterus; it's remembering everything associated with this room—the room where the king had his way with me.

Night. After. Night.

I lay on the royal-blue bed where I would cry myself to sleep after he left. The ceiling still has the same glittering chandelier that should make any young girl smile at its beauty, but not me. All I can see in those perfect crystal shards is the memory of everything he did to me. I watched it on each one of those tiny reflections.

The smell of sweat and fear radiates through the room, only adding to the rage I feel flowing through me.

With each excruciating push, I see a wider smile spread across the king's wretched face. It adds more wrinkles to his already old complexion, showing that his age is far beyond mine: *his child wife*. His dark hair has streaks of gray to prove just how hoary that disgusting being is, and his sunken eyes prove how little light is left inside of him.

*If there ever was any to begin with.*

No one with a conscience would do what he has done to me. No one with a soul or single grain of humanity.

I turn to see my parents looking anxious and impatient at the time this birth is taking. Gods, I hate them. It's hard to say who I hate more...the king or those two sorry sacks of fish scraps that I must call my parents.

My mother has done nothing more for me than what I am doing now, birthing a child. My father, *oh my father*, he has contributed nothing to my life beyond the sperm used to make me. The only thing I can accredit the two of them for is giving me the worst childhood I could've asked for.

*Sorry, Mother and Father, let me speed this up for you. I know you have so many better places to be*, I scream out in my mind, wishing I could say it aloud but my voice fails me. The only sounds that come from my mouth are the excruciating screams from the pain.

I roll my eyes, but they never notice. They never notice *anything* about me.

With a last agonizing push, my baby girl is born, healthy and crying. I take deep breath after breath until my nerves and heart are calm once more.

The midwife places her small body against my chest, and I cry, gazing upon my beautiful daughter.

My little Asherah, my perfect princess.

I'm so beyond happy she's okay, and while I'm scared of what my life will become now that she's here, I'm ready to experience it. Somehow, with her close to me, I know I can face anything.

She will not know the life I have had.

She will only know complete and utter love and happiness.

From the first look of pure innocence on my baby's face, I know I will always keep her safe. I don't care how difficult it will be to raise my child. I will forever strive to be the best mother in the world, and she will never know my suffering. All my little Asherah will know is unconditional love and attention at every waking moment as long as I live.

All my life, I thought a happiness this completely consuming would be impossible to find, but as I clutch her small body to my bare skin, I know I was mistaken.

However, my feeling of bliss is cut short by my *husband's* voice.

"Oh my gods, she's beautiful. She'll make an excellent princess," he says, swimming closer. His deep, blood-red tail and matching fin become ever more apparent with each movement toward me. I might have even found a color beautiful once if I didn't know what it meant about his inner soul.

"Don't come any closer, you monster," I yell at him. Perhaps it is after my outburst, but everyone finally notices the entrancing blue glow encapsulating my daughter.

*They're going to find out.*

They all know I didn't love the king, and he definitely didn't love me.

"That's so cute! She was conceived from pure love!" the clueless midwife states proudly.

*Pure love.*

How funny.

It's true her father and I were indeed in love when she was conceived, but her father isn't here to appreciate such an honor. "I'm thrilled for Your Majesties," she says with a small bow before swimming out of the room. The king closes the distance between us and eyes me closely, and I see my parents shift even more nervously before containing themselves.

We can't have the king knowing you suspect something, can we?

"Explain yourself, Kaileah. Why is our daughter glowing the color of your *maemōjik*?" Maemōjik, the emotion a witch feels the least, and mine so happens to be love. "You know more than anyone in this room that our

daughter was conceived out of nothing close to love.” I fight the urge to spit in his face at his taunting words.

“Why don’t you use that thick skull of yours to think, *Dorian*? I love my daughter, and she has been developing inside me for the better part of a year. Of course she is going to be born glowing with love,” I say in a harsh, sarcastic tone that I hope hides the reality of why she glows such a color. If he finds out...

“Watch your mouth, girl. Now that your parents’ deal has been fulfilled, I have no need to keep you alive.” I hear a knock at the door, and a young witch pokes her head through.

“Are you ready for the birth certificate, King Argyros?” The king sighs and glares in the girl’s direction.

“Yes, make it quick,” he growls in a tone that makes the young witch shake. She swims into the room, holding a document with words branding into parchment as she speaks.

The majickal binding of royal birth. Nothing can shatter it, and so long as my daughter’s name appears on that sheet, regardless of whether she is only of my blood, she will be heir to this kingdom. The thought pulls my glower into a smile.

“Princess Asherah Dlari Argyros of Adlei, daughter of Queen Kaileah Astorah Dlari and King Dorian Lycidas Argyros. Heir to the Adleian throne.” The words finish appearing on the page, so she rolls it neatly and seals it with a strong majickal bond.

The runes flare to life before dulling.

After gathering the rest of her things, she swims out the door, but not before I see the look of near terror on her face, having been in the presence of our kingdom’s tyrannical king.

Little does she know she just made the worst mistake of her life.



Not long after, a familiar face comes into view as the king is about to speak. My friend, the kind witch with long black hair and a beautiful icy blue hiding beneath swims through the room with such grace that I become slightly jealous. She's always been so naturally elegant, unlike me.

I try to ignore the envy since she's been teaching me to hold myself as she does. The art of appearing perfectly confident, even if it's all a lie.

It's helped me keep myself together, I admit.

She looks at me for some time, and it causes my heart to sink. *How have I been so clueless?* I realize now that her tail is a pure onyx black, and her face is painted with pure anger toward...me? My head swarms with a plague of thoughts.

What reason have I ever given her to feel an anger so strong I can almost taste it?

She hid her true colors for all these months, and I was blind. All the days she would spend with me, gaining my trust just so I would reveal my deepest secrets. I've told her everything—NO.

She knows about—

I look down to Asherah curled on my chest and try not to let them see my heart shattering. I turn back to the woman before me with shock and complete betrayal for what she has turned out to be.

The one other person in my life I felt I could trust beyond my real love. The one other person I felt happy with. All of it was a lie.

How could she? How could she hide all of this from me for so long? How could I have been so ungodly stupid to not see it?

"Your Majesty, if I may be so bold, I believe the queen has been unfaithful to you," she states with a disgustingly happy grin and a pointed look in my direction. Her gaze reads what I've suspected but never allowed myself to truly dwell on: *I want your title, and I'll get it no matter what.*

"How dare you suggest such an idea?" the king yells. "Present your evidence, *now!*" he spits out, his eyes like daggers waiting to strike. At least it isn't me on the receiving end, but I know I will be all too soon.



“Happily, Your Majesty,” she begins at a low hum, swimming toward my newborn princess. I can’t tell if it’s an exhausted delusion or reality, but her pupils seem to compress to be two sharp lines like a serpentine creature intent on killing her prey.

“Stay away from my daughter! I’ll rip you limb from limb if you so much as lay a hand on her!” I cry out, clutching Asherah closer. My traitorous friend tilts her head while continuing to hum toward my baby.

“It’s just a simple spell to show the child’s true parents.” She smirks. “If you fight me, then it’s clear you have something to hide.”

She’s right. Gods, I hate that she’s right.

Asherah’s small lavender tail slowly splits in two, starting from the indentation of her fin to the top of her hips. Each scale on her tiny tail reforms and changes color.

She fights back and struggles to swim, having two fins instead of one, but the spell can’t be ignored for any longer as it reveals one part is a soft blue identical to my own and the other is a light, kind red, nothing like the king’s.

His eyes grow wide with anger as my parents’ eyes flood with fear. I sit in terrified silence, as I know there is no denying my daughter is not of the king’s blood.

The strong, sarcastic front I’ve put up falls, and I’m back to who I really am: the scared-out-of-my-mind, eighteen-year-old child who just gave birth to a beautiful little girl—the target of everyone’s hatred.

That’s what I am, and no one sees it. I am a child. *A child.*

*Why me?*

I can’t protect myself from anything the king wants to do to me, and as he said, nothing is stopping him from killing my baby along with me. He probably will, just out of spite, regardless of the outrage it would cause.

“What is your name, witch?” he asks, failing to hide his increasing rage.

“Daevia Phoenix, Your Majesty,” she says with a bow at the waist, staring up at the king in a way that twists my stomach into knots.

Dorian sits in a silence that threatens to send my heart straight out of my chest. Instead, it slams against the walls that keep it in.

Say something, say something.

“And can you cast a curse?” he asks slowly, turning his piercing gaze from me back to Daevia.

NO.

NO.

NO.

I try to use my majick to escape, but it’s useless. *I am useless!* I fight back more, determined to protect both my defenseless child and myself. I’m incredibly weak, and I notice the feeling of a majickal restraint binding me.

There is nothing I can do.

“Yes, of course. What was it you had in mind?” Daevia’s eyes glimmer with despicable, evil happiness.

“Do what you think will be the best punishment. Make her suffer.”

“Gladly.” Daevia closes her eyes, clasping her hands as she hums a sound so deep the room shakes. The chandelier of glass breaks and fills the water with tiny shards ready to cut.

I throw my body around my child, protecting her from the incoming glass daggers. My eyes are shut so tight I can’t see what’s happening, but I feel it. I *feel* the way her power is washing into me, and I can only assume Asherah, too.

There’s no use fighting back.

I can’t protect my baby, my sweet Asherah. Still clutching her away from them, I kiss the top of her head where the beginning of black hair sprouts—just like her father.

“I will find a way back to you, my darling,” I whisper, tears washing away as the room’s stagnant water swirls like a tornado. “No matter what separates us, be it life or death, I will find you.”

“By the power of the enlarged crimson moon above and the uncontrolled majick inside the child, I cast a curse so powerful only an identical

event on this very day could destroy it.” With the power she has shown, I doubt such an event will ever occur again. She would likely all but pull the moon from the sky to keep it that way. “Kaileah, you are hereby cursed never to step outside the castle, and, Asherah, you will never become your true form again.” Her voice is not entirely her own, and her laugh is echoed like there’s a chasm between us.

She did not need to say the words aloud, as our power comes from the mind, not speech, but how could this new version of my old friend ever pass up an opportunity to state her power? That’s all she ever wanted, I realize. She wanted power...*my* power.

When she couldn’t get it, she found another way.

I feel her words inside my skin, clawing and attacking as the rest of her body turns just as bestial. Her hands twist and morph into long, animalistic fingers, cutting through the water as she dips deeper into the surrounding energy.

She laughs to taunt me, proving just how much power she has after giving up her sanity to a god without morals. Her hands return to their normal form as she focuses on the curse instead of showing off her talents. The idea of it sends my rage over the edge, but I’m too weak to act on it.

Curse this useless body.

Using the last of my strength, I try to sit upright but fall back. She places an unseen barrier between herself and me. I try with everything I have left to push through it, but it’s too late.

With her curse complete, the water calms, but I notice Asherah’s tail slowly losing its scales until all that is left are two human legs.

I scream as my baby struggles to breathe without oxygen. Her gills disappear as each second passes, and I hold her as close as possible, hugging her small body until she stops breathing entirely. Not once does she scream or fight, and the thought that it was quick and painless comforts me.

Something inside of me breaks, knowing I let my daughter, *my life*, die in my arms without fighting back.

I should've fought back.

I should've found the strength.

"Your child isn't dead, Kaileah. Open your eyes," Daevia states bluntly.

I do as she says and see a small air bubble encapsulating her head. Asherah is smiling and breathing—I don't understand.

"This is the only kindness I will allow you. The witches will take your child to the nearest humans for them to raise as their own. Although, I will make sure she never knows you exist," she says as an evil grin splits her face.

She knows exactly what she's doing. This 'new' Daevia that has taken over my old friend knows very well this is not kindness.

It's a cruel form of torture meant to hurt me far beyond her death, but she's wrong. However much it would tear apart my heart to think of her never knowing how much I love her, all I can hope is that she will live.

And she will. I can feel it as easily as I can feel the tiny beats of her heart. She will live, and one day, I will find her.



Four witches carry the child to a land far enough away that there is no chance of her ever being found. Once they feel they have traveled long enough, the witches searched for the first piece of inhabited land.

There, they meet a human couple crying together, alone, praying for the gift of fertility. The humans stumble back in fear as the four creatures rise from the water, holding the small, human child in their unearthly arms.

"Wha—what are you?" the man asks with a shaky voice. The witches sneer at his fear, for humans are weak.

"We're the answer to your prayers," the eldest witch begins, gaining a snicker from the woman to her right. "This child has been cursed to never

know her true form as long as she may live. Her life is now yours to decide. However, if she, or anyone, ever learns of our existence, we will kill her and anyone she loves. Do you understand?" the eldest of the four witches explains as if it is was a script she has memorized.

The man's face flushes a ghostly white as he struggles to find words to respond. He wonders what beings could be so filled with evil to kill a baby, but neither what they are nor the severity of the situation hits the two humans. If it had, they would have run at the first sight of the merfolk before them.

Poor, clueless humans.

The couple look at each other before responding.

"What if we don't take her?" the woman asks curiously. She is significantly less afraid than her partner, willing to taunt the creatures with questions. But instead of taunting them, it gains their respect.

"If you do not take the child, then we will have no choice but to kill her," the witch answers blankly with a shrug. The humans' eyes grow wide, and the woman grabs baby Asherah with only a second delay.

"We will take her! What's her name?" she asks with a panicked look, checking the pulse of a child of mer, now cursed with human flesh.

"Asherah. Change it, or the same rules will apply."

"Okay. We will raise her as our own," the woman states proudly, feeling as though she alone is responsible for the child's safety.

