

CHAPTER 1



ALUNA SWAM TOWARD the abandoned outpost, her heart pounding, her breathing necklace pulsing at her throat. She kicked her legs harder, wishing it were tomorrow. Wishing she already had her tail. With a tail, she could speed through the water, fast as a dolphin.

Goldenfins and shiny-blues darted out of her way. Most of the sun's light was gobbled up by the ocean above her, but she could still see every frond of kelp, every sprout of rainbow coral, every pair of eyes hidden deep in a hidey-hole. The ancients had blessed the Kampii with everything they needed to survive underwater: powerful tails, thick bones and tough skin, adaptable vision, breathing necklaces . . . everything

except the ability to fix their own tech when it started to fail.

“Hurry up,” she called to Hoku. The thick ocean swallowed the sound, but the tiny artifact in her throat sent her words directly to the artifacts in Hoku’s ears . . . despite the fact that he was trailing ten meters behind her.

“I’m swimming as fast as I can,” Hoku said. “You know, there might be a reason the outpost is forbidden. Maybe it’s overrun with Deepfell.”

“Deepfell don’t hunt this far into the shallows,” Aluna said, hoping she was right. She and Hoku would both be fish food if she wasn’t.

“I think we should turn back. My grandma will worry if I’m not in the nest for dinner.”

Aluna swung her body upright and treaded in the current. She could see Hoku in the distance, swimming slowly with his pale, scrawny legs and terrible technique. “Four Kampii have died in the last three moons, and the Elders want us to believe their deaths were all accidents? They’re hiding something, something important. The ancients lived at this outpost for years before the City of Shifting Tides was even built. I know it holds the answers.”

Silence.

“And who knows?” she said. “Maybe we’ll find a few artifacts for your workshop. . . .”

“Oh, tides’ teeth,” Hoku said. “I’ll be there in a flash.”

He caught up, his freckled face red from the effort. And from thinking about artifacts, no doubt. Hoku could stay hunched over his workbench for days when he got a new piece of tech.

“We’d better find something good,” he said with a grin.

She laughed and kicked off. “Let’s swim. We only have a few hours before full dark.”

But instead of fading into blackness, the ocean grew brighter as they swam. Aluna drifted to a stop before a shimmering dome of white light. It looked as if the moon had fallen into the sea and lay buried half-way in the sand.

“A glowfield!” Hoku said. “It takes forever to breed the right jellyfish and to get them to knit together in the correct pattern. You were right—whatever the Elders are hiding, it must be important.”

“How do we get through the barrier?” Aluna unfastened the knife strapped to her thigh and swam closer. Thousands of jellyfish floated in a vast web, their tentacles intertwined so closely that not even a hermit crab could slip through their embrace. She looked for a spot with fewer tendrils and readied her blade. “Maybe we can cut a hole.”

“Oh, it’s not difficult to cut through the jellyfish,”

Hoku said absently. “The hard part is resisting the paralysis they cause.”

“Paralysis?” Aluna yanked her weapon away from the jellyfish and bolted backward. “Next time, make that the *first* thing you mention, okay?”

She looked closer and spotted fish stuck to the glowfield like shells woven into her sister’s hair. Some of the fish struggled weakly, but most were dead and partially eaten. She had no intention of sharing their fate.

“I can see buildings!” Hoku said, peering between jellyfish. “The ancients conducted experiments here, back when they were figuring out how to work with the ocean spirits, before the first Kampii colony was founded. I wonder if any of their equipment still works.”

Aluna squinted through the tendrils, careful to keep her distance. A cluster of barnacle-covered domes sat in the middle of the glowfield, silent and serene. In the white jellyfish light, they looked like pearls.

“Sarah Jennings must have come here,” Aluna said wistfully. “This was her home before she founded the City of Shifting Tides and saved us all from the Above World.”

“Aluna,” Hoku whispered.

“We’ve got to get inside,” she said. “The Elders want to keep us out, and I want to know why.”

“Aluna,” he whispered again, his eyes wide and focused on something behind and above her. “I don’t think it’s *us* the Elders are trying to keep out.”

Aluna clamped her mouth shut and looked up.

She felt the water grow cold as the deadliest predator in the ocean glided a few meters above their heads. Pointed snout, black pebble eyes pressed into pale flesh, rows of sharp teeth still trailing scraps of meat from its last meal.

Great White.

The shark lazed its way through the water, looking. Listening. Smelling.

Aluna was sure it would hear their hearts pounding or see the necklaces pulsing at their throats. *Be still as a starfish*, she told herself. *Be calm as Big Blue*.

The shark glided over them and zigzagged around the curve of the glowfield, as if it were searching for an entrance.

When the creature was almost out of view, Hoku kicked his feet against the current to maintain his position. It was a small, unconscious move. He probably didn’t realize he’d even done it. But Aluna noticed, and Great White did, too.

The shark twisted sharply, attracted to the sudden motion. In one moment it was swimming away, and in the next it was streaking through the water right at Hoku.

“Swim!” Aluna yelled, but he didn’t move. His arms drifted at his sides, his legs hung useless below him. He just stared at the shark.

Aluna vaulted up from the ocean floor, waving both legs and both arms, and screamed, “Over here, you big guppy! Fight me instead!”

Great White ignored her.

Only one thing left to try. She flicked the point of her knife across her palm, fast and deep. A tiny red cloud puffed up from the wound. Her skin would knit itself back together quickly, thanks to the ancients who designed it, but even one drop was enough. Sharks could smell blood from kilometers away. There was nothing they loved more.

Great White twitched. Aluna gasped, her vision suddenly eclipsed by the shark’s pale, monstrous body speeding toward her, fast as a harpoon. Deep battle scars marred its muzzle. Its great maw hung open, big enough to swallow her whole.

She switched the grip on her knife so that the back of the blade rested against her forearm. *The knife is not a tool that you “use,”* her brother Anadar always said. *The knife is an extension of your arm. As soon as you pick it up, it becomes a part of you.*

She knew she couldn’t hurt the shark, not without a thick spear and the skill to drive it deep into the

monster's gills, but it wasn't expecting her to fight back at all. Sharks never expected that. If she could slash it on the nose a few times before it bit her, it might decide she wasn't worth the effort.

The shark closed in. Aluna yelled and punched her knife at its nose. Great White dodged at the last moment and *flash!* A bright-green beam of light erupted from a spot above one of its pitiless black eyes.

Glowing lines crisscrossed Aluna's body. The shark had cast a net over her—a net of light! She watched the net move across the dark skin of her arms and legs and over the tight seal leather that covered the rest of her. The green light shimmered in the current, dancing and flickering like moonlight on the waves. It didn't hurt. In fact, she couldn't feel it at all.

“Move!” Hoku yelled. His voice reverberated in her ear and woke her from her stupor.

She straightened her legs, lifted her arms, and dropped like a stone through the water. She hit the ocean floor and flattened herself against it. Lots of sea creatures hid themselves in the sand. She tried to be one more. The shark's flickering green gaze refracted through the water where she had been, as if it were looking for her.

Aluna saw Hoku not far off, dug into the sand, just like her. “What's going on?” she whispered.

“I don’t know,” Hoku said. “I’ve never seen tech like that. And I’ve definitely never seen it coming from a shark!”

The creature darted left and right, searching.

Great White had legendary patience, while Aluna was renowned among the Coral Kampii for exactly the opposite. She couldn’t stay here forever. She had to take a chance.

“Wait till it chases me, then circle back to the city,” she whispered. “Don’t follow me, no matter what.”

She secured her knife in its sheath and waited. When Great White’s mysterious green light was farthest away, she pulled herself into a crouch, pressed her palms together over her head, and kicked off.

“Aluna, what are you doing?” Hoku yelled.

“Saving us,” she said simply, and swam for her life. For both of their lives.

CHAPTER 2



SWIFT AS A SEAL.

Aluna could feel Great White behind her, mouth agape, hunting. Its glowing net formed around her once, and she darted out of it as fast as she could. She tucked her chin to her chest to minimize her drag in the water and kicked harder. *Nothing could hold her. Nothing would stop her.*

She swam through a school of sunstripes, trying to confuse her scent. Great White dragged its green light through the water, searching for her. She ducked under coral and around rocks. Never in all her life had she wanted to see one of her brothers so badly. She'd even be grateful to see her father. Not even Great White could scare him.

If the shark hadn't been throwing out its net, it would have caught her in one flash of a tail. Whatever game it was playing, that game was saving her life. So far. The rest of the saving was up to her. If she could just make it to the kelp forest near the city! Great White would never be able to navigate between those thick, sticky strands.

The first tufts of seaweed were young and sparse, easy to weave between. Easy for Great White, too. It powered through the fronds as if they didn't exist. Aluna tried to stay calm and focus on her technique. She'd never swum this hard and this long before, even when she'd secretly followed her brothers on their hunting trips. The breathing shell at her throat pulsed faster, sucking air from the water and feeding it to her lungs.

The kelp thickened. Long strands of green brushed her face and slid across her legs. She tried to keep her bearings. It was easy to get lost in a big kelp forest like this one—and dangerous. You could swim for days without finding your way out. She'd heard some Elders talking about a kelp jungle somewhere that was too treacherous to enter at all. Strange things lived there, they said. Creatures with unnatural bodies cried like babies to lure you in, then devoured you with a hundred tiny mouths.

That kelp jungle was high on her list of places to find.

Soon, she had trouble navigating between the tall, sticky stalks. She slowed and used her hands to make a path through the towers of green. Behind her, Great White slowed to a stop. Its green light bounced off the dark kelp, creating a field of dancing shadows. Aluna drifted silently, afraid to move. A few heartbeats later, the shark's glowing net veered off, grew dimmer, and disappeared.

Great White had gone in search of easier prey.

Aluna took her first big, slow deep breath. *Almost home.* She'd be safely in the City of Shifting Tides before full dark, and hopefully, so would Hoku.

A tendril of kelp wrapped itself around her ankle and she kicked it off. Another wrapped around her wrist. She tried to shake it off, but it clung tight. She unsheathed her knife to cut the kelp from her arm, but it wasn't kelp that had grabbed her. It was a hand. A girl's hand. Aluna looked up into a pretty face and a pair of blank white eyes.

Makina.

They'd been friends until last year, when Makina had undergone the ceremony of transformation and grown her tail. Since then, they'd barely spoken.

Makina hung in the tendrils of kelp, swaying softly

in the current. Her eyes glowed white and full, as if tiny moons had eclipsed her pupils. Dozens of thin braids drifted around her face. Her hand, stiff and clawed, had somehow grabbed Aluna's wrist.

"Makina," Aluna whispered, blinking away sudden tears. Her gaze fell to her friend's throat, to the little shell pressed hard into Makina's flesh. No pulsing glow. She wasn't breathing.

Makina was dead.

Aluna stared at her, remembering her face in life, remembering how proud Makina had been of that silly long hair and all those braids. How she always wanted to come over when Aluna's three brothers were home. Aluna wore tight sealskins in order to swim faster, but Makina cared more about her looks. Her delicate fish-scale blouse perfectly complemented the silvery shimmer of her new tail and the pale, gauzy skirt she wore over it.

Gently, Aluna pulled her free of the kelp. The sticky fronds had wrapped around the girl's legs and torso, but not tightly. Makina could have freed herself easily. The seaweed must have attached itself after she had died, not before.

But there was no blood. Makina hadn't been bitten or punctured. Aluna stared at the breathing shell attached to Makina's neck, suddenly suspicious. She reached out a finger to trace the seahorse design. As

soon as she touched it, the shell dislodged and drifted toward the ocean floor. Aluna caught it in her hand.

Aluna saw two small, dark holes in Makina's throat where the shell had been attached. Empty holes. The breathing shell's two slender tubes should have been burrowed there. Those tails held the shell in place as it filtered air from the water and delivered it to the lungs.

Without air, Makina had drowned.

Aluna opened her hand and stared at the broken shell nestled in her palm. A name was carved on its back in tiny, perfect letters. The Elders had spoken the name a dozen times before, always in hushed voices, always when they thought no one could hear them. She couldn't read, but Hoku could, and he'd written the letters for her to see.

HydroTek.

Makina wasn't the first to die like this, and Aluna knew that she wouldn't be the last. The City of Shifting Tides was fading, one Kampii at a time, and the Elders weren't doing a thing to stop it.

Aluna squeezed the necklace in her fist. *Makina was dead.* Suddenly, it didn't matter that Great White had almost caught her. It didn't matter that her legs ached and her eyes burned and her head was starting to pound.

She wanted answers.