

New Mermaid (Mermaid TFTG)

By FoxFaceStories

A Commission for Leonthar

Lane is an American tourist to the Gold Coast of Australia, there to enjoy the sun and surf. But his life changes when he stumbles upon two pretty girls who he comes to discover are secretly mermaids when not under a full moon! Lane comes to befriend and become smitten with the pair, and soon the ultimate chance to change his life comes when a chance to complete their mermaid pod arises. But will he take it?

New Mermaid

Lane knew he had made the right decision the second he stepped out onto the glorious beaches of the Queensland Gold Coast. From the wintry cold and solitude of North Carolina to the bustling summer joy of Australia, it was a transition that had been much needed. For the better part of two years he had been flailing about with little purpose. He had let friendship fall by the wayside while pursuing his law degree, only for said law degree to fall apart as he became disinterested. In truth, the young twenty year old man wasn't sure what he wanted out of life, and his general purposelessness wasn't exactly helped by his lack of connections: any guiding hand his parents could have provided had ended when they unfortunately passed in a car accident when he was in his late teens, and he didn't exactly have much in the way of extended family. It was little mystery then why he had felt without direction for much of his life since, or how he had let close connections slip away. In the end, he had simply terminated his degree - not just halted, but *terminated* - and booked a flight to Australia. It was a crazy, hasty decision, but he needed to get away from the gloom and come to somewhere bright and cheerful.

And my God, was it bright and cheerful. Already he had visited the theme parks, from Dreamworld to Movieworld to Wet'nWild to his personal favourite; Sea World. The last had all the magnificent critters and creatures of the sea, all of which fascinated him. The people were lively here as well, with broad accents and suntanned skin and a love of the beach. He'd never seen so many people wearing flip flops in a city centre before (though amusingly they called them 'thongs' here), or even going just barefoot, even in their supermarkets. There was a larrikinism to the location, though it sometimes went too far with the sheer amount of enthusiastic drinking the locals tended to get up to. Still, it was a far cry from his home state, and Lane felt himself becoming a bit more confident at having gotten out of his comfort zone. He was even working as a part-time barista and behind a bar to make ends meet; he needed to, to justify the work visa he'd managed to score prior to booking his flight

over (this was also a particular thing he found fascinating: Australians *loved* their coffee. They went crazy about it. A place like Denny's would be uprooted and thrown into the ocean if it ever tried to start up here. Starbucks was incredibly rare and often mocked. Australians were dead serious about their coffees and how they were made, and it made Lane pretty damn enthusiastic for it as well).

But it was the beach that called Lane to it again and again. That sunscorched location with its pearly white sand and rolling blue waves, almost too blue to believe. It was whimsical and wonderful, and there was an atmosphere of excitement and relaxation mingling in the air. Families playing with their kids, beautiful women sunbathing in their bikinis, hairy Greek-Australians laughing as they paddled through the shallows, and dedicated swimmers between the buoys (pronounced 'boys' here, Lane had discovered. One Australian had simply said "what the fuck is a boo-eee, mate?" when he'd pronounced it the American way). He wasn't exactly flushed with cash, but at the beach you only needed to turn up and have a good time.

"Make sure you make time for tonight's music festival!" a pamphleteer called as he made his way to the sand. "It's the Seaside Moon Festival! Totally free! Come support some local artists!"

Curious, Lane took the pamphlet. It seemed interesting, and besides he was trying to get out of his comfort zone and do new things. Make connections. He'd failed his old ones and let them wither on the vine. Perhaps he'd even meet a special someone?

What am I thinking? he thought to himself. *I'm getting way ahead! Still, a cute Aussie girl would be an amazing experience. The women here don't know that I'm pretty damn inexperienced back in the US of A.*

He decided to go.

Lane arrived at the beach once more later that night, having dressed himself up a lot snazzier than usual. Here on the Gold Coast, the smart casual look reigned supreme, so he was wearing a nice light blue button shirt and darker shorts, with product in his dark hair to give it a 'messy yet smooth' look. Lane wasn't exactly tall or majorly handsome, but he felt he didn't look too bad. At worst, he was determined to come out of his shell a little more.

What actually happened was the start of a journey to come into *scales*, not that he knew it at the time. The bands that played on a raised stage on the beach were a delight to watch and listen to, but it was hard to get close to the spectacle. Evidently, many people had arrived early to stand beneath the full moon and sing and shout along to the many head-banging pop and rock tunes. It meant that one of the few locations Lane could find was

right near the water, the platform but a speck of a display, surrounded by the many Aussie dancers and celebrators. And singers. The last were especially notable, because as much as the music flowing from far away gave a sense of joy and excitement to the proceedings, Lane couldn't help but hear the gorgeous tones of two women closer by as they sang the lyrics also. They must have been mega-fans, whoever and wherever they were, because their voice were perfect, forming an ideal choral harmony with each song, no matter the genre, a soprano and mezzo-soprano accompaniment that in Lane's eyes - or ears - sounded far sweeter than the actual bands and singers of the music themselves.

"Who is that singing?" he asked an Aussie man next to him.

"They're called Power Flo," the man explained. "They come from Newcastle. They're a bit overrated."

"No, I mean those women who are singing."

The man looked at him like he had two heads. "I don't hear anything, mate. You're not on the piss, are you?"

Lane had no idea what that meant, so instead he withdrew further from the crowd, trying to seek out the lovely voices that were singing. They had an almost hypnotic effect on him that he couldn't explain. But far from being closer by as he had assumed, he realised that they were - impossibly - quite far away, separated from the crowd by over a couple of hundred feet. The two figures were standing by the water up to their ankles, the moonlight falling down upon them as they held hands and sang. Their harmony had no words, at least no words that he recognised, but they seemed to mix and mingle with the song that was playing, enhancing it beyond all measure and giving it new meaning. A thread of melancholy seemed to be weaved in and out of it, despite the pop rock nature of the song.

Lane moved closer, forgetting the festival behind him. It was as if he were the only one who could hear their singing over the booming speakers of the festival, because if anyone else could hear them, surely the festival would be forgotten? Occasionally, the pair paused, or seemed to lack a chord or give space for one, almost as if a third voice was missing. Idly, Lane hummed to himself as if he were part of their group, instinctively finding a space for himself. He must have been too loud though, because the two women, still holding hands, turned their heads to face him, suddenly realising he was there.

"Selena, someone is watching us," the brunette one whispered.

"I can see that, Tula," the blonde responded.

Both were beautiful, and couldn't have been much older than he was, looking to be in their early twenties. The brunette Tula was wearing a blue crop top with a yellow flowery pattern and a pair of denim shorts that left her perfect midriff bare. Her hair was long and slightly curly, and her eyes were surprisingly green, noticeable even beneath the full moon's silver light. The blonde Selena was just as beautiful, wearing a loose summer dress with an

open denim jacket over the top. Her hair was longer than Tula's, coming down to her waist, but her overall figure was shorter. She had a smattering of cute freckles, and her eyes were a vibrant ocean blue that likewise seemed almost unnatural like her friend's. Both had lithe figures, though he couldn't help but notice that were impressively curvaceous in two particular places each. Nothing outrageous, but he had to keep his eyes 'up there', so to speak. He did notice that they were both barefoot, though.

"Sorry to intrude," he said, "I just couldn't help but notice your singing. It's very beautiful."

The pair exchanged a surprised glance.

"You mean you can hear us?" Selena asked. "Our signing, I mean."

"You shouldn't be able to do that."

"Um, but I can? You have very good voice projection, if that makes sense. I could hear you all the way from the middle of the crowd. But, no offence to the bands, your music is much better."

Again, they exchanged a glance. Lane blushed a bit, realising he had probably stepped in it. "Look, sorry, I'll get out of your way and -"

"We were singing for our friend," the blonde one said.

"Selena!" Tula said, folding her arms. She frowned, clearly not wanting to share this information, but Lane found himself intrigued.

"The one missing from the harmony? I could hear a missing third voice in there, if it makes sense."

Selena's jaw fell open. "Whoa. That's pretty impressive. You've got to admit that's impressive, Tula! He noticed!"

"Yeah, okay, I'll admit that's pretty impressive."

"He must be special if he could hear a merm-"

"Shush! Shush! Not another word!"

The blonde Selena gasped, put her hands on her mouth. "Stupid, sorry!"

Tula just rolled her eyes, but she stepped forward to lane and extended a hand. "I'm Tula. My *uncautious friend* here is Selena."

"Nice to meet you," Lane said, shaking her hand. He was surprised to find it a little wet. Maybe she'd been dipping it in the water around her ankles. "I'm Lane."

"You're not from around here, are you? Where's that accent from?"

"America," he said. "North Carolina, specifically."

The blonde's eyes went wide and she clasped her hands together in a borderline parody of romanticism. "Ooooh, where is that? Is it on the northern hemisphere? Wait, or is America in Tasmania? I'm so bad with huma-"

"*With geography*," Tula interjected. "You'll have to excuse her."

“Um, it’s America,” Lane said, perplexed. “The most powerful country in the world. Leader of the free world and all that, if you believe it.”

“We don’t travel much,” Tula said. She had stepped in front of Selena, and it was increasingly obvious that she was the bossier, more athletic of the two. Lane was finding it hard not to admire her abs.

“Oh, um, gotcha. Well, I’ll get out of your hair then. It was lovely to meet you both. I just wanted to pass on that your singing was very beautiful. It made the whole festival worth it. Anyway, I might see you around. I work at a local coffee shop called Split the Bean, and after a bit of training I make a hell of a cappuccino, so-”

“Yes! Yes!” cried Selena, jumping up and down and producing more than a little distracting jostling in her bust area. “I’ve never had a cappuccino. Oh, please Tula! Can we go get a coffee *right now!*”

“They’re not open in the middle of the night, sister.”

“Oh, right.”

Lane jumped on this opportunity, though. He couldn’t say why beyond their attractiveness, but he really wanted to get to know these strange women more. Besides, their local accents were gorgeous.

“But I am working tomorrow morning from ten if you want to drop by. It’s on Murlowe Street halfway up. My shout.”

“Why are you shouting?” Tula asked, frowning.

“Um, do you not say that here in Australia? It means I’ll pay.”

“Oh, good. We don’t have a lot of your money.”

“Well, it’s Australian bills still . . .”

Tula swallowed. “Good. That was what I meant.”

“We’ll be there, Lane!” Selena said. “Won’t we, Tula?”

The brunette sighed. “I guess it can’t hurt to get to know some more people on land. Besides, you liked our singing, and that interests me. This better be one good coffee, Lane!”

He promised it would be. Hell, he was going to practice as much as he could the next morning before they arrived. They talked a little more, but he got the sense he should leave so they could talk it over. They were a strange pair, that was for certain, and Tula kept eyeing him curiously as he left. Selena just waved ecstatically. They were like the classic caricatures of the tomboy and the peppy blonde.

Maybe things will go well after all, he thought to himself. But what was up with the singing? And why do I get the sense that they’re hiding something weird?

He went to bed that night and dreamed, strangely, of the ocean. He was swimming in it, and two women were laughing in soft, melodic voices. It felt like coming home.

“By the deepest depths, this is amazing!”

“It’s pretty good, I’ll admit,” Tula added to her friend’s comments. “The froth is like sea foam, only edible!”

“I can’t believe you’ve never had coffee like this before,” Lane said, chuckling.

They had arrived a little later than expected: apparently time management and clocks weren’t ‘their thing’ according to Tula. But it worked out well: he was on his break, and so could quickly make them a coffee and chat during his half-hour time off. They were wearing the same clothes as the previous night, though the pair smelled amazing, like cucumber scent or something.

“So, you’ve lived here your whole life?” he asked.

“Oh, totally!” Selena said. “Well, sort of. We love coming back to land here, but we travel up and down the sea - I mean, the coast - when we can.”

“And it’s just the pair of you?”

The two became solemn for a moment, both looking down.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to pry.”

“It’s okay,” Tula said. “You already figured it out last night, just from listening to our song. We had a third member of our pod.”

“Pod?”

“Um, our group. Our ‘band’, I suppose you could say. Her name was Lillia. She was very, very dear to us. Very dear.”

They held hands again, and there was a softness to their touch that almost made Lane think he was barking up the wrong tree here. *Wait, are they . . . together?*

It would be embarrassing if he’d been that oblivious, but he wasn’t going to turn down good local friendship either. Besides, he found himself intrigued.

“I’m very sorry. I’ve lost people too. My parents passed away when I was younger. I’ve felt very lonely ever since.”

“Maybe that’s why you could hear our song,” Tula said, leaning forward. “Your spirit was compatible.”

Oh, I get it. They’re super new age or something, he thought to himself. *But harmless, right?*

“Yeah, I suppose,” he said.

Selena practically bounced in her seat after tasting more coffee. “No, it makes perfect sense! You could hear our song because you’re, like, compatible! Not many people can hear our song, or understand the missing parts of it and what it means. But you could straight away, Lane! For a human like you to hear our words-”

Tula made an obvious kicking motion under the table, causing Selena to squeal.

“What did I say?”

“*Everything*. Look, let’s change the subject. I don’t want to talk about Lillia or any of this.”

Lane thought. “Well, since you both seem, how do I put this, not too familiar with the further inland stuff, why don’t we discover it together? We could go to one of the theme parks in the afternoon? Or perhaps grab a bite to eat?”

Selena was on board, and even Tula agreed once the more physically exciting options were on the menu. Lane hoped he hadn’t overstepped with the comment, but they seemed to take it truthfully: despite apparently growing up here, it was like the Gold Coast itself was a mystery to them. As a vacationer, he somehow knew more about it than them! It was strange, to be in a foreign country and be giving a pair of very attractive local girls the tour, but what followed was an exciting day that had the peppy Selena bouncing with joy, and even Tula showing quite a bit of excitement, though she clearly tried to hide it at first. They went clothes shopping, but Lane was astounded when Tula tried to pay with what looked like golden doubloons or some other kind of ancient coins. He decided to sport them in exchange for some of the coins, which they parted with easily. As thanks for the cool souvenirs, he took them to Movie World, and learned that neither had actually seen a movie before, another astounding fact. But Tula was ecstatic over the rollercoaster. Selena much, much preferred the water rides. They agreed to do more exciting things the next day, and Lane was happy to oblige, especially since the pair were wearing new clothes that showed off their beautiful figures. They visited Sea World the next day, but that turned out to be a big mistake.

“They shouldn’t put sharks in small jars like this!” Tula cried angrily. “It’s cruel!”

“And the dolphins should be free!” Selena added.

It put them both in a foul mood, so instead they went to Wet’n’Wild, which was much preferred.

“It’s like an ocean current, but above the water!” cried Selen happily.

“This is amazing!” Tula added, squealing as she followed her sister down the dark tunnel of the slide. Lane followed after, and he laughed with them. They splashed out together, and for a brief moment all three were a little shocked to find themselves entwined in the pool at the end. Selena actually giggled - underwater no less - and Tula actually blushed visibly, disentangling herself from Lane. Her chest had been right up against his. It was . . . quite a chest.

“Sorry about that,” she said. “I forget that you land - I mean, that other people don’t always get so close.”

“All good,” he said. “Um, is Selena alright? She’s laughing underwater and I’m afraid she’ll run out of air.”

Tula just rolled her eyes and pulled her blonde friend up. “For the sea’s sake, Selena! Try not to be so obvious.”

“Sorry, it’s just so fun! And this bikini is weirdly comfortable. Miss the scales, though.”

“The scales?” Lane asked.

“The usual material we wear,” Tula said quickly. “Come on, let’s get some food to eat before we go.”

They indulged massively in the many flavours, but greatly preferred the seafood variants. Noodles were a big love for them, but ‘land beasts’ such as cows and pigs they were hesitant to eat.

It must have been one strange commune they grew up on, Lane thought. It’s the only way to explain their strange ways.

Eventually, it was time to part once more. Selena was melancholic, and Tula seemed quite reluctant, even if her athletic, tomboyish nature made it a more hidden emotion.

“It’s been so wonderful spending time with you, Lane,” Selena said.

“Yeah, it has. I got to be honest, I feel a real connection to both of you. I can’t explain it, but it’s there.”

“We feel it too - even if Tula won’t admit it.”

“I admit it,” Tula said. “I’m just not shouting it across the reefs to every fish in the sea!”

Selena giggled. “It’s been so wonderful, walking around on land, enjoying the sun, the Golden Coast-”

“Gold Coast,” Tula corrected.

“Even if there’s no actual gold. Totally weird. Thanks for showing us it all, Lane.”

“Well, there’s still plenty more of it to see,” he said. “And it’s all new to me as well. You don’t sound like you’re free tomorrow, but maybe the weekend?”

They shook their heads.

“The week after?”

Again, they shook their heads, lowering their faces so as not to look at him.

“Um, sometimes this month?”

“We won’t be free at all,” Tula said bluntly. “I’m sorry Lane, but we’ll be going away for a good while. Back to where we came from.”

“I thought you were from here?”

“We are . . . just a different *here* from what you may be used to. Sorry. Truly, we do feel that connection. In fact, I haven’t felt this way since . . .”

“Since Lillia,” Selena finished, wiping away a stray tear. “Tula, we could tell-”

“No,” she said, and gave such a look that that was that. Selena wilted like a shrinking violet, folding her arms over her generous chest.

Lane was heartbroken. Even if he didn't have a romantic chance with the two women - he had increasingly gotten the sense that they were 'batting for the same team,' to to speak - he still had managed to make a strong connection with them. He had let so many friendships and relationships in general wither away that the thought of another disappearing was anathema to him.

“Are you sure I can't at least see you when you leave? So I can say goodbye. I can get your phone number so we can stay in contact.”

“The numbers won't help you,” Tula said. “And you can't see us go. I'm sorry, it's the way it has to be.”

She stepped forward, placed her hands on his shoulders, and to his shock - and apparently Selena's - planted a deep kiss on his lips. This was no chaste peck, but something altogether more meaningful. She cupped his cheek with one hand.

“Thank you, Lane. I will miss you.”

Holy moly, that was a kiss.

Selena then *leapt* into his arms, placing a kiss not just on his lips, but his cheeks, forehead, nose, and then his lips again.

“I'll miss you even more. I wish you could say goodbye when we leave, but we have to be secretive. Thank you for reminding us of her. Lillia. You are similar to her. Also, she was such a nerd!”

He chuckled. “I am not a nerd, just because I like trivia and legal intricacies-”

“Nerd!”

She hugged him though, and had to wipe away a few more tears. The travel home was awkward, filled with silence and unanswered questions. When they arrived back near the beach, they slipped into the crowd.

And now I'm alone again, he thought to himself. *Just me and a lack of purpose.*

He walked around the mall for a little bit, idly looking at various trinkets. He ventured to some smaller market stalls that were out in the walkway, and for reasons he couldn't quite explain he purchased some small shells and a few intricate bits of dried kelp that had been painted in bright colours. He went back to his apartment and connected them via a thread to make a seaside-style necklace, perhaps just as a memento to himself to remind him of the pair of women who had come into his life from the sea and had disappeared just as quickly.

And that was that.

Until that night.

Lane found it hard to sleep, caught in the throes of purposeless once again. When he did finally nod off, the dreams returned, so very similar to the ones he'd had in the last few days. He dreamed that he was swimming in the ocean, but he was so much faster and more manoeuvrable than he should have been, as if his legs were changed in some way he couldn't quite quantify due to the strange haze-like nature of the dream. Selena and Tula were present, their lower halves obscured in the underwater bubbles. He didn't need to breathe and neither did they. He heard them giggling and laughing as they dove and looped through the tropical water, both of them resplendent in their carefree beauty.

'Come to the beach!' they called. 'We have a connection! It's not too late! But you must be quick! The full moon is nearly gone!'

When he woke, it was nearly midnight. The light of the last day of the full moon shone through the window of his cheap little apartment window. It was a hot night, which made it hard to get to sleep again.

No, he thought. It's not just that. I can feel something. A pull. A call.

It was music. It was a harmony. It was the song of Selena and Tula echoing out, impossibly, once more.

"That . . . that can't be right."

Not understanding what was going on but eager to find out, he quickly threw on some clothes and fled from the apartment. Neither of the strange and beautiful women were nearby, so instead he followed that pull to the beach several blocks away. But even as the song grew stronger, that connection began to weaken. He looked up, and saw that while it was still a full moon, the merest sliver of shadowed black had recessed into the side, foretelling its crescent shape in future days. He began to run faster.

Their song. It's so beautiful. Like the sirens of ancient legend I used to read about.

He made his way onto the beach, which was utterly empty, at least on the particular stretch he'd come across. Sure enough, the two women were standing in the water up to their knees, singing as the ocean lapped at their skin. He ran to them silently, chasing that waning connection. Both were wearing new clothes: Tula wore a shimmering yellow scaled bikini top and beach skirt, and Selena wore the same equivalent but a brighter orange instead.

"Whoa," he said under his breath. Under the light of the full moon they looked ethereal, almost beyond human. Their ankles seemed to shimmer in the water unnaturally. Their voices were even more astonishing, their singing once more leaving room for a third singer, and in doing so speaking of melancholy and loss. But there was something new there, this time. Something joyful as well. Even with the words - if they were words at all - alien to him, he could understand intimately what was being said: *We farewell a friend, but*

are thankful for a new one, though we must farewell him too, we will not be sorrowful, for he brought happiness back where we had struggled to find it.

How he understood that was beyond him. So too was what happened next: the two girls lowered themselves into the water, pushing forward and flowing beneath the surface.

And then something magnificent happened.

Selena and Tula erupted back up out of the water, both of them changed utterly. Their upper halves remained the same, though their yellow and orange scaled bras now shone incredibly off of the moon light. But far shinier and more beautiful were their *tails*. Both of them had lost their human legs, and now a tapering mermaid's tail had formed for both of them, roughly two or three feet longer than where their toes would have ended, and with the same colour scales as their respective tops. Their fins were wide, their scales smooth and perfect, slick from the water, and they curved up, paddled against the watery surface elegantly and powerfully. Like classical mermaids, the scales ended at the top of their womanly hips, their human upper halves still possessing perfect hourglass figures, especially so in Selena's case.

The two of them embraced, shaking their hair free and singing to the full moon in one final crescendo of a note. Lane did something then that felt totally necessary, yet utterly bizarre. Answering some primordial call, he stepped forward and began to sing as well. He didn't use words of any kind, but simply gave into the rhythm of their voices and allowed himself to fill that third gap. It all happened at once, him inserting himself into the final extended note as the two women looked his way with surprise.

The song of the mermaids ended, and a small silence filled the aftermath. Lane breathed heavily, unbelieving what he had just done or seen. He realised he was still holding the necklace he had made earlier that day.

Why did I even bring that? Why did I just sing? And how are there real life mermaids in front of me? But it makes total sense! It explains all the strange ways they acted and odd things they said. Especially from Selena.

"Lane!?" Tula exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

"Yeah, what are you doing here?" said a much more excited Selena, who was grinning from ear to ear even as she failed to hide her tail beneath the waters.

"I - I felt a call to be here," he said simply. He swallowed. Their tails were so beautiful, so entrancing. "I had a dream. And I heard your song again from three blocks away. I wanted to come and say goodbye. You're - you're mermaids."

"We are," Tula said. "You can't tell a soul."

"I - I won't. No one would believe me, but I wouldn't anyway."

He stepped closer towards them, his feet entering the water. It was warm and welcoming, more welcoming than any waters he'd ever stepped in. The two separated from

each other, moving slightly further away into deeper waters, though Selena shifted her tail and returned closer to him as he got further in, circling around his waist, her orange tail even more resplendent up close. She moved artfully, gracefully, and Tula moved forcefully, appropriate for their respective personalities.

“He felt our call, Tula!” Selena exclaimed happily. “And he hears our song! You can’t tell me that this doesn’t mean something! What if he had dreams?”

“I, um, did. Weird ones that only make sense now. I was underwater with you. You were singing, but telling me to come to you. And my legs were . . .”

He looked at Selena’s tail. She flicked it joyfully and lightheartedly, giggling as she moved around.

“Oh, this is wonderful news! Tula, this is wonderful, right? It means something! It’s a sign for our pod!”

Tula crossed her arms, her more yellow-orange tail flickering in the deeper water. “It . . . could mean something. Or it could just be that he is attentive, more than most humans. It’s not like -”

Her eyes suddenly went wide. “What’s that you have in your hand, Lane?”

He held up the necklace. “Um, this? I kinda just felt a need to put it together yesterday. I bought the shells and stuff from local stalls and threaded it together. I guess I thought it would be a reminder for-”

Tula darted forward and took it, marvelling over it. Selena joined her, hugging her from behind. They looked so natural, covered in water as they were, fussing over the trinket.

They are so hypnotic. I wish that I . . .

He didn’t finish the thought. It didn’t make sense. It was stupid. Instead, Tula held up the necklace in front of his eyes.

“How did you know how to make this?”

“I just knew, I guess.”

The two exchanged a meaningful glance.

“Can either of you explain what’s going on? You’re mermaids, for how long? Were you born mermaids.”

“Of course we were!” Selena exclaimed, “but some mermaids used to be human. But when you’re a mermaid, you can only grow legs and come on land once a year, and it has to be during a full moon. So you only have, like, three days of your choice.”

“That’s why you had to say goodbye. The full moon is almost over.”

“Exactly.” She hugged him, and the sensation of her scaled bra and full chest against him made for more than a little excitement. Thankfully, his waist was hidden in the water for now. “And we couldn’t have you knowing what we really are. At least . . . that’s what we

thought. But we *can* trust you. You're the first non-mermaid we've been able to trust since Lillia."

"Lillia was born a human?"

She beamed, and Tula finished for her: "She was. She joined our pod voluntarily, though she was a mermaid before we met her. She was from Perth way, but rounded the entire land mass to find a pod that seemed right for her. She completed us. And now . . . now you've made an exact replica of the necklace of our pod, just like hers."

Lane was bewildered. *I did?* He communicated the thought out loud, even as he found himself walking further into the water, so that it was near his shoulders. Tula and Selena had more ability to move and duck and dive in these waters, and increasingly their movements were displays of power and supernatural beauty, their scales shimmering gloriously beneath the moonlight, even when beneath the surface. Again, that call came to him.

"Your pods," he said. "Is it like a friendship? A family?"

"Yes," Tula answered, drawing closer to him and placing a hand on his shoulder. Her scaled bra pressed against his side. She was looking at him with fascination. "And so much more. We are what you would call 'bonded' to one another. Pods come in threes or fours. A pairing is too small. Our third soulmate passed away in an accident from a collapsing reef shelf, and we have mourned her ever since."

"It shattered our hearts," Selena said, taking up his other side. Her scaled tail slid against his leg. It was surprisingly silky and smooth in texture. "We come to land in order to reminisce over her. At least, that was our plan."

"Then we met you," Tula said. "I wasn't ready to accept, but you could hear our song, you felt this connection, you dreamed of the sea *and* you made that necklace."

"Plus you bought us iced cream!" Selena exclaimed.

"Oh, it's just ice cream," he explained.

"Mmhm, well it's amazing either way."

"You're talking to me about amazing? You're real life mermaids! I never knew such magic existed in the world! I came to the Gold Coast to find purpose and meaning, I didn't expect to find the supernatural! You're both - you're incredible!"

He meant every word, and from their blushes it was clear that liked to hear them.

"You came here to find purpose," Tula said, taking his arm and drawing him into the water so that he had to tread it. She and Selena kept him afloat with ease. He trusted them completely. "Maybe you've found a much bigger purpose than you can imagine. Maybe you can help us bring back our lost sister."

"I can?"

Selena nodded eagerly. Her blonde hair shifted in the water with her. "Only if you want to. You could join us."

What!?

"I'm sorry, you mean I'd become one of you?"

Tula smiled. "If you wanted. It would be a life changing and permanent event. We have the power to make a new member of our pod, but only if the newcomer accepts and shares a connection. Lillia had a connection much like yours. And her spirit had your enthusiasm, but also some of your melancholy."

"And she was a total nerd," Selena giggled.

Tula snickered. "Yes, that too. But if you wish, you could answer the call you feel so strongly in your heart. You could join us. You could . . . you could become a member of our pod. Our family. You would never be alone, and neither would we."

Lane's mind raced. *I'm in paradise. I've met real actual factual mermaids. I'm a fish out of water among fishes in water, and they're asking me to join them? It's crazy! There's no way! But . . . but I don't have anyone else. I feel a closer connection to Tula and Selena than I have with anyone. And this warm, lovely, tropical region lifts my spirits. And the water . . . it really does feel like it calls me. I can't do this, can I? Surely not? But I want to! And they are so very, very beautiful and wonderful and funny and sweet and snarky and - and - oh, to hell with it!*

"Y-yes," he said, stammering over the word for a moment. He coughed, clearing his throat. "Yes. I would like that very much."

Tula seemed sceptical. "Are you sure?" She circled around in front of him, her gorgeous tail effortlessly moving to keep her afloat and in one place. It must have been very powerful. "This is no light decision, but at the same time it has to be made tonight. But it will be permanent, Lane. I know you feel a connection, but are you certain this is what you want to do?"

Selena continued to cling to him, holding her breath. She sank down a little in the waves so that her mouth was underwater, as if she knew that this was a moment in which she shouldn't speak.

I do want this. Holy moly, I really do. I can feel it. It's like the first time I've ever been so connected to someone else. I don't want to lose this, not for one second.

"I am," he said, voice much more certain this time. "I want to join your pod, if you'll have me. If you want to have me."

"Of course we do!" shrieked Selena, jumping up into the air and placing her arms around him. "Right, Tula?"

"Yes, but don't be so loud about it! We've already been discovered by one human."

“But he won’t be human for long! We need to take him to deeper waters. We don’t have much time - the full moon is nearly over!”

Lane was carried by the pair away from the beach. It should have felt foreboding, but it wasn’t at all. The weather was still warm, the sky cloudless and full of spectacular stars. It truly was a tropical paradise here, and both girls - especially Selena - laughed and giggled as they took him to a small island that was far from the coast. It too had nice sandy banks and splendid trees. It would be a nice slice of paradise during the day, but for now they took him underwater.

“Hold your breath!” Tula advised, as they pulled him down deep, sliding into an underwater cave and bringing him back up to a large air pocket with its own little rocky banks. Lane gasped at what he saw: numerous blue algae and other life bloomed with colour, making this central pool a place of magic, perhaps literally so. Selena swam down and brought up an underwater plant, the likes of which he’d never seen before; it was golden-orange, just like her tail. Tula did the same with a plant that matched her own colours.

“Eat,” they both said. “And listen to our song. Stay in the water while we circle you.”

Lane felt nervous. He wasn’t regretting his decision, but he knew the moment had come when everything would change. He ate from both of the plants slowly - the taste was surprisingly sweet, as if it were more of a tropical fruit than anything else - and as he did so the two mermaids circled him in the water. Both of them sang, but this time their voices were not filled with melancholy and loss and remembrance, but with a resurgence of hope and a longing for a new dawn. The light of the algae, jellyfish, and other plant life in this strange cave suddenly became a whole lot brighter.

‘Welcome a new member to our pod. Bring back our lost one, allow us to be complete once more. Strengthen our connection, form a bond. Let this human become our new sister and new mate, so that we each may once more again be complete.’

The mermaid’s song with its alien language began to make sense to him again, even if parts seemed strange, like the bit about being a new sister. But he couldn’t think too deeply about that, because suddenly his form began to shift and change. The energy of this sacred underwater pool swirled around him, emanating from the illuminated life around him and even more strongly from the magical mermaids that continued to slowly swim in a circular fashion. Both were beatific, smiling as they sang, their siren voices echoing to become a full magical chorus. The light dazzled and sparkled, settling all over Lane’s skin.

And then it began.

It started only as a few shifts of tension in his body, and a loosening in others. His feet became numb, and his legs felt strangely stiff, slowly pulling together. For a mere

moment he was afraid of sinking, but the two women drew closer and held him aloft, their tails snaking against his skin. Where their fins connected to his flesh the skin there changes.

“Ahhhh,” Lane sighed. The feeling was not painful or discomforting, simply strange. He could feel small scales pushing out over his skin, and in the brightly-lit water he could see that they were an orange-yellow colour, midway between Tula and Selena’s own colours. It felt appropriate. “It’s h-happening.”

“Yes, it is,” Tula said. “Embrace it, sister.”

She continued to sing as the changes accelerated. Selena giggled, sliding her hands along his back and helping remove his shirt. Tula likewise removed his pants, though Selena evidently had dibs on his underwear. Free of these articles, he not only felt more natural in the water, but his legs could begin to merge. The skin connected, fusing together. The same was true of his bones: his pelvis altered completely, his leg bones becoming a long spine that connected to his, well, regular spine. It was the most foreign sensation in the world, but it began to feel strangely pleasurable. Deeply pleasurable, in fact.

“Mhmmm,” he moaned, voice rising higher. “It f-feels wonderful. It f-feels right. It feels - ohhh!”

His nipples radiated bliss, and for a moment he wasn’t sure why, until he looked down and saw that they were actually *growing*, distending to become larger and more female, and even forming cute pink areolas around them. The changing man bit his lip, even as his feet began to flatten, losing most of their sensation as they joined to become a fantastic fin that extended outwards greatly.

“M-my chest,” he managed, voice rising in octave so that it was lighter and freer. “I’m b-becoming-”

“A new sister,” Tula said, halting her song for just a moment, though her voice remained musical. “Wasn’t that obvious?”

Selena gasped, nearly disrupting the magical song entirely. “By the reef! I thought you knew. We didn’t mean - oh dear!”

Flesh began to push out from his chest as his whole body softened. More scales emerged from his lower half, but even as he was becoming a magical sea creature his greater attention was focused on his still-human half. His eyebrows raised in shock as two small breasts began to push out from his chest. They grew, becoming rounder and fuller and heavier, rising like a pair of sensitive souffles until he had a couple of *very* feminine mounds on his chest. He had to be a healthy C-cup at least, his new breasts bobbing a little in the water as he was held aloft.

“Oh my G-God,” he stammered, writhing a little from the pleasure of the growth. His waist pulled in, his body hair disappeared, and his shoulder shrunk, but all these signs of

impending femalehood paled in comparison to the growth of two breasts, the ultimate signifier of femininity, except for . . .

“Mhmm! Ohhhhh, ahhh!”

He gasped and groaned, shaking a little from the unexpected delight between his thighs. Well, he didn't have thighs anymore; his kneecaps had melted away, his tail becoming a single flexible limb. But he still knew where his manhood was. It folded back up inside him, but that wasn't enough: it dispersed entirely, inverting to become a feminine slit and tunnel, his testes drawing outwards to become what could only become a pair of ovaries. Something ballooned within him, just below his stomach. It was a womb: he could feel every part of its formation, just like he could feel his face softening, his lips becoming fuller, his hair elongating so that it fell in great tresses down into the water.

“It's s-so much! It's - ahhhh! I'm b-becoming a woman! An actual m-mermaid!”

“We can stop the ritual, it's not too late!” Tula said. “We thought you knew!”

But Lane shot out an arm to grab hers. “Don't! Keep going! I - ohhhhh God - I want this! I want to become like you! Make me a mermaid, please!”

Selena shook with delight. “You heard him, Tula, keep singing! Let's make our new sister complete!”

Their voices rose, higher and higher, and this time Lane's joined them. But he didn't feel like a Lane anymore: he was the new Lillia. Or something like her. The original mermaid reborn to fill the same role, but still undeniably Lane in her core.

“Lily!” the new woman cried as her hair continued to spill out and her figure take on a gorgeous hourglass. “I want to be Lily!”

She burst once more into song, and their own song met hers with approval. Her tail lengthened, the new muscles and sinews allowing it to move powerfully in the water. It was strange and wrong and wonderful and so very natural all at the same time, and it allowed her to keep her top half above the water even as Tula and Selena let her go. Her belly slimmed, her form still athletic but now much more lithe and graceful. She was Lily now, she knew it.

She sang it, her voice becoming the centrepiece of their final note.

The light bloomed brilliantly in the cave, and then it reverted at the very apex of that last note. When it was over, Lily took a moment to look herself over, and so did Tula and Selena.

“You're beautiful,” said the athletic brunette.

“So pretty! I love your long, dark hair! And your tail is midway between ours, just like Lillia's was!”

“You're so like her,” Tula said. “But new at the same time.”

“That's what I want to be,” Lily said, experimenting with her tail. “I want to help fill the hole she left behind, but I don't want to replace her. I couldn't do that.”

Tula drew closer. "You truly are something special, Lily. How does it feel to be a mermaid?"

"It feels . . . amazing! Wonderful! I can't believe I've gone through with this, but I already don't regret it for a moment. I just want to swim across the reefs and see life from a whole new perspective, with both of you with me. I want to do it all, now that we're bonded."

The pair of mermaids exchanged a cheeky glance.

"I'm missing something, aren't I?"

It was Selena that spoke. She swam around and clutched Lily from behind, her fingers tracing near her breasts. It made Lily gasp from the surprising - and lovely - sensitivity.

"Oh, you're a mermaid, alright. A really, totally hot one. But you aren't bonded with us, yet. But you will be!"

She giggled, then began to grope and squeeze Lily's new breasts. Lily moaned, realising what she meant. The pod, as they had sang about, was more than just a family or sisterhood. They were mates, and not just in the Aussie sense of the word either.

"Do you like this?" Selena asked.

"Y-yes," she admitted. "Don't stop."

"I won't, but Tula will join in, won't you Tula?"

The more reserved of the pair folded her arms and grinned. "In a moment. I just want to watch for a tick. You two bond away."

They did. Lily could feel it; the energy that existed between her and Selena was already manifesting stronger as they connected. Their tails intertwined, and soon Selena had shifted around to press her own bustier chest against Lily's own. She kissed Lily on the lips, and Lily did not pull away. Instead she let her tongue dance in the other woman's mouth, savouring the taste and feel of her. An unfamiliar moistness grew between her - well, in the hidden slit in her tail. Her nipples hardened.

"Mhmmm, I can f-feel it," she moaned. "The bond."

It was then that Tula approached, placing a hand on both of their shoulders. "Oh, you haven't felt anything yet, Lily. Just you wait. I'm taking this party deeper."

And with that, she suddenly pushed them all underwater. For just a second, Lily's mind automatically panicked. Years of instinct told her to hold her breath, but already the gills of her new form were functioning perfectly, allowing her to breathe underwater.

"By the sea!" she said, adopting their way of putting it. "I can breathe underwater!"

"And talk too!" Selena said, laughing even as she moved to caress Lily's breasts again. Tula caught her, kissing her blonde mate along the back and then more sensually upon her neck. It made Selena writhe, and it was one of the sexiest things Lily had ever seen before in her life.

“Oh my God, you’re right! I can talk underwater!”

Tula left Selena and grabbed Lane’s hand. “Come on. There’s plenty more space for us to enjoy ourselves out of the cave!”

She pulled Lily along, and as she did so, Lily got a better sense of her own tail. She shifted it automatically, waving it up and down with ease to propel herself forward. Nothing could have wiped the smile off of her face. It didn’t matter that she was unexpectedly female, or that her dark hair was now long and flowing in the water. In fact, it felt all the better for it: she was a whole new person, with a whole new life ahead of her.

But her body was also raging, deeply aroused and wanting to bone. The light of the dying full moon cast brilliantly through the waters, illuminating a vibrant reef. It was astonishing, and deeply romantic.

“Here,” the much more experienced Tula whispered in her ear. “This is where we bond.”

And they did, deeply so. While Selena was an excited, giggling lover who burst with energy, Tula had a restraint and patience that slowly built up to an impressive stamina. Together, the two mermaids bombarded Lily with powerful sensations, making her cry out beneath the water, her tail squirming as they caressed it. She was surprised how wonderful it felt to have her fins massaged, or her scaled hips squeezed, or her flat stomach rubbed as the pair worked themselves up to her breasts. It was Tula that first breached her new womanhood, her fingers sliding in expertly.

“Ohhhhh, it’s s-so weird! But s-so good!”

“You’ll get used to it, bonded one,” Tula suggested. She slid her fingers further in, stroking her inner walls and making Lily’s nervous system light up with pleasure. This was at the same time as Selena playing once more with her breasts - she was evidently a breast girl. Lily returned the favour, taking the initiative to feel up the other woman, to kiss her and make love to her. The three of them moaned in ecstasy, their coupling (tripling?) taking on new forms constantly, favouring Lily initially to introduce her to the pod, but also giving space for Tula to be nuzzled by Selena and Lily, and then for Selena to have her own breasts massaged and sucked upon. The last made her clearly orgasm, and it brought Lily to ever greater excitement. Her own climax was coming, and the two other women could easily sense it through their new bond. They tumbled above the reef, surrounded by swarms of fish and strange creatures, their tails glimmering in the light of the moon’s rays dispersing through the ocean. Selena took up position behind Lily, grasping both of her breasts and fondling her nipples. Tula used her tongue on the new mermaid’s opening, and it was this that finally brought her to her full. The bond between them locked into place at the very moment of climax, and Lily let out a tremendous cry. It was not like an ordinary woman’s cry:

it had a musicality to it, like a long siren note of ancient literature casting across the ocean, announcing to the underwater world that a mermaid pod was finally healed and restored.

“Ohhhhhhhhhh,” she moaned afterwards, collapsing down onto a comfortable section of the reef, away from the sharp coral. Fish swirled about her, as did her hair. Tula and Selena settled on either side of her, and the pair of them rested their heads on her shoulders, their hands upon her tail. The sea was gentle down here, gentle and brilliant, like a whole new world waiting to be discovered. She could feel the essence of Lillia within her, the previous mermaid of their pod. Her magic was present, allowing her to fill the previous woman’s place.

“I feel like I’ve merged with her, somehow. With her essence,” she finally said.

“That’s because you have, my love,” Tula said, stroking her back gently. “When a mermaid of a pod dies, her magic lives on in the place of her birth - or rebirth, in her case. But part of it also goes out into the world, sort of like an echo.”

“Or a song,” Selena sighed, resting even more comfortably against Lily.

“Yes, like a song. It seeks out those who are compatible to be the new mermaid of a pod. Sometimes it never finds one, other times it just takes a long while. We were starting to lose hope, over a year on. And then you came to us, guided by her magic. I didn’t want to believe it at first, for fear of losing hope. Besides, you were a man.”

“Not any longer,” Lily giggled. “But I can see what you mean, now that I’m a mermaid. It’s like . . . it’s like she’s in me, but I’m still me. Like she brought me to you. I wish I’d known her.”

“In a way, you already do,” Tula said, kissing her on the cheek. “How does it feel to be a mermaid?”

It feels like I can’t even put it into words, she thought. Like being remade. Reborn. Resurrected. Which, if what they said about Lillia’s magic is true, sort of actually happened. Even being a woman just feels so right now, even if it will take a little getting used to.

“It feels perfect,” she said, laying back a little further and listening to the many sounds of the ocean. “It feels like coming home.”

The three mermaids pressed up against one another, the pod complete once again. They held each other for a long time, talking and whispering and giggling, filled with excitement for all the things they would do in the days and weeks and months and years to come.

“But before all of that,” Tula said, “I think it’s time you wore your necklace, Lily.”

She placed it over Lily’s neck, and indeed it suited the sparkle and shimmer of her orange-yellow tail well. She could feel Lillia’s magic inside it, the continuation of her role now consolidated within the former man.

“It’s beautiful,” she said.

“Bragger,” Selena joked. “You made it, remember?”

“But *she* guided me,” Lily said, touching the necklace gingerly. “But you’re wrong, Tula. There is a second thing I need, and I’ll need your help in getting it.”

“Oh, what’s that?”

Lily blushed a little, biting her lip. She flicked her tail, jettisoning from the reef and twisting expertly by instinct to face them as she swam backwards.

“I’ll need one of those very cute and handy scale bras of yours! Just for modesty!”

The two women laughed.

“Come with us! We’ll show you our little nook where we can make you one!”

And with that, the pod took off for even deeper waters. Lily was right. It felt like coming home.

It was a week later, and the three mermaids were once more around the Gold Coast, emphasis on the ‘coast’ part. Lily couldn’t have imagined how much her life would change in a single week, but she was glad of it. Not only was she now living free as a mermaid, away from anxieties about degrees and rent and payment, but she had two mermaid sisters and lovers in a compassionate and caring polyamorous relationship. And the ‘amorous’ part was no joke: without the distractions of modern technology and modern responsibilities, the three coupled (and tripled) quite often, and flirted easily and often as they travelled through the sea.

Already, Lily had seen magnificent sights. She had visited reefs that no human could see so clearly, and danced with her new sisters in the midst of a swarm of silver-coloured fish. She had raced them across the ocean floor, delighting in the ridiculous obstacle course they had set up. And, ironically, given her new waterborne nature, she had indulged frequently in lying back on the sand of remote island beaches, soaking in the sun’s rays, her body covered only by the scaled bra she had made with her pod (and sometimes not even that - mermaids didn’t sunburn, thankfully!).

“You’re still a total landlubber!” Selena joked. “You’re always getting out of the water just so you can chill out on the sand.”

“It’s hardly *chill*,” Lily said with a smirk. “Besides, it’s the ultimate life! The sun and sand and sea, all together. Besides, who says ‘landlubber’ anyway?”

“Arrr, only the best pirates, me matey!”

Tula watched this all with amusement. “Please, there are far more relaxing spots beneath the ocean. Just wait till I introduce you to the underwater hot springs. You’ll freak.”

“Underwater . . . hot springs?”

Tula grinned. She wasn't kidding: the springs were *divine*. And, this being likely Tula's plan, quite the lovely place for some sensual mermaid-on-mermaid action as well. But then it turned out for all her greater reticence and caution, it was Tula who was the much more libidinous one, not Selena. That worked well for Lily, who was happy to be taken advantage of; she suspected she'd inherited a bit of submissiveness from Lillia, and while it was odd at first, her old masculine need to feel like the pursuer was slowly dying away. A good thing too, because it gave her more room to tell the mermaids all about the surface world. It had confused her, how despite Lillia being formerly human the two mermaids didn't seem to understand human culture at all, but that was when Tula revealed how long mermaids could live.

"Three hundred years? What? Really!?"

"Well, technically four hundred, but that's less likely. We don't age physically, though. We'll still look gorgeously like this even when we're over two hundred, though we might look like your mid-thirties or so in the final fifty years or so."

"Damn! That's . . . incredible. Wait, so you're actually very old?"

Selena swooped by underwater and slapped her gently. "Rude! We are young mermaids and we love it! We're only, like, fifty or something. We don't really track the years well, right Tula?"

Tula harummphed. "You don't. I do. I'm fifty three. But Lillia was before us. She was over eighty years old."

No wonder they didn't have up-to-date knowledge. They could only go on land once a year, so it wasn't exactly a long opportunity to know how much things had changed.

"So you weren't her original pod?"

They shook their heads. "She joined us willingly after leaving hers. It happens sometimes. A mermaid spends her time with those she loves, then departs to find new mates."

A sudden sadness came over Lily. "Does that . . . does that mean it might happen to us?"

At that, the two mermaids burst out laughing.

"No way!" Selena said.

"We're way too attached for that," Tula explained. "Each pod has its own traditions. We're . . . monogamous, but pod standards. We three will stick together, I promise."

"Good," Lily said, beaming. "Because I finally feel like I have a family."

The three embraced, each exchanging a kiss with the other. It was Selena that pulled away first. "Awww, this is so wonderful! But the surf is up down the coast, and frankly I think it's time we showed Lily how to ride the waves, girl! Last one there is a rotten starfish!"

Tula grinned. "Oh, you're on. Come on, Lily! We can beat her!"

Lily followed, beating her powerful tail through the water and speeding after them. She wasn't quite as capable as them - yet - but she was catching up.

Besides, she knew her pod would never leave her behind.

The End