

UYA Story #5 Mermaid Thing

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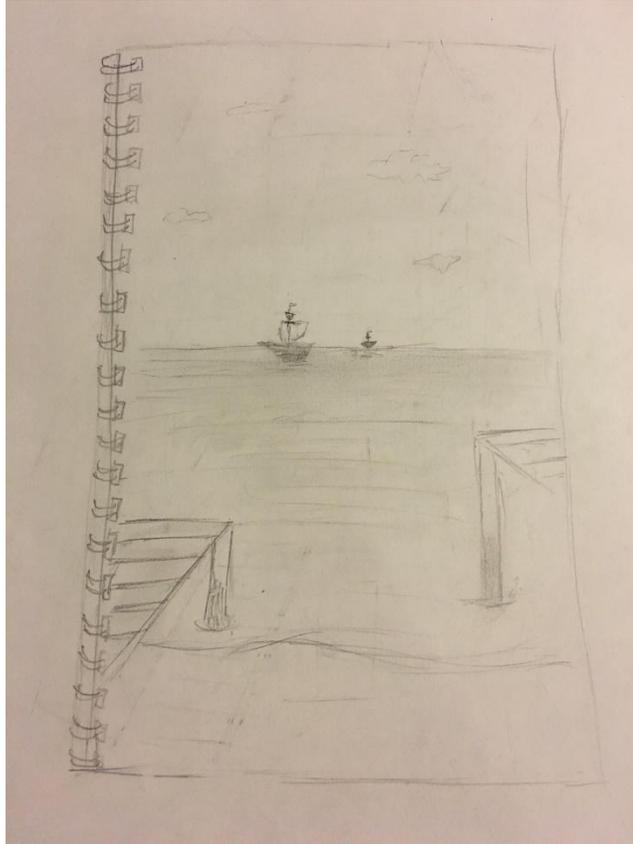
This town is so boring. I'm trapped. Every day before dawn all the boats go out and everyone fishes and comes back after dusk. Almost all the other kids my age are starting to join their parents. Especially on nice days. And anyone who is staying behind is working on learning their parents' trades.

But of course I don't get to. Only my parents know how to sign, plus I have horrible vision without my glasses.

Whenever I ask to join, my parents sign "it's too dangerous for someone like you" and pat me on the head.

Today is the worst yet because I've read all the books in this house and it's a beautiful summer day. Everyone is out on the water. The library is closed for cleaning and the bakery is only open on weekends.

I just take my sketchbook, pack up a small lunch of bread and fish, and head toward the docks. When I arrive I sit and draw the ocean and the few visible boats. It's turns out okay but it's not my best work.



I eat my lunch. The ocean breeze is pleasant, especially when the sun is beating down hard as it is right now.

I pack all my things, stand up, and stretch. Climb down under the dock to where the water would be at high tide. Taking off my shoes, I walk right where the water laps onto the sand. Walk along the shore until something ahead of me catches my eye. It looks to be a figure lying on the sand. They almost look shiny.

I run to the unconscious body and jump back with surprise when I see it clearly. Its skin is silvery and looks to be severely sun damaged, blistering in some places. It has a fishlike tail and the top half of its body is humanoid. I've heard about something like this. It's an evil creature called either a mermaid or siren and it's a bad omen. It'll make your boat crash.

As I gawk over it, it opens an eye making a pained expression. Its pupil is like one of a cat. When it sees me, its lips move and it hold up its hands to defend itself. I see rows of sharp teeth.

All I can do is stand dumbstruck. I'm scared, but it's like I'm frozen in place just staring. My heart feels like it might pound right out of my chest. Then I see it. The creature has tears streaming down its face.

I sign that I won't hurt it, but it just looks scared *and* confused. Now that I've gotten a better looks at it, it seems to be a boy and around my age.

He seems really dry. So I cup some water in my hands and pour it on him. I try to go slow enough so that he won't be scared but I can't go too slow or all the water drips out of my hands.

The tears seem to have stopped but he's still eyeing me with suspicion. But even so I try and splash water on him.



I wonder how he got onto dry sand in the first place. He probably got caught up here when the tide went down.

I don't know for sure if my putting water on his tail is helping one bit, I have no effective communication methods. But he seems to be in less pain. He is even managing to kind of sit up.

Once he does I notice complex pattern of tattoos on his back that go into his arms. More are revealed when I pour water on his back and arms and wash off some sand clinging to is skin.

The most visible ones are on his chest and arms. They are black, very thick, and taper at the end. From what I can see on his back they connect to complex rows of symbols.

I back away and try and figure out what to do next. Mermaids are supposed to be evil. They supposedly summon storms and floods. They supposedly pull people underwater and drown them.

But he's so defenseless and scared, not all like the monster from my bedtime stories. I almost feel bad for him. I don't know if there's anything I can do to help.

I sign, "I want to help", but it's to no avail. So I point towards the water then towards him and then at myself and make a sort of carrying motion.

He gives me a confused look, then slowly seems to understand and cautiously nods. At least I think he does.

He flinches when I pick him up. His skin is cool touch. But it seems really dried. That can't be good. I wonder how long he's been laying here.

I heft him up. He's not overly heavy. His arms tentatively touch my shoulders as I carry him to the water. I walk until the water reaches around my knees and slowly lower him in.

His face is immediately filled with relief. He smiles widely and so briefly, but before he swims off I see his sharp teeth once again. His cat eyes trained on me I see his lips move and he says something I can't hear.

I sign "Goodbye", but he is already off.

I walk back home dumbfounded. I can hardly believe what just happened.

For the next few hours I sit in my room and draw him over and over again. Trying to solidify this in my mind. It will probably be one of few exciting moments in my bland small town life.

Soon my life goes back into a comfortable routine. I wake up before dawn to wish my parents good luck on the seas. I make myself breakfast. I re-read a book or flip through old sketchbooks. I eat lunch. I wander around town and sketch anything interesting until it almost dark. Then I head home and make dinner for my parents. When they arrive home safely we eat together.

On weekends sometimes I'll get to go to the market in the next town where all the fish are sold. A month passes. I still haven't gone back. I don't want to ruin the memory.

But tonight is different. I can't sleep. Putting on my glasses, I see the moon is high in the sky. It's beautiful and almost full. I grab my sketchbook and a pencil and slip out of my room.

I put on my shoes and leave the house. I just have to make sure I'm back before dawn when my parents leave. Heading towards the beach with the light of the moon to guide me.

I arrive at my destination with little trouble. I look out at the sea. It's beautiful, but I can't help but feel disappointed. I was hoping he would be here. That strange mermaid I saw all those weeks ago. It was dumb of me to think he'd be here.

I stay there for an hour or so. I try to enjoy the soft summer breeze. I do a couple of quick sketches but none of them are any good. Taking one last look at the water, and head back home. I end up sleeping most of the day, but there's no one home to notice anyway.

I become consumed with the idea of seeing him again. In the back of my mind I know he'll probably never come back. But I have to try anyway.

For the next few days I spend my available time looking at the ocean. I draw the different types of fish my parents catch.

I stop drawing anything that doesn't involve the ocean. My sleepless nights are spent on the beach.

Finally, one night I see something. A small flicker of silver in the water. At first I think my eyes are playing tricks on me. But when I take a closer look I see his cat eyes again. They're silvery and almost glowing in the dark night.

I kick off my shoes and run toward him. But then rethink and slip off my shirt carefully wading into the water. I get up to my thighs and submerge myself in the salty waves.

He slowly approaches me. He looks just as curious as I am. Looking me up and down. I study him as well, and I notice he's healed up almost completely aside from a few scars.

He's absolutely gorgeous. I want to reach out and touch this mysterious illusion of a creature. But I don't dare.

My face almost hurts from smiling and he's smiling back. His shoulder length hair clings to him whenever he pops above water. He cautiously pokes and pulls at my clothes as if curious to what they are.

I sign to him. "Hello, nice to meet you again." He stares intently at my hands with a very familiar look, one of confusion.

I know it's a stretch he would speak any language a human could understand. So why would he know sign language? I just thought maybe after all these miracles, there could be one more. But I try not to let that ruin this experience.

I don't dare swim out any deeper though. I don't think he would do anything but I can't be sure. He tries to say several things to me and I just sign that I don't know. He tries to replicate my hand movements but fails.

After a while of this I realize the moon is low in the sky. Which means my parents will wake soon. I sign goodbye and point to the town. I think he understands and tries to sign goodbye back. But I can't quite tell.

Once on shore, I pull on my shoes and shirt, taking one look back at the ocean and giving a short wave.

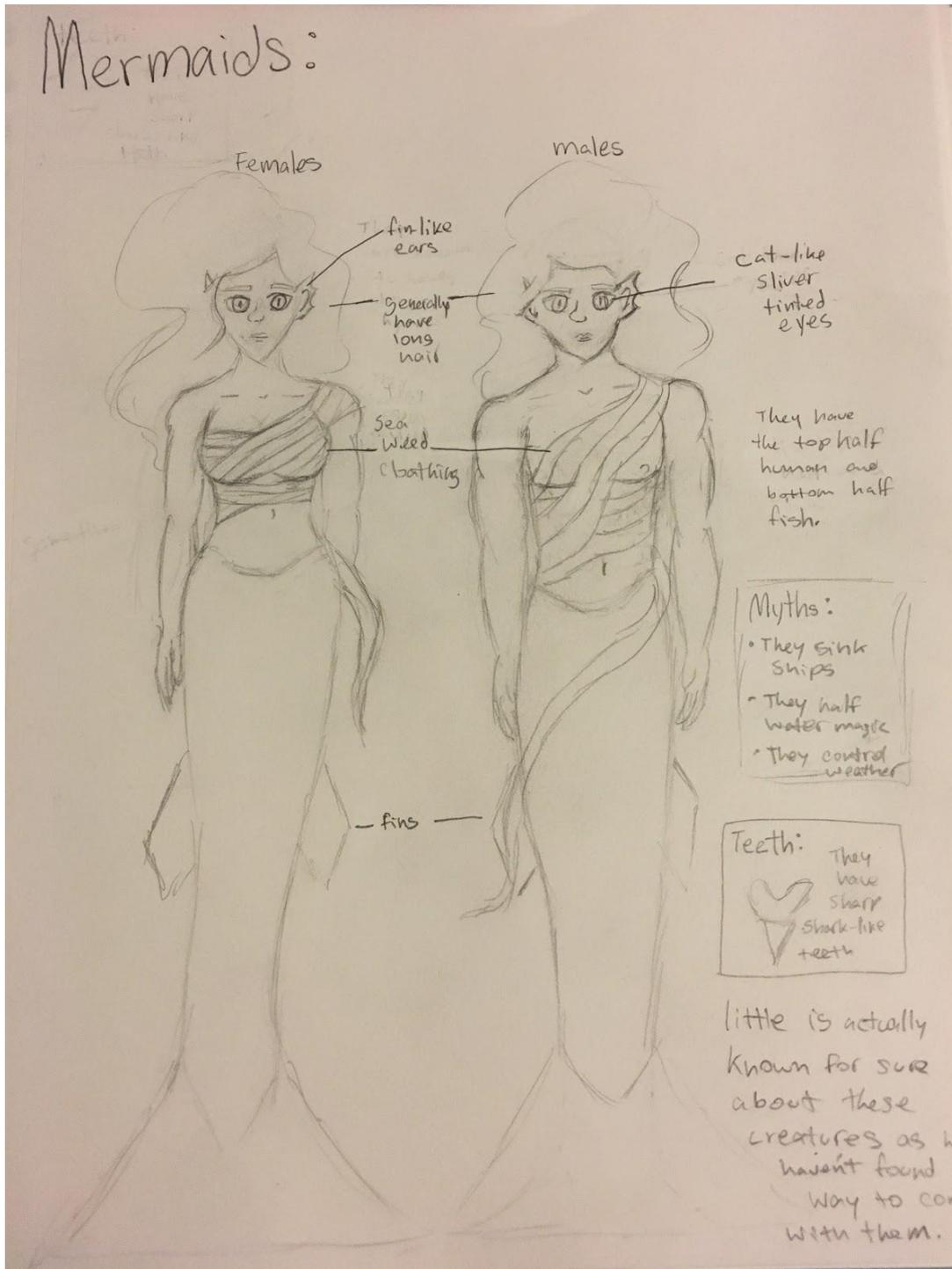
I rush home with all my belongings and quickly strip out of my wet clothes and try to dry my hair. I hide everything in my closet and lay in bed, pretending to be asleep.

My parents come to check on me, surprised that I didn't come to see them off. They open the door, see that I'm 'asleep', and leave. But soon enough, I start to drift off.

I wake up midday and for a second I think last night was all a dream, but I open my closet and it's filled with a pile of damp and sandy clothes.

I bathe and decide to go to the library. I wonder in and head for the section with books about monsters. I pick out a couple books and find their sections on mermaids.

I try to find any useful information. The first book says they are dangerous and should be avoided at any cost. The next couple are just old tales of someone falling in love with a mermaid and the craziness that ensued.



Finally, I find a monster manual that looks like it could be useful. I put all the other books back and check it out.

I head home. The sky is already turning a soft shade of orange.

When I get home I start on dinner. I eat with my parents when they get home; they sign a little about work but it's not a very exciting job. So I excuse myself and go to my room to read.

The cover of the book is thick leather and the pages have detailed drawings, myths, and descriptions of each creature. I turn to the page on mermaids.

There's a big diagram and the author goes on to say that they neglected to add two major elements, one being that mermaids have a coloration and fin shape of

a certain type of fish. The second is that they have tattoos. The author says that they left those out because they vary a great deal.

I wonder what type of fish the mermaid I met was. He's probably a common fish based on his coloration. I should really give him a name. I'm sure he already has one but I won't be able to hear it anyway. I brainstorm for a while but finally decide on Ethel.

I'm content with what I've done tonight, so I head off to bed. I take off my glasses and change into something more comfortable. As I lay down in bed I smile to myself. I have a new friend and research subject.

The next few nights are stormy. The ocean is too rocky to visit, so I just stare at the dark water through my window. The occasional lightning flash illuminates the sky. In this time I decide that I'm going to visit the beach at every opportunity I get.

When I go to the market I'll find some more books on mermaids because the town we go to is considerably larger than this one, but in the meantime I continue to look at the ocean, drawing it and reading. The book has a lot of good information on many things besides mermaids. It has pages on goblins, elves, demons, gnomes, and a lot of other creatures, then there are a couple chapters on Magic. I myself, being one of many humans not born with any native magic, don't really understand a good amount of it. But I do wonder what it would be like to control something like that.

I still meet my parents for dinner and see them off in the morning, but the rest of my time is preoccupied with research or art and they start to notice.

They invite me to go to the market and I wholeheartedly agree. Once we are there my parents drop off their catch and get paid.

I suggest we walk around a little before heading back. My mother begrudgingly agrees and we set off.

We go to the main bookstore in town. There are books floor to ceiling on all sides. A soft light from the window highlights the narrow aisles as I walk through. I look at several shelves of leather bound book before I find anything useful.

I find a beautifully bound book. Its cover seems to be made of fish scales. I flip through the dusty pages. I don't get a good chance to look at it because my mother signs that we have to go.

We check out; she picked out a couple books she'll never get around to reading. I wave goodbye to the store owner as we leave. I start reading as we get on the cart home. The book is quite interesting.

The first part is myths and stories about mermaids. My favorite one is about a female mermaid who fell in love with a prince and trades her voice so she can marry him. But he falls in love with another woman and so the magic wears off and she turns into sea foam.

The second part is about all the anatomical features that we know mermaids have, along with some tattoo designs that seem to be common. Unfortunately, none of the meaning of the tattoos are known.

The third part is about theories about how they communicate with each other and the various failed attempts to make contact. I've already finished the book when we get back. I head up to my room and take notes on everything.

I sleep in the next morning. Not bothering to bid my parents farewell.

I head out around noon. I decided to peruse the library again.

I go to one of the only sections I haven't spent much time in: Magic. The whole section is rather dusty and neglected. Although with the amount of contra Mancy here it makes sense.

I pull one book on the recurring chart of magic and one on transformation spells. I sign them out and drop them off at home for tonight.

I walk along the beach once again. I pull off my shoes and roll up my pant legs. I step into the water letting the warm foam wash over my legs. I look out at the teal water. Studying it as if trying to learn what great mysteries it holds within its depths. The wind blows some pieces of my hair into my face. I tuck the ginger stands behind my ear.

I take off my shirt and lay it on top of my shoes.

Then I slowly wade into the water. I get waist deep and sink down, submerging myself. Coming back up I taste salt in my mouth. Letting the waves carry over me as I look at the sky. It's been so long since I've gone swimming. I float away the day, ending up getting very tanned.

I get home around the time I usually start cooking. I lay down. I tell myself i'll take a short nap; no longer than five minutes. When I wake up it's long past the time my parents get home. The moon is high in the sky.

I decided to look over my notes to make a list so I can see what I'll need get to do rituals. I'll have to go to the market with my parents again and slip off to buy this stuff.

I wait out the days until the market, completely abandoning any hope of a normal schedule. Sleep away a most days visiting the beach at night.

I manage to see Ethel three more times. Our meetings are becoming more frequent but no less interesting.

We sit in the shallows for the most part. Studying each other. His skin is healed. It's a little scarred but still beautiful.

Once in a while I try and teach him to sign. He'll point at something and I'll sign it and he'll try to repeat my motions. It's a slow process, but I try and be patient when he gets frustrated.

On the day of the market I don't get any sleep. I go home, bathe, and change. Once I'm done it's already time to go, so I grab my list and some money. I climb into the cart and we head off. I immediately doze off. My mother wakes me up when we arrive.

I tell my parents that I want to walk around on my own. After a bit of negotiations, they begrudgingly agree, though I have to start cooking them dinner at least twice a week again.

They go to sell or trade their catch and I go to buy the items on my list. Black fabric, a bone needle, black thread, and chalk at the first store. Luckily I need chalk for more than one thing so it won't be useless after my sewing project.

I then go to an apothecary where I find the rest of the items. Some roots, shells, dried flowers and crystals. At the stores I have a paper and I use it to ask the cost. Then I have the person at the counter write the answer. It works perfectly.

I hide everything in the fabric bag. My parents are against magic. Father was born and raised contra Mancy. Although we don't practice most people in town do and my father holds onto the principles of the religion. Thus I must hide the magical items.

I slip away when we get home. I exhaustedly stumble to the beach. I take off my shoes and walk along the shore until I'm far past the edge of the town. The forest grows almost up to the shore in some places. I finally arrive at my destination. I arrive at my secret cove.

It's been years since I've seen or been anywhere near here. I used to go here when my parents both started to fish at the same time leaving me alone.

I had in a small act of rebelliousness and left my house wondering around. Eventually finding this place. I would come here regularly.

I walk under my canopy. The one I would sit under for hours while reading. I reach my hand in the tree I used to hide my first drawings in. The once hidden papers long blown away by the wind or taken for an animal's nest. I walk along the few short and thin paths I made out of smooth rocks, clam shells and the occasional piece of sea glass. The longest one leads to a patch of berry bushes. It's just as I left it.

The last time I was here is forever burned into my mind. I had snuck out here at night with a couple of candles. I sat under the canopy. Looking at the moon over the water. It was beautiful.

The next morning, I woke up there. I headed home as quickly as possible, thinking I would be scolded. But my parents had been looking for me all night. They had gone to check on me and I was gone.

When I arrived home they both cried and hugged me. Signing they were sorry and they loved me. I will never forget the look on their faces. Panic and fear melting into relief. After that I stayed home. Not wanting to make trouble for anyone.

But now I'm back. I will be more careful this time. I am older and smarter.

I unpack my bag. Laying out the contents on the grass, I spread out the fabric. Then I open my book to the page on clothing and follow the steps. I use the chalk to draw a pattern and cut it out with a pair of scissors I snagged on my way out.

The process of sewing will be far more daunting. I have only sewn a small portion before I'm extremely tired of it. So I take on the new task of packing up most of the things I bought today and putting them in a small waterproof box. I place them in the hollow tree I used to keep drawings in. The only thing I keep is the black coat patterns and the things to sew it together.

Looking up at the sky I realize that it's almost morning. So I quickly head home. I slip into my room and doze off.

I wake up late in the early evening. There's a note on the table. It reads *Remember you have to cook dinner tonight -love mom*

I look at what's in the cellar. It's mostly salted fish and a small selection of fruits and vegetables. As per usual. I pull out some berries my mother must have bought yesterday and some leafy greens. As well as some of the fish.

I start a fire in the stove and wait for the wood to catch. Then I pull out a pan and start to cook the fish in some oil. Lightly seasoning it on both sides.

The whole house slowly starts to fill with the smell of my cooking. Once the fish is done I cut up the strawberries and tossing them in the greens with some oil and vinegar.

Soon my parents arrive home. I have set the table and the meal is ready. They sign thanks you and we all sit down to eat.

Once the meal is over my parents starts cleaning it up and I head upstairs.

When they are both asleep I stop reading my book and start sewing. But I soon decide to take my project to the shore, just in case Ethel shows up.

He doesn't show up. But I do end up getting most of the jacket done.

I wake up in the afternoon and finish the jacket. I wait for my parents to get home. Once they fall asleep I sneak out.

Ethel is at the beach tonight. I sign hello and he clumsily signs it back. It's pretty cute. I'm glad he's at least trying.

I get him to follow me. He swims parallel to the shore. We get to my cove and I turn off into it. He cautiously follows me. I go to my reading spot and sit down. He edges up on the shore in front of me.

He looks around and runs his hands along a small section of the path. I pull out my jacket and put it on. The long black coat falling to my knees. It's supposed to keep me clean and help the magic somehow. I walk over to the tree pulling out everything I bought at the market and a couple of books. Ethel gives me a strange look and I smile back.

He pulls at my jacket. Looking at it curiously. I take it off and hand it to him letting him see my handiwork. He smiles widely showing his sharp teeth. He tries to put it on but somehow gets his head stuck in the sleeve. I have to help him get unstuck and put it on properly. Even when I do the sleeves cover his hands and it falls off his shoulders. I laugh him a little bit.



Then I tie my hair back and open a book. I show him the diagram on transformation. It shows a ritual and the product which is a small gross plant. Once you eat it you get gills for a couple of hours. He gives me an excited look. I think he understands the project.

So I ask for the last and most difficult to find thing. A lock of his hair. It takes a while to explain but eventually When he understands he agrees. I take go and grab my pair of scissors. He warily looks at them but begrudgingly lets me cut off a small piece of hair. I let my hands linger on his soft shoulder length hair. I force myself to not run my fingers through it.

I tie up his hair and place it next to everything else. He watches as I place the flattest stones I can find in a large circle and fill it in. Then I start to draw symbols on them in a pattern with the leftover chalk. At first I have to reference the book often but as it goes on I memorize the pattern.

Once I'm done, I lay down next to Ethel. Taking a break from the monotonous work. He looks down at me smiling.

I sign "what?" He shrugs and lays down next to me. We look up at the stars together. He slowly and tentatively reaches out for my hand. I hold his soft cold hand in mine. We lay like that until it almost dawn. When I have to leave I hug him. His wet hair leaves a small print on my shirt. Then I pull the jacket off of him and put it away with everything else.

When I get home I go straight to bed. I have several dreams about Ethel. Although I can't quite remember them completely. I think I was a salmon mermaid. It was really weird.

I head out to my cove during the day today so I can finish setting up the ritual. After putting on my coat I take everything out of the tree. I place several stones: rhyolite for hidden talents, clear quartz for focus, smoky quartz for transmutation, opal for air, lapis for water. Then I place an abalone and some sea glass with them.

I place several candles around my circle. Finally, I put everything else away in my tree and go home.

I cook dinner again. The same thing as last time. I eat with my parents and excuse myself early trying to get some sleep before tonight.

I leave as soon as my parents go to bed. Thank the gods Ethel is at the shore. We go to the cove again. I put on my jacket and take everything out of the tree once again.

I add sea salt, sand, jasmine, kelp, seaweed, pansies, Ethel's hair, and my old hag stone to the ritual circle. I light all the candles and finally sign the letters that are in the book in quick succession. A blue green light flashes from the pile and a small slimy ball is on the stones.

Ethel and I exchange looks. Both of us dumbstruck amazed that it actually worked. I sign that I'll eat it now and Ethel nods.

I strip down to my underwear and stand in the water with the plant thing in my hands. Ethel swims up next to me. I give him a nervous smile and he smiles back.

I eat the plant. It's disgusting, a mixture of an uncomfortable amount of salt and fish that's gone bad. But I dip my head under the dark water and I can actually see pretty clearly. I everything far away is kind of blurry but that's probably because I'm not wearing my glasses. I realize that I don't have to hold my breath and breathe in deeply. Surprisingly, it actually works. I'm not dying.

Ethel swims next to me. He soon gets bored of my slow pace and grabs my hand intertwining our fingers and pulling me along. I don't really know where he's taking me. I haven't really thought this far ahead. I didn't think it would work at all.

After a short while I see a coral reef. He slows down and we sit on it. The reef itself is beautiful. But view from it is breathtaking. Far below there is a city. The buildings not restricted as much as they are above the water letting them make strange and interesting shapes.

The windows are lit with a soft yellow orange light. I even see a few other mermaids. But everything isn't quite clear without my glasses. So I decided to focus on a closer mermaid. I realize I'm still holding onto Ethel's hand. Causing me to blush. But I still don't let go. He notices me looking at him and smiles scooting closer.

I lean into him and he leans into me. I take a deep breath and start to choke. He looks at me very concerned. I point up whilst coughing. He half pushes me half pulls me to the surface. I take deep shuddering breaths coughing. Ethel holding onto to me and helping me stay above water.

He slowly brings me back to shore and comforts me. I sign that I thought that I might die. He probably doesn't understand what I said completely by my hands. But we've spent enough time that he knows from my body language. He just pulls me in and holds me tightly. I start crying. We stay like that for a long time. I finally pull back wiping away my tears with the back of my hands.

I hug him one last time briefly before signing goodnight and going home.

I wake up and my parents are already home from another day of work. I slept through the whole day. I eat dinner with them. They talk about their usual things. It's mostly work and a few pieces of small town gossip.

But I don't pay much attention. I'm running the events of last night over and over in my mind.

I go the beach and he's not there tonight. It seems that he's always gone when I want to see him the most. I spend all of the next day thinking about him and our night out. I can't sleep because my mind is going in a thousand different directions. What if he didn't like me crying on him or thinks I'm stupid after seeing me choke.

After a long and anxious day, I lay on the beach again and look up at the stars. The waves crashing on my legs. Suddenly I feel a familiar hand on mine.

I sit up and Ethel is right in front of me. He signs hello and I sign it back. Then he slowly leans into me. Softly and sweetly pressing his soft cold lips against mine.

Pulling back, he signs *I've wanted to do that for a while.*

The End