

Tide of Innocence

Luke's ears had gone deaf from the throbbing of the bass. The smell of sweat and sex in the air made him stand with his arms folded across his body self-consciously. His blue eyes darted around the packed room not focusing on any of its swaying occupants. A flick of her hair drew his attention and he could almost hear her laughter through the tipping of her head. Mesmerised he dragged his gaze back to his friends, fresh-faced youths that stood out in the crowd. A sigh escaped his lips and he couldn't resist another peek at the captivating beauty. An elbow nudged at his ribs almost spilling the half-consumed drink in his hand. His attention seized but for a moment and when it returned she is gone.

"What are you looking at?" Darcy, his best friend slurred at him, this time his nudging did cause the drink to spill over and onto the floor. Luke almost felt sorry for the host and the clean up that would be needed afterwards but the thought passed through his head quickly as he spied the same beautiful girl as before.

"Her," he replied trying to discretely nod in the direction of the girl but he had underestimated how much he had been drinking and nearly fell over as gravity shifted.

"Dude!" Darcy whistled appreciatively. "You've got no chance."

Luke threw him a look, he wasn't here to try and go home with a girl, he was here because he had been dragged along by his mates. He looked again across the crowded room and blushed as the girl caught his eye and winked at him. She looked older, much older than he was. She must have winked because she thought it was cute that he was staring at her or something. Older girls did things like that, didn't they? He took a nervous sip of his drink, placing one hand in his pocket trying to look casual, like he went to mad parties, drank alcohol and looked at beautiful women all the time. The effect was ruined when a sultry voice floated into his ear making him almost choke on his beer.

"I saw you looking at me."

He turned to the voice to find the same brown-haired beauty that had just winked at him standing to his left. Her little black dress accentuated all the right curves and he could feel the heat rising as he realised that while she was beautiful across the room she was downright stunning standing in front of him. He swallowed before opening his mouth to say something witty back but all he could croak out was a lame, "uh yeah."

Another elbow in the ribs from Darcy and if it were possible he felt himself blush harder.

“So, what’s your name, handsome?”

“Luke.”

There was a short silence, where the music interceded their conversation before Luke realised that he needed to return the favour.

“What’s yours? Name, I mean.”

The girl’s laughter drew him into a daze, it was as enchanting as it had looked from across the room.

“Penelope, but you can call me Penn.”

Penn looked slyly between the boys who were all standing in the group gaping at her, a small smile tugged at her lips before she swept her gaze back to meet Luke’s.

“What do you say we go for a walk?”

“Umm...”

Multiple elbow nudges this time, Luke could see Penn trying not to laugh at his friends’ obviousness.

“Sure,” he finally managed. Turning to Darcy he held out his cup for his friend to take. “See you later?”

“Sure, text me.”

They exited the party, pushing through the mass of bodies before stumbling into the fresh night air, well Luke stumbled, Penn’s exit was impossibly graceful.

“Want to walk down to the beach?”

“Sure.”

Luke felt like his brain was in meltdown, he was going for a walk, at a party with a gorgeous older woman. Things like this just didn’t happen to him, ever. They took the short pebbled path down to the shore and Luke felt the heat rush through his body when Penn grabbed his hand and entwined her arm with his.

“So Luke, you look pretty young to be at that kind of party.”

“I guess so.”

“Let me see if I can guess your age.’ Penn pretended to think. ‘Umm 16?’”

"I will be in a few weeks. My birthday's at the end of the year."

"So young and innocent." Penn sighed and out of the corner of his eye, Luke could swear he saw her lick her lips. Maybe he wouldn't be innocent for much longer or maybe he was going to be made a fool of, either way, the alcohol in his blood was eager to see what would happen when they finally reached the shore.

At the point where the sand turned from dry to damp Penn stopped.

"Let's go skinny dipping." She started to unzip her dress.

"Uh, is that such a good idea?" Luke's nerves started to kick in. It was dark and he was drunk. "Don't they tell you not to drink and swim?"

"Relax, it's not as if we will be doing much swimming." With that, she took off the rest of her clothes and was racing down to the water so fast that Luke barely had time to see anything. "Come and get me!" She called back over her shoulder as she dived into the waves and disappeared.

Luke stripped down as fast as he could, though he couldn't bring himself to get fully undressed, so he kept his underwear on. As he neared the water he noticed something shiny flashing under the surface near where Penn was floating.

"Penn look out!" He cried dashing into the water only to stop at her giggle.

"Aww, how sweet, he wants to save me from myself."

Confused Luke pulled up short, only half in the water as Penn pulled up what appeared to be a giant tail. A giant mermaid's tail. Luke gaped and Penn's giggles turned into full on laughter as she saw the look on his face.

"You're, you're..."

"A mermaid?" she suggested.

"A mermaid," Luke repeated faintly, what exactly was he supposed to do with a mermaid?