For every kid
who wants to save the world

And for Stephanie,
who frequently saves me
“The world cannot change for us; therefore we must change ourselves for the world.”

— Ali’ikai of the Coral Kampii, born Sarah Jennings
A LUNA 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 t 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. . . .”

 espresso
“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 halfway 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.”

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“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.
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.

‡10‡
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.

*HydroTèk.*

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.
I wish they hadn’t taken the necklace,” Hoku said. “If I could examine one, maybe I could figure out why they’re breaking. They must need power to operate, but where is it coming from? Elder Peleke won’t tell me. I wonder if he even knows.” He looked at his hands, wishing he had his tools. Wishing he had something to focus on besides Makina’s death and Aluna’s anger.

“Oh of course they took the necklace,” Aluna stormed. “They’re going to act as if none of this ever happened, same as always. One death might be an accident, but Makina was the fifth. How can they ignore five?”

She was swimming circles around her nest, her eyes red rimmed and wild. They’d spent the last hour
remembering everything they could about Makina. Now he just wanted to eat some fish and go to sleep. Predictably, Aluna’s mood had gone in the other direction.

“They had no right to hide her away like that!” she said.

“Not everyone wants to see . . .” The body, he thought. When had Makina stopped being a person and become just another object? “She had a lot of friends, and her parents weren’t even in the crossway when you brought her in. Maybe—”

“And they wouldn’t even answer my questions about the necklace! Now the Elders are off ‘confer-ring.’” She snorted. “That’s all they ever do. Talk, talk, talk. They never actually do anything.”

“But your father . . .”

Aluna waved her hand. “He’s the worst.”

Aluna and her father were like a pair of fighting eels—always going for each other’s throats. Elder Kapono intimidated the entire city, and scared the ink out of Hoku, but Aluna was never cowed. She seemed to think it was her duty to defy him.

“The Elders are probably talking at the council dome,” she continued. “Eating clams and sucking coralfruit juice and gossiping like younglings. If only we could hear through the sound shield!”

“Well, maybe . . .”
Aluna stopped her swishing and swam over to him, her eyes intense.

“Well, what?”

*Oh, crabs and krill.* Why did he always have to open his mouth? He shrugged, suddenly embarrassed. “I’ve been working on this device, this new artifact. You put it over your ear and it increases the distance you can hear. I thought if I made it strong enough, we could talk at night when we’re both in our nests.” He’d intended to give her the artifact as a gift when she got her tail, as a way for them to stay in touch even when she was off with all her new friends. So much for the surprise.

“And you think it will work through the sound shield?”

“It might. I couldn’t find a way to make us talk louder, so I found a way to make the artifacts in our ears pick up sound better.”

“Brilliant!” Aluna said.

“Well, I, uh—it’s not—”

“We can try it out right now. Let’s go!”

Aluna bolted for the room’s hatch and darted into the passageway. Hoku smiled and followed her back to his family’s nest.

Tomorrow was the ceremony of transformation, when he’d watch Aluna trade her legs for a tail. Tonight was all he had left before everything changed, before
she became a full Kampii and left him behind. One last night of trouble and danger to get him through the months of loneliness that would surely follow.

Hoku’s family lived in the sand-side part of the city, where the nests were small and carved right next to each other at the bottom of the coral reef. Few rays of sun penetrated the water sand-side, and the current was nowhere near as strong and refreshing as it was in the city’s main channels. Overall, the sand-side was dark, dingy, and depressing.

His mother always talked about moving to a moon-side nest, but he and his dad knew that would never happen. The old moon-side Kampii families passed their homes to their children, and the Elders had long since forbidden the carving of any new ones in the “good” areas. Something about the structural integrity of the coral, Elder Peleke had said. Hoku had a feeling there was more to it than that, but he never questioned the social injustice of it all out loud. Who would listen to a lowly sand-sider, anyway?

Aluna would, if he ever found the courage to talk to her. She never said anything about his family’s nest or status, or her own. Fresh, clean currents flowed through her family nest. Glow-in-the-dark spirals and starfish and seashells decorated every surface. Even their resting sticks bore the hand-carved Shifting Tides
seahorse emblem. But despite everything Aluna had and everything he didn’t have, not even the tiniest hint of disgust or pity ever showed on her face. She was just Aluna, same as ever.

When they got to his nest, both his parents were out on work assignments and his grandma Nani was napping. *Good.* He didn’t want to answer any questions about what they were doing.

They swam through the cramped tunnel to his room. There was nothing he loved more than his workshop, except getting the chance to show it off. He immediately darted to his desk, hooked his knees around his worn resting stick, and tapped on the lantern to wake up the lightning fish inside. The fish darted back and forth, faster and faster, their bodies glowing brighter and brighter.

“You’ve been busy!” Aluna said, nodding to the new jars of artifacts hooked to the ceiling and secured to his desk.

He shrugged. “Elder Peleke still won’t take me on as an apprentice, so I have to learn everything myself. Which means lots of failed experiments,” he said. “I haven’t gotten anything to work in weeks, except for the Extra Ears.”

“Extra Ears? Is that what you’re calling the hearing artifact you made?”

“You like it?” he asked. “I like coming up with
names for the artifacts almost as much as I like making them.” “Extra Ears” was a vast improvement over his first two naming attempts, “Hearing Helpers” and “Ears x 10.”

He reached for his “in progress” jar, carefully removed the Extra Ears artifacts, and placed them on the sticky plate attached to his desk. He loved his sticky plate; it had been in his family for generations. The flat square of metal grabbed other metal things and clung to them. Magic, his mother called it, but his grandma pronounced it “magnet.”

“How do they work?” Aluna reached for one of the Ears, but Hoku batted her hand away.

“No touching! They’re very delicate. I think we both remember what happened the last time you tried to help.” He looked up at the jar labeled SHARK DETECTOR and the mangled metal bits inside. Such a waste.

“I forgot what a snoot you are with your bits of metal,” she said, but she didn’t reach for the artifacts again.

“I have to be careful,” he said. “If I do something wrong, I might break the artifacts already in our ears. And then we won’t be hearing anything besides whales and waves.”

The Extra Ears on his sticky plate looked like tiny plugs attached to bent pieces of coated wire. He plucked one gently from the plate and tightened two
tiny screws. It didn’t matter what they looked like; it only mattered that they worked. And they did. He’d tested one the night before and overheard the neighbors fighting three nests away. Once he perfected the design and showed it to the Elders, Elder Peleke would have to take him on as an apprentice, even though he was a lowly sand-side kid and not the son of someone important.

“Ready!” Hoku said.

Aluna drifted over and held her short hair out of the way. Hoku pressed the artifact against the inside of her ear, then wrapped the wire around the outside to secure it in place.

“How? What do you hear?”

“A mumble-jumble mostly, but I can hear that little squid Jessia gossiping to someone about the boy she likes—oh!” Aluna looked at him and giggled.

“What? Who is she talking about? Tell me!” he begged. Jessia had smiled at him that very morning. She had nice teeth. He grabbed the other hearing artifact and scrambled to affix it to his ear with none of the delicacy he’d used with the first one.

“Oh, she’s moved off. I can’t hear her anymore. Too bad!” Aluna said. “Are freckles really that cute? I hadn’t noticed. But now that old fish Moke is going on and on about what he wants for dinner.”
“Shhh!” Hoku said, but she was right. All he could hear was Moke talking about fish. He couldn’t hear Jessia at all. Had Aluna made the whole thing up? This wouldn’t be the first time she’d teased him about one of his crushes. He put a hand to his cheek. He had a lot of freckles.

“Hoku, these Extra Ears are amazing. You’re a genius,” Aluna said, and he instantly forgave her.

“Let’s get to the council dome,” he said. And see how much trouble we can find.
THE ELDERS’ VOICES were faint, but when Hoku clung to the council dome and pressed his Extra Ear against the slick, opaque surface, he could make out the words. Aluna followed his example.

“. . . simply ridiculous,” Elder Maylea said. “It’s already dangerous enough sending our trade team to the Human settlement. Who knows what horrors have overtaken the rest of the Above World. The ancients came to the City of Shifting Tides for a reason, and that reason has not changed.”

“The surviving Humans have reverted to barbarism and worse,” said Elder Peleke. “Our scouts have seen Humans with fingers made of knives, with artificial eyes that burn like fires! And the Humans that
do not reshape themselves with tech simply cower in
their villages or wage senseless, bloody wars with their
neighbors.” He grunted. “Their has always been a
savage heritage.”

“Their heritage is the same as ours, Peleke,”
Aluna’s father said. His voice, even through the sound
shield, resonated stronger than the rest. “A few hun-
dred years of separation does not erase the thousands
of years that came before. We were all Humans once.”

“But our security is based on the fact that none of
the Above Worlders know where we are,” Elder Maylea
said. “Sarah Jennings went to great lengths to keep our
location a secret. Not even the other Kampii tribes
know where to find us, and we are still three dozen
years away from the next Exchange. The more contact
we have with others, the greater the risk.”

“Yes, there is safety in isolation,” Kapono said.
“But are we afraid of contact for the right reasons?
Are we jumping at sharks, or just at their shadows? We
could use the outpost at Seahorse Alpha to commu-
nicate with other colonies, to learn about our past, to
plan for our future! And yet, Seahorse Alpha has never
even been opened in my lifetime. We have imprisoned
it in a glowfield, as if knowledge itself were dangerous.”
Kapono lowered his voice and spoke slowly. “As long
as our gaze remains inward, we will never truly know
what is happening in the Above World.”

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The Elders fell silent. Aluna and her father were so alike, Hoku thought. More alike than either of them realized.

Elder Inoa’s voice broke the quiet. “Are you suggesting that we reject the ways of our ancestors, reject the very will of Sarah Jennings herself? That we rejoin the Above World while we are at our most vulnerable?”

_Rejoin the Above World!_

Hoku couldn’t believe what he was hearing. The Above World had always seemed like a dream to him, a world filled with endless artifacts and machines and people who knew how to use them. Sometimes he wished he’d been born in ancient times, before the Kampii gave up that wondrous, mechanical life.

But he’d heard other stories, too. Tales of Humans with poisonous weapons for arms and with hearts of cold metal, who roamed the Above World killing whomever they wanted. With the Deepfell hunting the oceans and those Humans on dry land, the only safe place in all the wide world was right where they were: hidden in the City of Shifting Tides.

There was a silence in the council dome. Hoku pressed his ear harder against the dome’s surface, afraid that he’d miss Kapono’s answer. His heart pounded and the breathing shell at his neck pulsed rapidly to keep up. Half a meter away, Aluna’s shell pulsed just as fast, her eyes wide.
The silence seemed to last forever. Then Aluna’s father said, “No, no. Of course not. You all know how I feel about the Above World. It’s too dangerous, too unpredictable. My allegiance has always been, and will always be, to the Coral Kampii and our founding principles. I believe I have already proven my loyalty.”

“My mother,” Aluna whispered to Hoku. “He’s talking about my mother. He could have gone to the Above World when she got sick. I bet the Humans had medicines that could have saved her. But he didn’t. He let her die instead. To him, that’s loyalty.”

Hoku looked at her, saw her lips pressed together and her brown eyes fierce. He didn’t know what to say. He never did. Aluna’s loss made him feel guilty that he still had his own mother. Guilty, and grateful.

Elder Inoa said, “Yes, of course you have proven your loyalty. No one thinks otherwise. But we must stay hidden as long as possible, if not forever. It is who we are. We must trust the Elders before us and keep the Seahorse Alpha outpost secure. Exposing our people to the information inside will only cause more strife. Kampii must not fight Kampii. Not ever again.”

Aluna whispered, “The outpost! We have to—”

“Even so,” Elder Kapono said, and Aluna clamped her mouth shut so they could hear. “Heed my words: this is not the last death our people will suffer.”

“It is not,” Elder Peleke agreed. “But as you know
better than anyone, in dark times, some Kampii must die to preserve the way of life for the rest.”

The Elders all spoke their agreement at once.

“We will encourage more pregnancies,” Elder Inoa said. She herself had borne eight children, and she never let anyone forget it. Fertility was a great badge of honor for the women in the City of Shifting Tides.

“Yes, more pregnancies,” Elder Peleke said. “We can offer incentives. Our reasons need not be apparent.”

“Then the matter is settled,” said Elder Maylea. “We will weather this storm as we always have. As Sarah Jennings would have wanted us to. By the moon!”

The other Elders repeated, “By the moon!”

“The next order of business is the taxation of whitefish harvests from the sand-side farmers—”

“Enough,” Aluna said. She let go of the dome and drifted from its surface. She ripped off her Extra Ear and held it out. “Here, take it. I don’t want it anymore.”

Hoku stared at the artifact pinched between her fingers.

This is not the last death. Some must die . . .

“Take it,” she repeated.

He did. In the dome below, he could hear the Elders arguing about harvest rights. He quickly removed his own Extra Ear and shoved them both into one of his pockets.

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“What should we do?” he asked her. Aluna always knew what to do. She always had a plan. No matter what, he could count on her to tell him where to go.

This time, she laughed. It wasn’t a happy sound.

“What should we do? Pass the tides, like good little fish,” she said. “And hope that the next Kampii to die isn’t someone we love.”
A Luna said good night to Hoku and swam for her nest, her thoughts dark. She kept seeing the same images, over and over: Makina’s dead white eyes, the broken necklace in her palm, Hoku’s worried face pressed against the council dome. How could she live a normal life knowing it was only a matter of time before someone else died?

Then again, maybe she wouldn’t be living a normal life. Maybe her own necklace would be the next to fail.

She changed direction and headed for the training dome. A few weapon drills would calm her tumultuous mind. Most days, they were the only thing that could. If only she were allowed to be a hunter like her brothers!
She loved fighting—the emotional rush, the way her mind and body worked together, the rare feeling of power and control, even if it was just over herself. And she was good at it, too. But girls were forbidden to do anything the Elders deemed dangerous while the Coral Kampii population was below its “minimum safe level.” And now, with the Elders wanting more babies, she’d be lucky to do anything as deadly as shucking a mussel or skinning a fish.

Her brother Anadar was in the dome when she got there, going through a complicated spear set. Aluna treaded by the entrance, not wanting to distract him. Besides, she loved watching the swish of his long spear as it pierced the water. He wasn’t as strong or naturally talented as their older brothers, Pilipo and Ehu, but he worked harder and had more patience. And so far, he’d kept her training a secret.

When Anadar finished his series of moves, he saluted the old stone warriors’ shrine at the north curve of the dome and turned to her.

“I thought I might see you tonight, after everything,” he said, and that was all the mention he made of Makina. But there was a look in his eyes, a sadness, and Aluna wondered if he didn’t need this session as much as she did. Not that they could actually talk about it. Unless Daphine was part of the conversation, Aluna and her brothers stuck to the same three topics:
eating, hunting, and which one of them would win in a fight.

“Well, what are you waiting for?” he said. “Grab your spear.”

Aluna grinned and darted for the weapons stuck to the nearby wall with jellyfish goo. A few of the spears had only one point, but most had sharpened metal tips on both ends. She chose the shortest, sturdiest spear, to match her smaller stature. One day, she’d wield the longer sinuous weapons and make them dance in the water, just as her brothers did.

“This is your last lesson before you get your tail, so let’s make it a good one,” Anadar said in his best grown-up teacher voice. “I want to see every spear set you’ve learned so far.”

She groaned. “All of them? But I want to learn something new!”

“Then you better find enlightenment in a set you already know.”

Aluna sighed and swam to the center of the dome, about three meters above the sandy floor. Before she started training, she’d thought the weapon sets were beautiful, but stupid. The hunter performed a series of moves with the weapon, but without an opponent. Some of the spear twirls and positions looked far too elaborate to ever be useful in a real fight. But after she learned her first set—Spear in Six Directions—she
began to understand. The sets conditioned the body to understand the weapon, to feel its ebb and flow. And they were much harder than they looked. She never concentrated more than when she was learning a new series of moves.

She faced north, saluted the shrine and her brother, then began.

Her body did most of the work. It knew the moves, directed the spear to poke or slash, twist or spin. Her mind focused on intent. It was not enough to go through the motions. She had to understand what each of them meant. She had to give them heart, imbue them with her spirit. She wasn’t just poking the point toward the sand; she was driving it into the gills of an imaginary Great White.

After Six Directions, she performed two dolphin-style sets called Chase the Seal and Playing in the Surf that involved tumbles and quick changes of direction. By the end of the second one, her breathing necklace was pulsing so fast that she thought she might pass out.

“Go on,” Anadar said. “There is no time to catch your breath in the middle of a fight. Push.”

*Push through the exhaustion.* He’d been telling her that since the first day she picked up a knife. *The only limits you have are the ones you set yourself.*

Aluna saluted and began Devil in the Depths, a
shark-style set with fast, sharp movements. Her arms wobbled, and the first few strikes were sloppy. She \textit{pushed}, and found a second wave of strength.

When she had finished the rest of her sets, she stopped treading and drifted to the ocean floor. Her breath came in great gasps, and she held her side to ease the cramp in her ribs. Her spear hung lifeless from her hand. If Great White attacked right now, she’d almost welcome its jaws.

“Not bad,” Anadar said. “A little messy at times, but you maintained good speed and power. Let’s go over the spinning combination in the White Coral set. I think you have the wrong grip in one part.”

Aluna looked at him. Was he serious? His brown eyes sparkled their response. \textit{Tides’ teeth}—he was.

She pulled herself upright with a groan, adjusted her hands on the spear, and adopted the White Coral stance.

\textit{Push.}

Her father was waiting for her when she got back to the nest. His tail curled around his resting stick in the common room, the resting stick no one else dared use. He didn’t look at her when she entered but stared at his dinner pouch, seemingly transfixed by whatever food Daphine had prepared for the family that night.
Aluna hurried through the room, eager to collapse and savor her well-earned exhaustion. She had almost made it to the other side when her father spoke.

“That girl should never have been in the kelp forest alone,” he said. “Her death was an unfortunate accident.”

Aluna stopped and twirled to face him. “An accident?” The anger and frustration she’d just purged from her system returned in one flash of a tail. “How can you say that? It was her necklace!”

His eyes flickered wide, but he recovered quickly from the surprise. “You’re talking nonsense. The girl made a foolish mistake and she died for it.”

“But you know it’s the necklaces,” she sputtered. “And you know more people are going to die just like Makina!”

You let my mother die, too. You chose the City of Shifting Tides over your own wife. She couldn’t say the words out loud. Not to him. But they both felt the accusation floating there, an invisible barrier always between them.

“Lower your voice,” he hissed. “I know the girl was your friend, but if I tell you her death was an accident, then you’ll believe it was an accident. Do you understand me?”

Tears pooled in her eyes and she blinked them into
the ocean. “The Elders listen to you. I know they’re afraid, but they listen to you. They would follow you anywhere.” *Even to the Above World.*

He gave a harsh laugh. “No one will follow a man who can’t even control his own daughter.”

“So this is my fault somehow?” she said. “What if Anadar is the next Kampii to die? Or Daphine?”

Her father’s brow darkened. “You are too young to understand what’s happening. You know nothing of the Above World and its horrors. Grow up, Aluna. You’re about to get your tail, and you’re still acting like a child.”

She glowered, her blistered hands curling into fists. She couldn’t speak, not without screaming. Where was the proud, honorable man the rest of the Kampii saw when they looked at her father? All she saw was a coward. A coward who was perpetually disappointed in her.

“Get out of my sight,” her father said, and she did.