**The End Is Only The Beginning**

At nine fifty-seven on a winter night a train crossed the Forth Rail Bridge, East Scotland. The surface of our three dimensional world was painted in cold, bitter frost. I never knew how much I would miss that. My family was on that train; my mother and six younger sisters. I wish I’d been with them. I was performing my famous ballad at a local event when the train swerved off the tracks, toppled over once, and proceeded to tumble off the bridge commencing its journey into the glacial water below. The water sucked the train down and down like a never ending well, until it was completely submerged, under the sea.

Neither survivors nor bodies were found. The thought of my family, blue, frozen and unmoving, floating through the ocean, being mistaken for old pieces of driftwood killed me inside. To an outsider, I may have appeared as a young, beautiful role model, known for my voice and ready to take on the world. But on the inside it felt as if someone had taken my heart and crammed it into the smallest corner they could find. I had nothing to live for.

I pondered about what to do with my life. Which path would I take? I could live and feel the guilt oozing from my body with every breath and every note I sang, or I could cut my misery short and end it all. I mulled over my possibilities and chose my second option. I might have ended it quickly with drugs, a blade, a gun or perhaps quietly by suffocation, hanging or starvation, but no. I had to go the way they went; death by drowning. My skin would freeze and turn from icy marine, to black. After time, it would rot off and soon I would be nothing but bones but if it meant being with my family, I’d do it.

The wind was hitting me hard. I stood on the edge of the bridge with my arms outstretched like the mermaids you see on the front of sailing boats. I jumped. The water hit me like a million tiny needles all over my body. The thought sank in. I was going to die. My life flashed before me, every memory, every moment encrusted in my brain. I drifted solemnly for about an hour, froze, and died.

I wasn’t expecting what came next. I was in a different world. Not heaven nor hell, but somewhere new; somewhere dreamlike, filled with water. I wandered around in this new world, trying to find something familiar. I called the names of my sisters and mother; nothing. Everything I stood for as a human being was gone. Nobody loved me and I had nobody to love, I was alone.

Something hit my head, hard, like a wave crashing against the ocean shore. I looked up and desperately scanned my surroundings to find what had delivered the blow. I saw a face. Something about it reminded me of an angel. It was familiar yet new, happy and sad and somehow managed to look old and young at the same time. I studied the face, the full lips, bright eyes and the long mane of red hair. A silent tear slid down my cheek. It was my mother.

We stared at each other, struggling to understand the situation. A minute passed before either of us spoke. It was me who began; “Mother?” Her words were careful as she responded: “Follow me.” She turned abruptly and swam into the darkness. I followed as fast as I could. In and out of the intertwined seaweed, up and down over the corals that lined the ocean floor. It seemed as if we were racing rather than playing a game of follow the leader. She stopped, turned and told me we had reached our destination.

Light shone on me. It was the first time I’d had a happy feeling since the day my family perished. My insides glowed. I was in a castle. Gorgeous mermaids with their long shimmering tails and handsome broad shouldered mermen stood around the stage of molten riches. Wonderful murals of life undersea coated the walls and pearls covered every square inch of the ceiling. My mother weaved through the crowd, leaving a path for me to follow. We made our way to the stage to find my sisters surrounding a clam shell. The shell opened and inside sat a girl. She looked much like my mother.

A voice rang out like honey. It filled the castle with joy and love. It was propelling itself from the girl inside the shell. The audience was awestruck. It tugged on my heartstrings and a wave of jealousy ran through my body. The attention that used to be mine was now hers. I felt replaced. My gift was my voice, and I didn’t think anyone could take that away from me. I tried to battle against her voice. I attempted to match her pitch, but instead of the angelic timbre I was accustomed to, a harsh, nasal voice escaped from my mouth. People stared. I crippled, turned beet red with embarrassment and flicked my tail as fast as I could until I found a place where no- one would care to find me.

I cried for hours on end. People passed. But no one seemed to care. The shell girl had ripped my chest open, stolen my heart and thrown it in a puddle of mercury. No one had to tell me, but I knew. She was my seventh sister. And already, I hated her with a burning passion.

A shot of long red hair flashed in my peripheral vision. It was her. She looked at me, laughed and dragged something out from behind her. It looked like a pitchfork. I thought she’d stab me. But instead she thrust it in all sorts of awkward motions. A force hit me hard and a whirlpool entrapped me in its spiral motion. I was dizzy. I was changing before my eyes; into a dark mess of tentacles. I fell to the ground with a thump. My young thin, fragile frame was now replaced with the bulky frame of an old woman. I lay there, plotting my revenge.

Rumors spread, and I was forgotten. Word had it that my nemesis (how could I still consider her a sister?) had made a new friend, on land. Interactions with humans were highly forbidden, especially those of a young girl and a lover. By now, I’d been around long enough to know the tricks, and the spells of sea life. I offered her a deal: a voice for legs. It was win- win. She’d have her love, and I’d have my life, but, there was a catch. If she and her prince did not share true loves first kiss, I would keep her voice forever, and she would live under my rule. If she managed to get her kiss she would gain her voice, and stay as a human being. She signed onto my deal and I wished her sarcastic good luck as she shot up to shore.

The third night approached and still, there was no kiss. My chances were elevated and a sly grin crossed my face at this very thought. I would take her spot in the prince’s world. I would be his princess and sooner or later, his queen. I made my way to shore, fantasizing about the events to come, dreaming about the sour look on my tormentor’s face when she felt the same suffering and loss that I endured.

As I predicted, the prince fell in love but not with me, with my voice. Her voice. We were engaged to be married. I would steal her thunder just as she had stolen mine. For once I would win. My life would be, once again, in my own hands.

The priest asked if he would take my hand. The prince’s smile crinkled his eyes and brightened his face as he settled the deal. Next, he asked me if I would be his wife, in sickness and in health, ‘till death do us part. I was about to say those two magic words when I was attacked.

Light hit me from all angles, the sea was mad. It blew me from side to side, and tossed me under the water. A ship hit me, and a new level of pain rushed through my body. My torturous life passed before me again. My eyes closed, and my corpse sank. I was dead again. But this time, for all the wrong reasons.

I watched them from above. I learned quickly. My seventh sister was Arielle. My mother left the night before the wedding and nobody mourned my death. In a way, I suppose I deserved it. I never meant to make anything difficult. I wish I could go back to my first years, and make everything right again…perhaps I could stop the train and cherish my life. My insides are black, and moldy. Soon I’ll be gone and my body, like my soul, will have disintegrated into the waves.