

## *The Sea and Her Moon*

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Captain Aven Taner has everything a pirate could want.

But when he sees a beautiful woman walking alone on a beach, he will stop at nothing to see her again. Even if that means hiring the help of a witch.

*The Sea's only love is the Moon.*

The old crone's words chased themselves around the Captain's thoughts. Over and over he recalled her voice, mindlessly rolling the cerulean stone she'd sold him between his weather-roughened fingers. Even now he muttered her instructions, reciting them by heart.

*If you wish to steal from the Sea, you must do it while her beloved's face is highest and brightest in the sky.*

A knock on the cabin door stole Captain Aven Taner from his inner rantings.

"We've circled the island thrice as you wished Cap'n." The ship's first mate announced upon entry. "The nets are laid, we await your command to heave in."

Captain Taner leaned back in his chair, resting his worn leather boots upon the gleaming wood table before him. "We must wait until midnight to steal my bride. As the Witch instructed."

The first mate sighed. "We should be halfway 'round the world by now sir. What manner of woman could cause such delay in our course?"

The Captain pursed his lips, grip tightening on the stone. "A beauty so divine I thought I tarried in a dream. I've thought of little else since I spied her on these shores."

Shaking his head, the first mate took in the piles of wealth littered around the Captain's quarters. Heaps of golden coins shimmering in the flickering candlelight. Gems the size and color of ripened citrus chimed in their gilded bowls. Shifting in the ship's gentle sway. The sword on Captain Taner's hip shone as though it were forged of starlight. The ruby inlaid hilt as decadent as fresh drawn blood.

“You’ve all the treasure a man could desire Cap’n. A man possessed of your looks and wealth shouldn’t need the help of a Witch to find himself a lass.”

The Captain ran anxious fingers through his silk-black hair. He was as handsome as a blade was sharp. And twice as dangerous. Fire-blue eyes and sun kissed skin. A smile that could end a war as soon as start one.

“She’s no ordinary lass.” Aven dismissed, waving away the older sailor without further comment. They would understand soon enough. The moment his crew laid eyes upon her, they’d welcome the sudden change in their chartered course.

The waves grew choppy as the moon reached her peak. Frothy black clouds slithered across the star strewn sky. Plunging the bobbing ship in and out of utter dark. Captain Aven Taner stood atop his salt stripped deck. Arms crossed and feet widely planted, he scowled up at the clouds. The crew wouldn’t be able to revel in his bride’s beauty without the light.

“Light the lamps” He commanded, reaching overboard and dropping the glowing stone into the black waves. The blue light grew dim the deeper it sank before disappearing completely.

A breath passed.

Then two.

Then three.

A vibrant flash of cerulean pulsed through the crushing black

“It’s time!” The Captain cried, “Haul in!”

The scent of kerosene hung on the wind. The laboring groans of men at work joined the cacophony of waves lapping at the ship’s hull. Moonlight and the warm glow of the lanterns revealed the trove caught in the pirate’s nets. Pink orange shells and rust-toned crabs, pinchers

clacking as they fought to free themselves from the snare. Brackish weeds and scores of fish.

Slippery bodies writhing as they fought to breathe.

The crew shouted to one another, struggling with the last net.

“Faster!” Captain Taner urged, near manic with delight.

A hefty creature slammed onto the deck. Sea-soaked fur shining and slicked to its rotund body. A calico of silver and black. Suede brown flippers fiercely tangled in the net. A glowing blue stone tumbled from its mouth, clattering onto the sodden wood.

The Captain bent, retrieving the fallen stone. He cooed at the creature, pulling the netting away from its face. Its oil slick eyes glistened in the dim light.

“Seal maiden?” Aven asked, holding the stone just short of the seal’s twitching whiskers. It pulsed once. Twice. Thrice. Just as the crone had said it would.

Triumphant, the Captain stood. He motioned to his first mate who stumbled forward, clutching a well oiled zither with a white knuckle grip.

“I don’t like this Cap’n.” The first mate stuttered, looking anywhere but at the creature. “This is tampering with devilry.”

The Captain shooed him away. He gingerly braced the lap harp on the deck railing. Skimming well-practiced fingers tenderly over the instrument strings. As fearsome with a harp as he was with a blade, the melody he plucked sounded of sunlight sparkling atop playful waves.

With a voice fairer than the breaking dawn, Captain Taner began to sing the incantation. A song the Witch had branded into his memory:

*’Tis a Selkie bride I wish to wed*

*Locate the isle of her bed*

*Circled thrice did I, before high moon*

*A witch's eye hath been my boon*

*I will free the one I saw ashore*

*She'll be prisoner of the sea no more*

*Maid, remove your seal skin one last time*

*So I might ask you to be mine*

The wind pitched and gulls cried. The seal's body convulsed, as though it meant to turn itself inside out. Muzzle wrinkling, it bared rows of needle-sharp teeth. The crack of breaking bones and tearing sinew echoed off the water. The animal's jaws stretched, strings of saliva sliding off its limp tongue. Oily eyes widening as the flesh at the corners of its mouth ripped apart. The seal made one last terrible howl of pain before it collapsed. Out from the ravaged maw spilled the body of a woman.

Her skin was milk white and butter smooth. Glossy from a membranous substance coating her entire body. Her waist-length curls were deepest black and plastered to her head. She was indeed a great and terrible beauty. Square jawed and doe eyed. Bloated pupils floating in an iris of phosphorescent green. She looked both ageless and as ancient as the earth.

The crew quieted as they gazed upon her. There is no silence quite like that of hardened men, speechless at the sight of beauty.

"One of you, lend me a shirt." The Captain barked, using his body to hide his maiden's virtue. The crew stumbled forward, each racing to tear the cloth from their backs.

The Captain knelt, pulling the worn linen garment over the Selkie's head. His prized zither clattering to the deck beside them.

“You freed me.” The Selkie exclaimed. The borrowed shirt fell past her knees and her voice was as deep and cruel as the sea she’d come from.

Captain Taner swallowed. Even his renowned bravado paled in her presence. “I did.” He took his bride-to-be’s hands within his own, hoping she would not feel how he trembled.

“I spied you on the shore. My crew were ordered to fetch you aboard but though they looked, they could’t find you.”

He brushed a thumb over her alabaster cheek “I thought I’d dreamt you.” He revealed the blue stone, the Witch’s eye he’d paid such a handsome sum for. “A witch plucked it from her skull to aid my search. She said to see you again, I must use her eyes. That her magic would draw you to me.”

He pocketed the eye and gathered his Selkie bride in his arms. “You are free from the sea’s curse.” Captain Taner declared. “And tomorrow we wed upon the land. As my wife, you’ll be an earthly possession, plaything of the waves no more. I promise, you shall want for nothing ever again.”

Tears of joy fell from the Selkie’s eyes and she pressed pale lips to the Captain’s cheek in thanks. Spurred by her affection he turned towards the companionway, eager to have her alone in his quarters.

“Wait!” The Selkie cried. She wriggled from his arms, scrambling across the deck. Taking up his fallen zither she turned to him.

“Your song freed me! Please husband, allow me to sing for you!”

Captain Taner's jaw twitched with indecision. His gaze lingering towards the cabins before he sighed. "Of course my sweet." He sat upon the gangway steps, eyeing up his bride hungrily. "One song and then to bed."

The Selkie smiled as she placed skeletal fingers on the strings. There was no melody to what she played. Just a thunderous stream of unpredictable notes. When she began to sing, her siren voice was harsh like an ocean storm. None knew the words or even the language she sung but they couldn't help but to hum along. They were entranced, unable to resist. She sang for hours and they wept, never wishing for her to stop.

They listened all night. Still smiling even as their tears made their eyes swell shut. Their limbs grew heavy, too weary to keep them vertical. One by one, Captain Aven Taner and his crew slipped into a deep, enchanted sleep. And still The Selkie played.

When the first rays of sun christened the sky and the crew's snores grew louder than the song, the Selkie finally paused. Quietly setting down the zither.

None stirred.

She tiptoed over to her discarded seal skin. Carefully stowing it aboard the ship's yawl. Then she turned, tucked her wild curls behind her ears, and got to work.

The sun rose lazily on a rowboat toiling in the waves. It rode deep in the water, weighed down by a mountain of gleaming treasure. A beautiful, dark haired woman captained the yawl. A seal skin draped neatly over her lap as she struggled to row with her makeshift oar.

"What kind of Pirate sails without fucking oars?" The Selkie muttered. She plunged a ruby-hilted sword into the waves, using it to maneuver the rowboat towards land.

A lone figure stood upon the shore. A woman, her face a canvas of happy lines. She kept her back to the waves. Head craned to the sky, staring up at a fading moon. Her silver hair cascaded down her back, gossamer blue dress snaking around her legs. She did not stir at the sound of a boat scraping over the sand or the crunch of approaching boots.

The Selkie dropped her seal skin before she wrapped her pale arms around the older woman. Looking up at the moon as well. “How fares your mother tonight my love?”

The silver-haired woman turned, keeping a hand over one of her eyes. “Fretting over her conwoman daughter as always. How’s yours?”

“*Pirate* daughter.” The Selkie corrected before looking to the sea. To the ship, still ablaze, sinking into the waves. “She is appeased and feasting upon the mortal souls of men.” She answered, smiling as she inhaled the faint scent of kerosine and smoke still present on the wind.

She removed a glowing blue stone from the pocket of her stolen leather breeches. Placing it tenderly in her wife’s delicate hand before kissing her frail wrist.

“All to plan?” The witch asked, her false eye safely back in her skull.

The Selkie smirked, “Child’s play as always. This one didn’t even learn my name before attempting to whisk me away to his boudoir.”

The Witch blushed, pink cheeks complimenting the lavender dawn. “A shame, your mother named you beautifully.”

“Yours are the only lips I wish to hear my name upon.” The Selkie stooped, picking up her seal skin and slinging it over her shoulder. She pulled her wife close, “Let us abed my love, I’ve a hunger only you can satiate. I’ll tend to the gold and fetch their bones after you’re asleep. Mother should be finished with them by then.”



The Witch blushed again, letting her wife lead her away from the beach. Towards a small cottage hidden in the mist, hollowed bone-chimes singing in the morning breeze.

“You’ve torn your skin again.” The Witch said, noting the state of the seal hide. “You should go easy on the theatrics next time.”

The Selkie laughed, “Tis fortunate, that I married a witch.”