

Chapter Six

Shashanna hurried down the steps as fast as she could with the tossing ship growing increasingly worse. By the time she made it down to the bowels to where the women had been relegated with the animals, she had almost fallen twice, having to cling to the steps above her head to refrain from tumbling down the rest.

As she cleared the last step, she looked up from where she had been watching her footing to see all the women clinging together, young Taylor virtually lost among them. The only woman not among the rest was the Thing, who was huddled the best she could near her, and moreover, Shashanna's hammocks.

The she-wolf was the first to see Shashanna. She had been staring intensely at the steps, almost as if she had been watching for her. She launched herself to her feet and hurried as fast as she could to Shashanna. However, before she could reach her, the woman saw Shashanna and they rushed to her as well, pushing the Thing out of the way. They crowded Shashanna as much as they could with her still clinging to the steps.

Taylor hung back slightly, looking toward the she-wolf, a peculiar look on her face, which only Shashanna saw--and could not rightly interpret.

The she-wolf looked toward Shashanna, disappointment clear on her misshapen face.

"What is going on? Why is the ship rocking so? Nazomi asked. Others echoed her, the rest remained quiet, too frightened to say anything.

"We are being rocked to sleep by Okeanos." Taylor said, before Shashanna had a chance to say anything. Her voice was unexpressive, trying to not give anything away, yet her eyes sparkled. "What do you think? We are in a storm." She added sarcastically, rolling her eyes at the group as she walked up to stand near her mother.

Shashanna inwardly grinned. She would have done more, but the others had not appreciated Taylor's remarks, so Shashanna kept her mouth shut. "She is right." She said instead. For all that, Taylor remarked again before she could continue.

"See? Okeanos *is* rocking us to sleep!" Allie reached out and cuffed her lightly in the back of the head.

Shashanna could not restrain the grin that time. She flashed it at Taylor, who grinned back. She did not say anything in response to Taylor's remark however; she *did* continue what she was going to say. "I do not know if the Atlantean gods are working against us, or not, but according to Collax, the storm is going to be strong, and is likely to continue to keep getting worse until it blows out." She looked around at the women then continued. "It may be impossible for us to guide ourselves in it...it is likely we will be blown off course."

"How long will the storm last?" Shira asked.

"Collax has no idea. We do not even know whether or not Allorana and the others were even caught in it..."

The women started all talking at once. However, Nazomi spoke loud enough to make herself heard, "What happens if we get lost?"

"Collax is a fine sailor. He will be able to find his way and guide us to Atlantis."

"What happens if the ship carrying Allorana, Tonia, and the others becomes lost?" Everyone stared at Shashanna, even the she-wolf.

"We will find a way to find them. The gods will help us."

Nazomi looked askance at Shashanna. "The gods have not helped us much to this point." Some of the women looked at Nazomi in shock that she dared say that, but one or two murmured their agreement. Suddenly, however, the ship pitched at a sharp angle, throwing all of them to the floor.

"I think," Misa said shakily, "we had better stop talking about this. *If* the Atlantean gods are angered at us, it would not due to anger our own gods."

"Wise decision." Shashanna said quietly as she struggled to her feet. "Besides, I almost forgot...the captain had told me to tell us to secure ourselves. It is going to get rough; I think we should secure the animals as well."

The women nodded.

Looking around, Shashanna saw several bundles of rope and she directed some of the women to tying the animals more securely into their pens, while others made sure the crates and barrels would not come loose.

"Taylor?" Shashanna looked at the girl who was watching the women. Taylor turned her head and looked at her. "Why do you not go ahead and secure yourself?"

"How?"

"Well, you know, I do not rightly know. I have never been at sea, much less at sea in a storm. We will have to see how this goes. I imagine the floor is going to get pretty wet, the water comes in here as is..." Taylor pulled a face and looked excited at that thought as she made her way to her hammock. Shashanna watched her for a moment before she made her way to her bunk and to the She-wolf. She hunched down to sit on her heels next to her. "How are you?" Shashanna asked the Thing, trying to put aside her suspicions and be kind.

"Sss-c-ca-ar-rrred." She stammered.

"Yes. This is going to be a long night. I hope it will not last longer than the night." Shashanna sighed. She looked at the She-wolf. She really was a pretty one...in a different way. "I cannot call you 'Thing,' nor can I call you 'she-wolf...which is what I have been referring to you in my mind. I need a name for you. What does your kind call you?" Shashanna had never heard that they one another other names, but it is always possible.

"N-nnn-a-aamm-me...? M-m-mm-ee?" She looked startled at the thought.

"Yes, I want to call you by a name. Have you something others like you call you?" She nodded shyly. Shashanna waited, but the she-wolf did not say anything. "Well? What is it?" She laughed gently.

"Tae." She smiled.

"They gave you a name you can say without stuttering!" Shashanna said with approval. Tae laughed delightedly, glad that Shashanna liked her name. Shashanna joined her in the laughing. "From now on, I will call you Tae. Is that fine with you?" Tae nodded. "Good!"

"Shashanna?" Maya, Misa's twin, had come up to Tae and Shashanna without either of them noticing. Maya did not even acknowledge the she-wolf. "The animals are secured...so is the cargo. There really is not a way to secure ourselves. What should we do? The tossing of the ship is getting worse."

Shashanna sighed. "We are going to have to deal the best we can." Shashanna stood and looked around her. Just as Maya said, everything that could be strapped down tight had been

done so. The women were standing around, well, standing the best they could with the ship swaying and tossing the way it was. "I suggest we all climb into our hammocks. I imagine before the night is over, a good number of us are going to be quite sick. It is going to be unavoidable. It is going to also be unbearable. Yet, there really is not much we can do. I do not have many of my stores. We are going to have to bear with it. We will get thro--"

Shashanna stopped as the captain climbed down the steps. "The storm is getting worse, and we have barely even entered it." He said without even a greeting. "I will send a man down to secure everything--"

"My women have already done so, Collax." Shashanna smiled briefly at him, the worry shining out of her eyes, and dripping from her voice.

Collax looked shocked. He looked around and saw that it had been done. "Thank you. I was not expecting you to take care of that. If there is nothing any of you need, I suggest you make yourselves as comfortable as you can for the night. It is going to be rough."

Shashanna looked around at everyone. "Do any of you need anything?" They shook their heads, looking nervous. "Just take care of the ship, we will be fine." Shashanna told the captain.

"Very well. If you need anything, let me or one of my men know. Try to get some rest." He smiled at them and turned to the steps, holding tightly to the higher ones. The waters rough enough for even one as experienced as he.

Shashanna turned to the women. "Let us do as he said, and try to get some rest." Everyone nodded and climbed into their hammocks. Shashanna put out all of the lanterns, save for one. This one she carried with her. Climbing into her hammock, she extinguished it, setting the hold into darkness with only the sounds of the women and animals settling. And the smells of the animals and humans combined.

The pitching of the ship seemed only to enhance once the light disappeared, and the moaning of the women began shortly afterward...