

Chapter Three

Watching her mother close the temple door. Allorana sat on the temple step with a sigh. True, guarding the door meant she should have stood in front of it, but she was tired. *Besides*, she *was* in front of it, just not *in front* of it, she thought as she played with her *peplos*, plucking a loose thread in the fabric.

Tiring of playing with the thread, she looked down at her feet. Laughing at how dirty they were, she scrubbed one foot on the other. Succeeding only in transferring the dirt, she made a game of trying to make patterns with the smudges.

She knew this is an honor, to guard the door while her mother worked, but it is also boring. Again, she sighed, and then laughed. Her mother once commented that she must have a blowhole, like a dolphin, with how often she sighed.

Her laughter died suddenly as--in the distance, but far too near--Allorana heard leaves rustling and a branch snapping. Jumping to her feet, she watched a Thing walking into the clearing. No, not walking, more like stumbling. It appeared nervous, constantly looking behind itself. Shashanna and Allorana do not approve of enslaving these creatures, but in this, no one listens to their priestess, nor her daughter.

This particular Thing is a cross between a wolf and a woman. Her nose and mouth are elongated into a half-formed muzzle with some human and some canine teeth. Some of the human teeth look like they are possibly canine, but didn't grow much past the human stage, yet are too long to be fully considered human. One ear is more pointed than the other, but both are fairly keen. She has whiskers and her eyes are golden amber. She wore no clothing, so Allorana can see that while she has just two breasts, she also has six nipples, and all but her belly is covered with soft-looking fur. Her legs are bent and her feet are looking like half-paw/half-feet with sharp claws. Only her hands are fully human, except for having claws there as well.

These poor creatures are the results of the ancestor's playing with magic and attempting to turn animals into humans as laborers. However, because the magic was so unpredictable then--and the ancestors grasp on their own humanity so tenuous--the animals did not turn fully human. They stayed in this half-state, caught between one form and another.

The ancestor's had intended that their unintentional creations die off, but they had bred. And with each subsequent generation, the Things had gained more. More strength. More knowledge. Just...more. At least, some had. Some seemed to remain as stunted and close to their animal-like looks and sometimes behavior as their predecessors. However, even the intelligent ones were not considered worthy of being citizens. They were not allowed to attend the schools nor were they allowed to participate fully in *any* gathering or household. They had to live on the fringes of society, and were treated badly--if they were acknowledged at all beyond being given their orders.

To make matters worse, their children mated and had children of their own. This caused the deformity of being half-human/half-animal became more and more pronounced. Shashanna had told Allorana that she believes that they will eventually regain their original forms and be proper animals again. However, Allorana was not so sure. How can they be proper animals again when they have knowledge now? When they can speak and reason...at least most, at least to a point? No, Allorana believes that eventually they will be able to shift forms, from one to another, at will. But nobody will ever believe her, not even her mother, so she keeps this thought to herself.

Glancing behind herself once more, the Thing took a stumbling step toward the temple steps, collapsing just short of them, breathing hard.

Allorana heard the gasps, and felt them tear through her own chest, as if she were the one experiencing them. She heard the whimper and the *almost* silent cries for help.

Torn between maintaining her position at the door--something that should not be in question--and running to the aid of the she-wolf, she hesitated. However, the plaintive whimpers of the Thing were just too much for her. With a final glance at the door behind her; she jumped to her feet and ran to the she-wolf's

Kneeling beside her, Allorana placed a hand on the Thing's shoulder. Lifting her head slowly she gazed at Allorana in surprise. Most humans avoided touching them at all cost...unless it was to extract punishment, or to kill them.

Her eyes glimmered with unshed tears at the kindness and sympathy that she read in Allorana's. It was not just that Allorana was a child. No, even the children treated the Things with disdain and sometimes even contempt. Allorana seemed to be a child that was unusual in most regards. She had been watching Allorana for a while...She knew that Allorana would be the one to come to.

"Have you a name?" Allorana gently asked.

The she-wolf was not offended the wording. It is rare for Things to be named; only those that worked in the homes usually have names, though even that is rare.

"N-no n-n-na-a-me." She struggled out. She wearily lifted her arm and pointed toward the coast where the waves could be heard in the distance. "Sh-h-h-i-i-psss." She said.

Allorana quickly stood. With her mother's word's ringing in her mind along with the she-wolf's echoing in her ears, she knew. She knew her mother's vision was happening now.

Quickly looking down at the Thing at her feet, she knew no one would believe her, even if the she-wolf could get out the words in time. Unfortunately, her breeding was of a poorer quality, closer to the animal than the human.

"Run. Run and hide." Allorana whispered to the Thing. She didn't know why, but there was something about this particular female that drew her, but there was no time to look closer at it. "Hide. If I can, I will find you when the danger is over. If I can't, find my mother and tell her: 'I saw the ships.' Now run!" Allorana watched as the Thing stumbled to her feet and finally caught balance, and falteringly, ran into the trees.

Not waiting, Allorana turned toward the temple and rushed up the steps, sending up prayers for forgiveness to the gods for her haste. Only as she reached the door did she hesitate. Should she rush in? Her mother had told her of the dangers of being brought out of a trance too abruptly. It could cause damage to the mind and soul.

Yet, the ships....

Yes, the ships. Looking toward the shore, she wondered. The she-wolf saw them, but just how far away *were* they? The chances of Ariki having a watch on alert were slim, and the chances were even greater that she has more information than any of them at this point. She looked back toward the temple doors. Yet, she has the duty of keeping watch.

However...is her duty toward her people not greater? Wouldn't her mother tell her that? That it would be better to sacrifice both to save their people?

Nodding resolutely, she made her decision. Placing her hand on the temple door and said a silent goodbye to her mother, in case they were never to see each other in this lifetime again.

Turning once again away from the door and toward the steps, Allorana gathered her *peplos* in one hand and dashed down the steps. She ran into the trees and toward the coast, only slowing once she hit the tree line, where she proceeded with caution.

As she ran, not a squirrel scampered. Not a deer dashed. However...she could feel someone--or something--watching her. It was strange. Stepping back into the deeper shadows, she paused and cautiously looked around.

Nothing stirred.

Not unless you count the gnats and other bugs that danced in the still air.

Continuing on her way, Allorana moved a little slower...a little more cautiously. The feeling refused to leave her, though she could not hear anything, nor could she see anything. She felt it regardless.

Could it be the gods watching my steps? She wondered as she came to the end of trees surrounding the beach. No answer came, at least, not the one she wanted.

Staying to the shadows, she looked toward the sea.

Her shoulders sank in disappointment...the ships have come. However, they were not teeming with warriors. There *were* a few hanging around, not like Shashanna's vision had shown, nor was there a *fleet* of ships.

Yet, as Allorana looked at the beach, it showed a lot of disturbance. Much more than these men could account for, unless they had fought each other for hours.

Which meant, there were more warriors around here...somewhere? This meant, they might already be in the village!

Panicking, Allorana turned to run back to the village to do what she could, but as she turned, there, standing before her, she found the source of the feeling of the eyes. A foreign warrior. His white-blond hair and blue eyes bespoke of his Atlantean heritage, as did his height. Though, to Allorana's mind, it was not *that* different from her own people.

The man grinned, and saying something she could not understand, he grabbed her.

Struggling in his arms, she kicked him in his man-parts as hard as she could. Just like her mother had taught her. Although she heard him grunt, he did not release her. She twisted and attempted to scratch his eyes. However, his grasp prevented her from turning enough to reach them.

After all this, she was beginning to tire, and he was laughing. *Laughing!*

Hitching her higher and tighter into his grasp, yet dangling her like a sack of grain, he carried her across the sand to the ships. Stopping before his comrades, one of his fellow warriors gestured toward her and saying something he laughed. Her captor said something in return and tossed her to the ground. The one that had spoken to her captor had similar looks to him. So similar, she wondered if they were kin. Looking at the others nearby, she was more certain of their kinship than ever. While the others had light hair, and eyes, there were enough differences that kept them from looking too similar. Yet these two were far too alike...in looks *and* in mannerisms. Her captor gestured to her and said something, and his kin laughed. Just then, hearing the rushing of feet and yelling, the men turned in the direction of her village.

Allorana struggled to her feet and was preparing to flee when she got her first glimpse of the warriors. However, it was not the warriors that pinned her to her spot. It was what they had with them that did it. Her people. Her friends, regardless that they were her mother's age or older, all except one. There were few of them, but there were enough, though honestly, one would be too many.

She ran forward, or she attempted to. Before she got more than a few steps, she felt a heavy hand fall on her shoulder. She struggled, trying to get to her loved ones. However, her captor would not let her go.

'Tonia! Eno! Conny! Wasia! Leniia!' She cried desperately to the women, and one child, from the village.

Tonia--the only child beside Allorana who had been captured--lifted her head from where it was dangling down the back of the man carrying her. "Allorana! Not you too! Where is your mother?"

Allorana noticed a few of the warriors had snapped to attention, turning their heads in her direction. Understanding then that they probably knew her language, Allorana yelled back, "I know not!" Hating to see the disappointment fall on her friends' face, she could not have these men capture her mother as well, especially as it was obvious they knew who she was.

Her captor forced her to sit on the sand as the other warriors gathered the women together. There was no shade where Allorana sat, and the hot sun shone on her head and glared in her unprotected eyes.

A couple of the warriors came up to her captor and were talking heatedly to him, gesturing toward the sky, the ships and her village. The man said little in return, only nodding once or twice. Allorana scooted in the sand, a few inches at a time, pretending as if she were uncomfortable. At first her captor did nothing, and so, gaining a little more confidence, she scooted some more. *Maybe, she thought, I can get away and get some help.*

Then a foot landed on her thigh.

Looking up at him, she saw he was paying no attention to her...still talking with his fellow in their language. She tried to scoot out from under his sandaled foot, but she couldn't move at all. Putting her hands at either end of his foot, she tried to lift it, or unbalance him. Nothing.

Finally finished with his conversation, he reached down. Lifting her to her feet, he walked her to the shores' edge.

Watching the warriors tie the women up while absently brushing the sand off. They tossed them into a small boat where they rowed them toward the ships out into the deeper water. Her captor stood shouting out the orders, or at least she assumed they were orders...The men seemed to be listening to him. She knew then that she was their goal. Not Ariki--as her mother had thought. Not her mother, at least, not anymore--if she ever was. No, it was her, Allorana.

Keeping her by his side, he pinned her there with a heavy hand. She looked up at him, but still he seemed not to notice her at all. No matter how much she struggled, every little one proved futile. She was like an ant struggling against a boulder; he was both that hard *and* that unyielding.

There were three ships altogether. The women were bundled on one, where once they were on board, Allorana lost sight of them. She couldn't be sure, but she thought she saw other women on board as well. Her heart lifted briefly. Maybe their fate would be spared a little with them there...that is, if they aren't fellow captives. Her heart fell just as quickly as it had lifted. But then her heart fell, just as quickly. What if they were fellow captives? Her captor's kin boarded that ship as well.

The majority of the men boarded the second ship. *That* was encouraging.

The rest of the men--including her, and her captor--boarded the last ship. He took her to a private cabin, and without looking at her, he set her in. Turning, he shut the door behind him and

slid the bolt home. *At least he put me in the cabin more gently than when he had dropped me on the ground.* She thought.

Looking around her, she assumed it must be his cabin. She could see charts and places where weapons and other possessions had once been stored.

She walked over to the charts and nodded. These were not sea charts, but charts for military maneuvers. And, she scrunched her brows, the layout of her village. *How did they get that? Was there a spy in her village? Or, did the gods aid them?* It could be either, or both.

Sighing, she sat on the bunk.

"Mother," she whispered, "What should I do? I could have slipped away, but I couldn't leave our people helpless with these people--" Hearing a crash near the door, she went silent. However, no other noise occurred, and no one walked through, still she could not guarantee that she wouldn't be overheard. *What should I do? You didn't teach me to converse with the gods yet. What do they want?*

She sat for a while. But no one came.

She was beginning to hunger and suffer from thirst, still no one came.

She went to the porthole, but could not see the sun, so had no inkling what time of day it was.

Wanting to stay at the window, she looked around the cabin. Spying the chair at the table, she went to move it, but to her frustration, she found that it, too, had been bolted to the floor. Looking around more, she could see no other way to sit before the porthole. It was too high to kneel before, so stand she must.

So stand she will.

Thanks to her mother, she has stood for hours before. It is a matter of will; she could do it even with the floor shifting under her. For this, she will do it, for no other reason than she cannot stand to stare at these four walls.

Bracing her feet on the floor, and her hands against the porthole, she stood. Staring out over the water, she watched the waves crashing. She watched the pattern of the light reflecting off the waves. The whitecaps rise and fall. The fish jump and fall. She watched the dolphin's race the ships. She watched them jump and dance among the waves. If she strained a little, she could just see one of the ships behind them. *I wondered if it was the one with my friends.*

Without knowing it, hours passed with her watching the water, the clouds and the other ships. So engrossed in what was going on outside the window, she did not hear the bolt slide and the door open. She did not hear the boots hitting the wooden floor. She did not hear the hiss material and creak of leather sliding against wood. She did not hear the clank of metal being placed against wood. She did not hear the crinkle of the maps being rolled up.

She just watched out the window. She watched, until she heard her name being called repeatedly. Whirling on legs which were surprisingly stable despite hours of standing, she saw her captor seated at the table.

She pressed herself against the wall. "What do you want of me? She asked. "I know you can understand me, I saw your reaction when Tonia asked of my mother. So answer my question."

"Your witch mother has taught you well, I see."

"Witch?" Allorana asked.

"It is the nicest thing I can call her."

"You know nothing of my mother!"

He just looked at her, while she glared at him. Calling called through the closed door using that other language, a woman came through. She was the first woman she had seen on this ship. Of course, she was not given a chance to see much of anything before being placed in this cabin.

Her captor said something quietly to the woman. Allorana didn't know *why* he whispered, it's not like she could understand him anyway.

The woman cast a brief, curious glance at her; placed her hand on the man's shoulder and left the room.

"You *are* called Allorana." He said quietly while still looking at her, not bothering to make it into a question.

Allorana refused to answer. *Why should she make it easy for him?* She thought. Obviously, *he is not going to make it easy for me.* She heaved a sigh and looked at the boards beneath her feet.

"I am called Llyr."

"I am supposed to think of you as a friend? After you take me and my friends?" She sneered without looking back at him.

She heard his steps as he stood and walked away from her. Looking under her lashes, she watched him walk toward a cupboard that she had somehow missed earlier. Opening it, he reached in. When he turned back toward her, he held a stool in his large hands. She quickly lowered her eyes again. The floorboards vibrated under the force of his steps as he walked back toward her.

"Here, we are not going to hurt you." He paused and she heard the thunk of the stool hitting the floor. "Sit. I want to talk. That is all."

"We could have talked in my village. You didn't have to take me away."

"I am not the only one that needs to talk to you. Furthermore, that other person is not with us." He said, nudging the stool closer to her.

Sighing, she relented, her legs quivered as she finally did sit. She hadn't realized how tired she was getting from standing.

Llyr opened his mouth, but before he could talk, the door opened. The woman that had been there before entered with food and two plates.

Placing the food on the table, Llyr smiled at her and said something. She nodded and left. He looked back at Allorana. "Come and eat. I know you are hungry. We will talk later. Or tomorrow. Regardless, we have a long journey ahead, there is plenty of time."

Allorana didn't know what to do with that. Argue further at being taken away from her home, or dive into the food. It *has* been a long day, and many hours, since she has last had any food...looking between Llyr and the food, she hesitated, but the food won. She took her stool to the table, and disregarding the manners her mother had painstakingly taught her, she reached for the food....

* * *

Llyr watched as Allorana ate, occasionally taking a bite himself. This child intrigued him; she is not what he imagined. Of course, he really didn't know what he had expected, but she was more like her mother than he had expected. She is also far more intelligent than he had anticipated, and that might make things difficult.

He frowned as he watched her reach for her goblet, only to miss it. She reached up and rubbed at her eyes and grabbed at the goblet again, this time grasping it in her hand and taking a drink. That was not the first time she missed it, or something else. He shook his head. He must be imagining things.

Shrugging, he took a bite of his fish. He chewed thoughtfully and thought back to earlier that day.

They had landed at the beach, leaving only a few of his men at the ships; he had sent the rest to the village. He had instructed them to take only a few women. O enough to help care for the child when they got to a safer place, especially when they got to Atlantis. He wanted some familiarity for her.

While the men had gone to the village, he had made his way to the temple. Thanks to the information they had received months prior, he knew that Allorana and Shashanna lived on the site. He just had to wait for the proper time to make the grab.

He hadn't dared to hope that the grab would work out so well. Allorana had walked right into his arms without his even having to do anything. He had been almost to the temple, just feet from the edge of the forest and the entrance of the clearing when he saw her break and run into the trees. He had followed her, watching her careful sweep of the area as she crept through the foliage and the branches. He had kept her in sight, but at a safe distance that she could not see him. That is, until she had reached the edge of the tree line before the beach. That was when he carefully and quietly came up behind her.

When she turned to go back to the village, he had grabbed her. And what a little wildcat she turned out to be. She landed a number of good jabs on him in her attempt to get free. Even now he felt some of the aches from forming bruises.

Taking her to the ships, he tossed her to the ground...albeit a little more forcefully than he had initially intended. But, when his brother had seen her--and her treatment of him--his brother couldn't resist taunting him that a little girl had almost unmanned him with a well-placed kick. For that comment, Llyr had sent him to watch over the women until they could get to a safe harbor. A place where they could resituate themselves and send the other two ships on ahead. He had plans to take this ship on a different course, intending to throw the Lemurian's off, for a bit at least.

It is no secret of where they are from, or where they are going to. Even so, until they have some of their plans in place, the longer it took for them to get *to* Atlantis--and the longer it took for the Lemurian's to catch up with them--the better. Of course, Llyr has his own reasons for taking his time in getting Allorana to Atlantis. Ones that were separate from what his king wanted...

His gaze sharpened. He saw Allorana again rub her eyes and reach for her knife, only to knock it to the floor.

"Are you tired?" He asked, watching her eyes carefully.

Her eyes seemed to struggle to focus on him, before she hastily answered "Yes, yes. I am. W-where am I to sleep?" She looked around the room.

He looked at her thoughtfully, something was not right. Maybe she *is* just tired, but then again...he will watch her closely.

"You will sleep here. This was my cabin, but I will bunk with the men. The woman, Aphrodile, will bunk with you for a few days."

She looked back at him, her chin tilted upward. "Can't you just take me back home?"

"No...No, I am afraid not. You are needed elsewhere."

"I am needed at home."

"Your home has your mother. We need you more." He said, smiling to try to make her see sense.

"If that is so, mother would have sent me to you instead of you taking me. *I want to go home.*" Despite attempting to appear determined, her lower lip started to tremor.

Llyr sighed. "There are others that need to talk to you. And I have much to say. We will talk in the morning. In the meantime, try to sleep. It will be better in the morning." Llyr stood, reached his hand toward her, but just before he touched the top of her head, he dropped his hand and turning, he walked toward the door.

"It won't be better until I am home." She said quietly just as his hand touched the handle.

Sighing, he pulled open the door. With a quiet word to Aphrodite, he walked out while she walked in.