

## Song for the Silver Merman

A tiny black tail splashed spray over me which caught the light and shimmered like a rainbow through my hair. The smell of salt filled my nose and I took a long, deep breath.

I turned around from where I sat alone on the dock near the Black Hawk schooner to see a little white fish with black fins dive down—Albio, Meris's companion. But, I didn't see any sign of the merman anywhere.

In a moment, Albio jumped high up in the air, almost level with my head, wiggled all his fins in mid-air, as an invitation to come play. Too busy being a show-off, he landed with a belly-smacker back on the water.

I couldn't help giggling at his antics and dove off straight away to see what fun he might be up to.

He led a lively chase, one of his favorite games.

I followed him darting in and around edges of underwater rock ledges until we made our way out toward the mouth of Tampa Bay. I worked hard to keep pace, and at one point, lost track of him. After a short search, I spied him hiding behind a tall sponge.

Once found, he wiggled his long, black tail and whipped off again.

With a powerful stroke of my flipper, I sped along, keeping the little fish in sight as he ascended along a rocky outcropping. What was he leading me to?

I poked my head above the surface and found Meris sitting on one side of the large rock mass, his emerald tail fins spread wide, glinting in the sunlight. With a smile covering my face, I treaded water a few moments, looking up and savoring the view--the broad muscles of his flipper, the metallic green scales narrowing into a V which dipped low, revealing his toned abs.

The skin of his tanned torso begged for my touch, fighting for attention with the dark curls flowing around his broad shoulders.

Next to me, Albio slapped the water with his fin, drawing Meris's notice and ending my time to quietly admire my merman. "Ciel, come on up and let your pretty blue scales shine in the sun beside me!" he called to me, motioning with a wave of his arm.

I returned his wave and crawled onto the rocks, nimbly employing the strength of my flipper to push up. When I reached the point where he sat, he gave me a quick kiss. Feeling a flush of heat in my groin, I hoped for much more, but over his shoulder I saw we weren't alone and knew passionate kisses would have to wait.

Two other mermaids, who looked to be near my age, in their late twenties, sat nearby. I recognized them from the welcome ceremony the merfolk community held for me. One was dark-skinned and slim with wild, long, kinky black hair that caught the wind and flowed in all directions. Her flipper gleamed a dark silvery shade, the smoky hue of hematite. Remarkable! Her friend was equally curious, a chubby mermaid with vivid green scales and hair. I'd never seen those colors before on any other mermaids. With my long, blonde hair, I felt a bit plain in comparison. While I watched, they began singing with such lovely voices, harmonizing together. I couldn't stop staring.

Meris noticed my reaction and laughed. "Let me introduce you to them." He moved over to a rock ledge closer to the pair and they stopped their song. "Would you two like to join us?"

"Good idea!" the green-haired one said with a wide smile. "Hi Ciel! I'll bet you don't remember me from your ceremony; there were so many there. I'm Sesi." Her calm, friendly tone was instantly comforting.

"I do remember you both, but not your names." I climbed to a rock seat on the other side of Meris, next to her.

"I'm Omarosa. How're you liking being a mermaid?" She grinned politely, but gave me a cautious look with her large, dark eyes.

"It's nice, but everything is so new I'm kind of spun around."

“Oh, I imagine! So much to learn all at once,” Sesi remarked, looking directly at me with sincerity. “We were about to practice our singing, if you’d like to join us. I doubt you’ve had a chance to learn, since mermen don’t often sing.” She giggled, causing the roll of her tummy to shake, and leaned back to look past me at Meris. “No offense.”

“She should learn to sing. Proceed!” He waved a hand for her to continue and turned to allow himself a better view. His face lit with a strange, smug grin. What did he know or expect?

I raised my eyebrows at him, hoping he’d answer my questioning look.

His only response was a chuckle and a kiss on my cheek. Curious behavior. Hmm.

“Don’t you worry about what he’s thinkin’. Just let your voice come natural,” Omarosa cautioned, raising an eyebrow at Meris.

“Have you ever channeled your mermagic before?” Sesi asked.

“Yes, but only a few times, just to command hermit crabs around on the beach.”

She let out a quiet laugh. “That’s a good start. Focus the same way, but on the note you’re singing. We’ll begin a simple magical call and then after you listen for a bit, jump right in with us.”

I nodded and took a deep breath, hoping I’d make a decent first attempt. Mermaids were supposed to be naturally able to enchant with their vocal melodies.

Omarosa opened with a steady, clear note in an alto range. It rang out far, with several fish at a distance jumping up to take notice. Then, Sesi added a line of melody, containing a more compelling spell, causing the fish to wiggle their fins as they passed the surface.

I inhaled as much air as my lungs would hold and began a note, naturally higher pitched than Omarosa’s. I closed my eyes to concentrate on the vibrations in my chest and those fish, blocking out all other thoughts. My note warbled, gently tickling my throat. Surprisingly, my breath lasted much longer than I expected.

Someone nudged my left side, and I opened my eyes. Although, still singing, Sesi's eyes were wide and she pointed to draw my attention out to the surrounding water. The fish were rising up and dancing on their tails before they fell back to the water. Then, they rose and repeated the strange dance. Even Albio jiggled on his black fin, which broke my concentration and my voice sputtered into laughter. The spell halted and the fish flitted below the surface, disoriented.

“Wow! How'd you do that?” Omarosa demanded. “I've practiced for years and I can't do that. You sure you never sang before?”

By their reactions, I guessed I'd done well. “Was that good?”

“It was fantastic, Ciel!” Sesi exclaimed, grabbing hold of my arm.

Meris folded his arms across his chest and nodded to me. “I'm not surprised at all. You possess a lot of natural magical ability. It's there in the electricity of our kiss, or enabling you to see your soul in my eyes.”

“If she can put that much into her song now, what might she do with some training from the Silver Merman?” Omarosa asked him, her eyes wide.

Sesi dropped my arm and stepped in front of me. “Yes, Ciel you should study with him.”

I turned to Meris. “Who's the Silver Merman?”

“The Silver Merman is the eldest merman possessing the most mermagic. It has been a mermaid before. He or she is in charge of training those merfolk gifted with natural talents in the craft. He asked me today to bring you by sometime. I think he already has a hint of what you can do. Omarosa's right, if he can teach you to channel more into your song, it'll be powerful.” He took hold of my hand. “But, you must want to do this, Ciel. It's up to you.”

“Did he train you?”

“He did.”

“Then, I'd like to also.”

“Let’s take her there now, so we can explain to him what happened here just now,” Sesi suggested eagerly.

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Down deep at the bottom of the continental slope where the mouth of Tampa Bay dropped into the open Gulf, we entered the gathering area of the merfolk community. Tall rocks formed a huge circle where I’d recently been welcomed to thousands in this underwater world. Now it lay quiet; the rock pillars guarded only a small group of elderly mermaids and a handful of fish.

“Where do we find him?” I asked.

Meris pointed upward. “He’ll be near the surface at the top of that tallest rock, or in a nook at its base if the weather’s foul. Today is calm, so let’s rise.”

“Why there, in the open, unprotected Gulf waters?”

“He builds his energy from the power of the waves.” I wondered how that was possible. Was it something I’d learn?

Sure enough, he sat on a rock seat, worn smooth by the pounding sea. His hair grew long and white, with silver coral-like decorations circling his head from ear-to-ear, crossing over his crown. These moved as though they were living appendages of his body. His flipper showed age, lacking the thick muscles of youth. The scale covering, apparently once bright blue, now silvered with an overglow, which gave him a regal look. We found him conversing with dolphins in a lively interchange, laughing and clapping at each other.

I’d seen him before, blowing on the magic conch which called all merfolk to the gathering circle. But, I didn’t know about his venerated position. I fidgeted, rolling my tail fins, as Meris addressed him privately on my behalf. Would he laugh at me and not consider me worthy as his student?

“Don’t be so jittery,” Omarosa snapped. She seemed so blunt and practical, not really mean, but as though she’d faced some hardships in life. What sort of person was she like underneath those rough edges?

“They’ve been talking for several minutes. What could Meris be telling him?” I asked them.

Sesi took my hand to show her support. “All good, I’m sure. But, I’d be nervous too.”

Then, the Silver Merman called to Omarosa, asking her to join their discussion. What concern did he have?

Finally, he looked my way and motioned me to approach.

I swam to the edge of the rock face and crawled up to where he and Meris sat.

He welcomed me with a wide grin and extended his arm to draw me to a seat close beside him. His fatherly manner comforted. “Ciel, from what I’ve witnessed and the events your friends have recounted, I’m considering accepting you into my tutelage. What would you like to learn?”

I glanced at him, not expecting this question and not knowing how to respond. “Umm...I thought you’d know what I needed to learn.”

“You must have an answer in order for me to accept you.” He looked at me with a caring expression in his gray eyes which glinted with silver streaks.

Again, I twisted the tips of my fins into balls. What was the correct answer? After a moment of silence, I said, “I’d like to learn how to put more power into my song.”

“That’s half an answer. Now tell me why you want to be able to do that?”

I responded without hesitation, “So I can keep myself and other merfolk or sea creatures safe.”

“A swift and sincere answer!” He smiled. “Welcome, Ciel. You will now be my new pupil.” He turned to the others. “Please leave us while she and I begin her lessons.”

I watched while Meris and my two new mermaid friends dove under.

Once we were alone, with just the family of dolphins, the Silver Merman waved to them. “Sing us a spell, calling them to do a simple task.”

I sang as before, and they danced like the fish.

When my breath ran out, he and the family gave me a clapping ovation. “Well done, Ciel. Even better than I anticipated. You possess great talent we can expand upon. Your task for several weeks will be to improve your focus, flowing your power to a single point, either your voice or your hand. Then, after many lessons and hard practice, once you can hold steady without interruptions in your mind, we’ll learn to intensify your powers.”

He leaned toward me and touched my head above and behind my ears. “This is where you probably feel your power, is that right?”

I quieted my mind and observed the sensation. “Yes, it is.”

“First close your eyes and focus here, enjoying the warmth and wonder of this feeling inside you. Let the sensation spread to your vocal cords. Then envision pouring that warmth out with your voice. If you do it properly, it will double or more the level of vibrations in your throat. Try it now. Take it slow, keep your eyes shut, and observe what is happening within you.” He removed his hands and quietly stepped back.

I did just as he described and analyzed what happened inside my body. The more I studied the sensation, the warmer and larger it became. Merely focusing on my power intensified it—incredible! The corners of my lips curled into a smile.

“Go ahead now, sing and watch your body from the inside,” he encouraged.

I formed a simple note, not paying attention to the sound, but to the vibrations of my vocal cords. Within a moment, the heat from behind my ears spread to warm my entire throat. Then, my whole body felt fluid.

When my breath ceased, he directed, “In our next lesson, I’ll help you do the same with your eyes open, monitoring the effect of your mermagic on its intended object. Practice the process we performed today before you return in the morning.”

“Yes, I will. Thank you so much. You’re such a good teacher. I understand those strange sensations inside me now. See you tomorrow!”

He patted me on the shoulder. “Tomorrow, Ciel.”

I dove off the rock and swam back toward port, my mind busy remembering his steps to observe and build my power, planting it in my memory, not wanting to forget even the smallest idea. That evening I repeated our lesson and sang my magic to the setting sun.

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After a couple weeks of lessons, and plenty of practice, I quickly focused and drew my power into a stream of magical melody of my choosing. Intent upon my studies, I’d seen Meris, but not other merfolk. Wouldn’t Sesi and Omarosa be pleased! When the Silver Merman urged me to take a day for rest, I swam out looking for them.

I came upon a mermaid I remembered from my welcome ceremony and asked her if she knew where they were.

She told me many mermaids were gathered at a tiny island in port, and they’d likely be present.

After a short swim, following her directions, I located a group of at least twenty mermaids, including my friends, perched high upon a sheer rock wall at one end. They all talked and giggled while combing their hair and enjoying the warmth of the sun. Sesi looked my way and I waved to her.

“Ciel! Come join us!” she called down to me.

“Be right there!” I hoisted myself up onto the rocks, climbing to where she sat.

Omarosa smiled and made a space for me between them. “Busy one you’ve been lately with your studies.”

“Yes. I’ve got a day off today.” I smiled, glad to be with them. I needed friends as much as I needed to learn mermagic.

Sesi whispered, muffling a few giggles, “We’ve been doing some singing. Maybe you can surprise the others with your new abilities.”

“As good as she must be by now, she’ll surprise you and me,” Omarosa added with a chuckle and a toss of her long, wiry black hair.

Then, men’s voices shouted out behind us. I turned around to see a pirate ship approaching the point of the small island where we all sat. They lined the near gunwale, gawking at our group. I couldn’t make out how many; they were still at a bit of distance.

“There’s trouble a brewin’,” Omarosa hissed under her breath. “Stay quiet.”

I looked at Sesi and she shrugged.

A clique of ten or so pretty mermaids sat foremost on the rock mass, most likely intending to be spectacles for any passing boats. They preened and posed for the seamen, combing out their hair and lifting it off of their chests to display their bare breasts.

In response, the buccaneers hooted and cat-called. “Yeehoo!” “Got us some fine rum on board to share with ye lasses.”

The group of mermaids continued to tease them, beginning a song. I’d not heard the melody before, but instantly recognized the spell intended to further attract the men. None was adept at vocal magic, only average in ability. But, their combined power cast a deep enchantment. All the while they continued to flaunt their breasts and bare asses, giggling between breaths.

“Is this a game they’re playing?” I asked my friends.

Omarosa nodded. “A dangerous one.”

Sight of the schooner coming nearer caused me to gasp. “That ship’s a sloop!” I exclaimed, but none of the performing mermaids paid any attention. Speaking more quietly to my friends, I explained, “Black Sam, the first mate on the Hawk taught me boats. It’s got a shallow hull and can navigate shoal waters.”

Sesi grabbed my arm. “Then, it can come right next to this rock wall if they want.”

“Oh, sure thing they’ll want. We best scoot down on some lower rocks to be ready to dive,” Omarosa advised.

We dropped to a lower level, but the mermaids at the point continued taunting as the boat rounded within thirty feet of the point.

A voice from the deck yelled, “Bring her to! Heave to!”

The pirates hung far over the gunwale, their eyes bugged out with lust. “Ye’ve got some right big ones, lass; flash ‘em to me again.” “Lovely teets!”

Suddenly, four ropes with wide stiff loops at their ends flew out from the ship toward the teasing mermaids. “Gonna get me some o’ that ass tonight and every night after,” declared one man holding a rope. His lasso caught around the neck of the mermaid with the largest breasts. “Got me the prize catch!”

“That be a fine bachelor’s wife ye got thar, Ben!” his mate observed with a guffaw.

The singing stopped and the mermaids screamed as they moved to slide off the rocks, but it was too late. More ropes came out and, in all, six were ensnared, tethered to the men on the ship.

“Haul in the booty, mateys!” Ben called out as he yanked his prize mermaid over the rocks. She fought hard to resist, but didn’t have much leverage on land with a flipper. He dragged her closer to the hull, the heavy rope digging into the skin of her neck.

“No slack in yer lines or they’ll swim into the channel an’ drag ye with ‘em,” an older pirate directed his lucky mates. “Ye dogs without a take, help hold! Ye might get a turn with their catch.”

Another man lowered several nets. “Hoist ‘em up in these!” We froze, watching in horror, as they scooped the netting over each mermaid and pulled them on board.

“Now to unwrap me prize,” Ben’s cackled as he removed the ropes from around the pretty mermaid and grabbed hold of her large breasts. She screamed and hit him, squirming away as far as the rope permitted. “Hold her steady, me matey,” he glanced back to his helper. The cable tightened so much she gasped for air. She began to shake and sob.

“Let’s dive!” Omarosa’s voice broke our delirium.

“No! I can help.” I searched for the stillness within me and drew it into my throat, letting it vibrate from a hum into a powerful, clear note. Looking at my objects, the pirates, I channeled my song to make them release their captives. My focus remained steadfast, riveting my power over them in a strong spell. Before my breath was half spent, the men dropped their lines, letting two of the mermaids free to the water below.

“She got the vodou voice! Hoist in them cables an’ weigh the main sail!” a voice boomed out on the sloop. Many backed well away from the gunwale. Ben loosened the leash around his catch and sent her back down in the netting, allowing her to crawl out onto the rocks.

The mermaids all turned to me, their mouths gapping and their eyes wide, like they’d seen a ghost. Those who’d escaped crawled to me, hugging me and murmuring their thanks. Ben’s prize staggered past, her neck oozing with blood along the cut lines from the rope. With tears in her large brown eyes, she said, “Thank you, Ciel. You saved me. I’d heard rumors you studied with the Silver Merman, but didn’t think you... thank you.” She choked on her words and others helped her back into the water.

“You sure did good, Ciel.” Omarosa reached out and touched my arm. I jumped at her touch. A warm sensation coursed along the skin of my forearm. I’d touched Sesi many times before, but not her.

She looked up at me with a startled expression. “Did you feel that?”

I nodded. “Warm and comforting? Like pure mermagic.”

“Yep, like I’ve known you for years.” She gulped. “Means we’re to be friends forever, you and me.”

“I’d like that. I sure need a good friend.”

Moisture filled her eyes. “Feels just like the touch of the sister I lost along with my folks.”

“A sister? I thought all mermaids were turned. Weren’t you?”

“Nope, was born a mermaid, and Sesi too,” she replied.

“So, you have parents, a real family?”

She looked down. “Folks were killed by fishermen. Sesi’s family’s mine now.” That hard loss was the reason for her blunt edge and distant manner.

“Oh, I’m so sorry.”

I wrapped an arm around her. She lowered her head onto my shoulder and we sat that way a long time, watching the setting sun pass below the Bay waters. I’d saved many from danger, but also saved one soul from loneliness.