

Lorelai

A Short Story

Future

The scroll lies tucked in a dusty alcove in the Library of Hadrian. It is a mess of hastily scrawled words: poetry and research and haunting musings about siren-song and curses and an ill-fated journey. At the bottom of the document, where the papyrus is crinkled and curling with age, a faded signature sits, the letters shaky and slanted. *Odysseus*, the signature says.

This lost and forgotten writing of the great and cunning warrior begins with the following story, legend, warning:

Be wary, oh sirens, you beautiful monsters of Poseidon's singing sea, you daughters of the river god Achelous and the maiden Muses fair! Your songs shall be the haunting and undoing of mortal men. But sing with caution so that you are always certain to lure and snare your mortal prey. For if a single man hears your song and passes unscathed and unsnared across the wide blue sea, the Fates will claim your immortality as price. Your lips shall wither and the song of your soul will cease and fade. You shall become like Medusa's stony statues, captured in the bondage of stone forever. To the sea you shall return and sink until stone meets sand in the watery depths.

Elsewhere on this leaf of scroll rests the sketch of a woman's face. She is hauntingly beautiful and her full lips are parted as if in song. There is a name beneath the drawing.

Lorelai, Odyessus has called her.

Present

Lorelai perches atop her sea-smoothed rock and watches for ships. The ocean sleeps today, still and smooth and endlessly blue. No wind rustles her obsidian hair and the world is eerily silent without the usual, crashing melody of waves. Not even the piercing cry of a seagull disrupts the unsettling stillness.

Lorelai stares across the ocean at the towering white cliffs of a nearby island and imagines the birds sleeping lazily in their nests tucked among the light rocks. The sun sears at her moon-white skin. She daydreams of slipping beneath the cool cerulean waves to rest in her silken bed of woven kelp. She longs to watch the scuttling jewel-toned crabs hunt along the ever-shifting sands of the ocean floor.

She is a creature of the sea. Sky and sun do not suit her.

The sun claws its way farther up the cloudless sky. Lorelai whispers a prayer to Poseidon for wind and ships. The eternal, gnawing ache of hunger is her sole companion.

As a purple dawn stretched across the sky like a bruise hours before, Lorelai and her sisters had hunted silvery minnows. The fish darted like tiny arrows through the sun-dappled waves as they chased minnows through forests of swaying kelp. Celisa shed a single, shining tear as she grasped a thrashing fish in her translucent, webbed hands.

"I do not like to see them suffer," she said, the normally lyrical lilt of her voice subdued by sadness.

Funny, Lorelai thought, how Celisa mourned the death of a mere fish but not the dozens of sailors she'd sung into the depths of the sea.

The meal of a half dozen fish failed to silence their wailing bellies. The meat tasted like ash and salt on their delicate tongues, and even now Lorelai cringes at the memory of tiny fish scales caught between her sharply pointed teeth.

Only one thing truly whets the appetite of a temptress of the ocean deep.

Lorelai parts her lips and asks once more, "Father of the Sea, remember your servants. Bring us wind so that the sea might sing, bring us ships so that we might feast."

A single, teasing breath of air stirs the salt-crusting hair on her brow. The wind smells of salt and stars and a midnight long ago.

Lorelai shivers. Shivers and remembers the goddess forgotten by all but her, the lesser goddess of bargains and secrets. The goddess who once grew gills and slipped beneath the sea and spilled promises more deadly than poison.

Past

The young siren releases her song under a gray sky that promises rain. Her sisters watch her, faces twisted in cruel grins. A warship bobs on the water nearby but no sailors appear at the edges of the deck. Lorelai opens her mouth to sing again, but the notes that echo are weak and discordant.

Tears threaten to fall from her thick lashes. *A siren is nothing without her song*. Lorelai does not understand why her sisters' voices weave together in intricate harmonies while hers is an ugly clamor.

"Poor little Lorelai," Imogen mocks with a flash of daggered teeth. "Once the rest of us have feasted perhaps we shall save you the worst of the spoils." The other sirens laugh, even the sound of their taunting mirth hauntingly beautiful. Lorelai can only watch, holding back her tears, as her sisters begin to sing.

The next moments pass in a blur of haunting songs and sailors plunging like falling stars into the sirens' waiting arms. Soon ribbons of blood streak the churning waves. The sailors do not scream as they are dragged below, do not scream as jagged claws tear their flesh. Their cloudy eyes rest reverently upon the faces of the sirens.

Lorelai watches all, drowning in the hollowness of her hunger and the crushing weight of her shame. She thinks that she would willingly trade anything if only she too could sing sailors to their graves.

"Please," she breathes, to the heavens or Poseidon or perhaps any god that may be listening. "Help me. I cannot survive without a song."

The winds carry her whispered pleas to a far-off island where a goddess is listening.

The goddess Aite sits listening to the sea on the inky sands of her far-off island. The whispering wind is her messenger; it stirs her long golden hair and carries a young siren's prayer to her ears.

Lorelai is the siren's name, the winds relay. She is the daughter of Achelous and his forbidden lover, the naiad Odella. The girl was cursed by Achelous' Muse lovers to lack a siren song. The notes that echo from the poor child's lips are no more than ordinary human song; they lack all power or enchantment.

The siren thinks that she is defective, broken, but in truth she was simply never gifted a song at all.

Aite smiles as the winds relate this tale of the Muses' jealousy and the desperate young siren who prayerfully pleads to any deity who might hear her. She smiles as she enters the bone cave and approaches the small cave pool, her looking glass into the world beyond this enchanted isle. She smiles as she murmurs the words of a spell and the waters of the pool swirl and shift until the goddess is watching a young siren watch her siren-sisters drowning sailors in the churning seas.

Of all the deals she's made in her immortal years, the goddess has never snared a siren before. She thrills at the idea of snaring a new species, of regaling her dark lover and fellow sower of mischief with tales of her triumph.

Some would call her cruel, the goddess knows, but enacting mischief and causing the ruination of mortals and monsters alike is her heavenly purpose. She mischiefs without discrimination: the evil and the good, the guilty and the innocent, all encounter the dark magic of her illusions and deadly deals.

"Oh little Lorelai," the goddess sighs, "luring you into a bargain will be almost too easy."

What was once a warship is now a strange mosaic of splintered planks and flotsam bobbing on the waves.

After finishing her prayer, Lorelai swims to the sentry point near the far edge of the island, a thin slab of rock that protrudes from the water a short way from the shore. She does not want to watch her sisters toy and flirt with handsome, cloudy-eyed warriors. She does not want to watch them giggling with each other as they place bets on which man will drown the fastest. She does not want to watch them feast on tantalizing blood while she herself must go hungry.

Lorelai climbs atop the rock and closes her eyes and listens to the soothing song of the sea.

Later, when the sun has almost sunk to meet the horizon, two sirens drag a corpse through the churning waves. Lorelai is awakened by the sound of their snickering.

“We’ve brought you a gift,” Imogen and Celisa taunt. With a flick of their onyx and emerald-scaled tails, they reach the edge of her rock. They carelessly shove a water-swelled body next to Lorelai, a dull crunch sounding as bone hits the solid stone.

The icy touch of death-cooled skin against her shoulder sends a shudder skittering down Lorelai’s spine.

“Your dinner,” Imogen and Celisa declare, melodious voices sounding in effortless unison. Their faces contort in grotesque grins and menace glimmers in their jade eyes.

When Lorelai glances at the body beside her, she understands why. The corpse turns even her hunger-torn stomach.

Strange scars of a long-ago illness pattern the sailor’s fleshy face. The creatures of the sea have made him their feast; the skin around his mouth hangs in thin ribbons that reveal scurvy-blackened teeth. He smells of rot, and beneath that stench, Lorelai’s heightened senses detect the disease that taints his blood.

It is a truth well known by every siren that the most handsome men taste the best. Men from pure bloodlines with beautiful mothers and strong fathers of bravery and legend. Gods-blessed men whose blood wards off sickness and whose faces and adventures are immortalized by the sculptors and the poets. Lorelai’s sisters tell her their blood tastes of clear mountain springs and whispering winds. Tell her the smooth sliding of it across their tongues feels like the kiss of the cool, shadowy water of the sea’s secret depths. Tell her only a few sips is enough to sate their hunger.

But the man before her is as gnarled as an ancient oak. He is fat with a bulbous nose and sunken eyes that are nearly colorless, body sunburnt and pockmarked, an overabundance of sagging flesh. She will choke down as much of his bitter flesh as she can bear if only to silence her wailing belly.

“Be thankful,” Imogen says. She wears a fine signet ring strung on a piece of kelp around her neck, no doubt plucked from the death-stiff fingers of whichever warrior she sang to. Imogen twirls the ring between her claws as she speaks. “We should have left you to languish in the agony of your hunger. What use is a siren without a song?”

No use at all, Lorelai thinks to herself. *Wretched and cursed, eternally ugly with no siren song to enchant men to see her as otherwise.*

Imogen and Celisa leave the body on her rock and plunge back beneath the waves. Lorelai knows they will now finish stripping the soldiers of whatever treasures they and their ship possess. Staring down at the waters surrounding her rock, the ever-shifting waves reveal flashes of golden armor, ornate weaponry, and pretentious helmets with sapphire plumes. Lorelai watches Imogen struggle to fit a helmet over her tangled mane of chestnut hair. Celisa’s distorted laughter echoes up from the ocean depths. The rest of their sisters swim to gather around them, sharing in the spoils before dragging what remains of the soldiers’ corpses to the growing tangle of bones at the far edge of the island.

Lorelai is left alone with the wretched body of the man who must now become her dinner.

The young siren sleeps in her soft bed of kelp. Traces of blood dot her nails like cruel freckles and her pale lips are stained red. Hers is the tossing and turning sleep of the restless, of one whose sleep is haunted by dark dreams.

The goddess watches her. Watches this siren whose desperate prayer traveled across oceans and islands to the black-sand beaches and bone caves of the strange land this goddess calls home.

The goddess shifts slightly, her rippling cloak of shifting shadow pooling against the sands of the ocean floor. With a breath, she speaks to Lorelai in a dream. Twirls her long, graceful fingers as she weaves an intricate illusion to snare her.

The siren's face softens in sleep as the dream digs its slippery claws into her mind.

The goddess plants visions in the siren's mind of Lorelai opening her mouth and singing a single, shattering note that summons whole crews of glassy-eyed sailors into the deep. Of Lorelai cradling the body of a handsome sailor in her arms, a prince with sightless glacier-gray eyes and a face as sharp and strong as chiseled granite. Even in death, his beauty remains. The goddess lets Lorelai taste him, taste his blood of fresh rain and summer wind. And when Lorelai drinks, the goddess lets her believe that she will never hunger again. Her sisters who once mocked her now defer to her every wish. Lorelai is their leader: she is loved, accepted, and celebrated. Her song is a melody that every siren envies.

Lorelai will wake with the vivid memory of the dream at the forefront of her mind, the goddess knows. Her sorrow and longing and loneliness will deepen.

And the next time the goddess comes, the young siren will be nearly ready to bargain.

The second night the goddess visits Lorelai, she borrows the face of the siren's mother. The face of Odella, the secret lover of the river god Achelous.

The goddess perches atop a blanket of emerald kelp on the edge of Lorelai's bed and shakes her from sleep. The siren stirs with a shudder. She sits up and runs a webbed hand across her face.

"My darling daughter," the goddess soothes, her voice like warm sunshine, her breath like the song of the swaying grasses on the banks of the far-off river that Lorelai long ago called home. "How beautiful and fierce you've grown."

"Mother," Lorelai gasps, before burying her face in the goddess's chest and clinging to her like a child. Lorelai begins to sob, soul-rending wails that would soften the heart of any human. But to the goddess, her cries are only a grating, if necessary, inconvenience.

The goddess wraps Lorelai in an embrace and gently combs her long fingers through Lorelai's hair. "What is wrong, my child?"

Lorelai's voice is muffled against the goddess's inky robes. "My siren song is broken. I cannot sing sailors to the sea and my sisters mock and scorn me. The sea is harsh and the gods do not answer my pleas. I am so very lonely and I miss the music of the nymphs and the rustling wind through the willows. Will you take me back with you to the river and clear streams of home?"

The goddess presses a kiss atop Lorelai's head. "Oh my child, it is the greatest wish of my heart that you could return with me. But it is your fate to remain here. You are no longer a creature of fresh-water and forests, much as you may wish to be."

"But I do not belong in this world," Lorelai pleads. "I am nothing without a song."

"What if you could barter for one, my daughter? What would you trade for a song?" The goddess's words are sweet and tantalizing and deadlier than poison.

"Oh anything, anything," Lorelai vows.

The goddess grins as she takes Lorelai's tear-damp cheeks in her soft hands. "I will not forsake you, Lorelai. I know a way to find you a song. Tomorrow I shall send you a messenger who will bargain with you."

Lorelai opens her mouth, a question rising to her tongue, but the goddess is faster. "Sleep my daughter," she commands, voice heavy with enchantment. "Remember all we have spoken of tonight." With a sigh, Lorelai sinks back into her bed, her question dying on her lips.

The goddess is smirking as she vanishes in a whirlwind of waves and shadow.

On the third night, the goddess appears to Lorelai donning the skin of a woman whose beauty rivals that of even Helen of Troy. The goddess's full lips are soft and smiling as she greets Lorelai, her face shining with a knowing kindness as she introduces herself as Odella's messenger. Sparkling violet eyes that are the marvel and undoing of many men watch Lorelai carefully behind curled lashes.

This skin is perhaps the goddess's favorite deception. Few ever stop to question the motives of a woman so beautiful. Many a fool has unknowingly signed away his soul in order to please her, to perhaps set her eyes of legend sparkling. Bargains are sacred things whose terms should be explicitly stated and carefully poured over. But so many of the race of men are fools.

The same could be said for the race of sirens, she suspects.

The goddess lowers herself to sit beside Lorelai on the soft sands of the ocean floor. "What would you trade for a song?" The goddess's words are an echo of those spoken the night before.

"What would you give up for the most powerful siren song in all of history," she continues, laying her snare. "A song to summon whole crews of sailors to the depths, a song powerful enough to lure any man?"

Lorelai is blissfully unaware of the invisible net of enchantment hovering in the air, closing ever tighter around her. "Oh anything, anything," the siren responds, remembering the intoxicating power the goddess showed her in a dream.

The goddess restrains a grin as the bonds of enchantment settle over Lorelai. She hums in satisfaction as she pulls a miniature dagger from a hidden pocket within her pale blue gown. It is barely longer than her ring finger, its tiny hilt studded with red jewels the size of freckles. Lorelai's jade eyes widen.

"We must seal the bargain in blood," the goddess explains. "I'll go first." She lowers the blade to her forearm. The skin of her arm is peppered with scars, a record of all the bargains she has enacted. She quickly carves a jagged line in her flesh and gold ichor blooms where metal meets skin. "See, nothing to worry about," she reassures Lorelai. She extends the knife toward the siren.

Lorelai hisses as she carves a matching line into her own skin. Green blood stains the knife when she has finished.

"What is your name," Lorelai asks as she hands back the weapon. The goddess answers, but no sooner is the name spoken does it fade from Lorelai's memory. Of course, the siren is unbothered, does not sense the secret magic at work.

"Now sing for me," the goddess commands. And for the first time in her life, when Lorelai opens her mouth the notes that sound are clear and haunting and thrumming with power. Lorelai bows her head before the goddess, weeping in gratitude.

"Aren't you going to ask me what you traded for this song?" the goddess asks, an edge to her voice. The siren struggles to collect herself, swiping the tears from her face and raising her head. Her face betrays that she has almost forgotten that this was a bargain, whether by her own hastiness or some quirk of the enchantment, the goddess does not know.

"What was the price?" Lorelai asks, eyes halting, wide.

"You said you would trade anything," the goddess reminds her, and Lorelai shrinks back from the triumph now glinting in the goddess's eyes. "I took you at your word. Count yourself fortunate, fool, that I will not ask for your immortality or the still-beating heart out of your chest or the lives of all your sisters."

Lorelai's face turns white as the foaming waves above her. "What was the price?"

The goddess laughs. "You shall never taste human blood again, lest you give up your siren song and soul forever."

It is all Lorelai can do to keep from collapsing on the sand. "What good is my siren song if I cannot use it to feed?"

"That is a question you should have considered before making a blood bargain with a deity." The goddess sheds her beautiful skin and dons her true form of malice and shadows. She gazes sternly at the siren. Her soulless eyes are depthless, blackholes borrowed from the lightless spaces between the stars. "You shall not perish, little Lorelai. Your hunger may be eternal but fish and other lesser creatures of the deep will keep you from wasting away completely."

Lorelai begins to speak but the goddess interrupts her. “I kept my promise: your voice will be unrivaled in all realms of the ocean. You will have power beyond imagination, renown among your sisters. You shall sing princes and generals and warriors to their graves. Your name shall be sung in the great feasting halls of men. Do not look at me with horror, child. I have given you all you asked.”

“This is not what I wanted,” Lorelai says quietly, shoulders sagging.

“Not everything you wanted, perhaps, but still what you asked for. Do not sulk because you were outsmarted,” the goddess chides. “Next time you seek to make a bargain, you will be smarter.”

The goddess returns to her island. Her feet sketch a path in the dark sand as she makes her way to the bone cave to reunite with her lover. She knows he waits for her, hiding in the shadows, her companion of trickery. She has a new scar to show him, a new bargain to relay.

Someday she and Lorelai will meet again.

But for now, the goddess has more bargains to make. More mortals and monsters to lure and snare with traps spun of beautiful words and tempting promises.

Perhaps she and Lorelai are not so different.

Present

There is a man tied to the towering mast of the approaching ship.

Lorelai and her sisters chatter curiously as they catch sight of him. The deck of the vessel swarms with sailors. They scurry like ants, securing the rigging, adjusting the tattered white sail that swells like billowing lungs with each gust of wind, and tightening the ropes of the crewmate they’ve restrained.

It is a weary, weatherbeaten ship. The scarred hull sinks low into the reaching waves and the sail is riddled with sloppy patches sewn to cover gaping rips. The wood planks groan in protest under the assault of foaming breakers.

Lorelai thinks of the forked tongues of lightning that rent the sky just hours before, the lashing whips of rain, and the hunger of the swelling waves as they too sought ships to devour. Poseidon has answered her prayers.

She allows a small smile to stretch across her lips. A tired ship will mean a tired crew.

Lorelai sends Senna ahead on reconnaissance. The youngest of the sisters, Senna straightens and beams with pride as Lorelia relays her orders: “Bring me news of their numbers, how fast their ship is moving, and who is restrained under those ropes. Be swift as the wind.”

Senna dives without a splash, her near-transparent tail adopting the gray-green color of the sea. As she swims, she keeps within the looming shadow the ship casts on the waves, further obscuring herself from the watchful eyes of the ship’s lookout.

Soon Senna returns, a rare flush coloring her pale cheeks. She stumbles over her words, breathless and quivering with excitement. She relays the news: the count is 47 men, the ship will enter their sacred waters in a matter of minutes, and it is the famed Odysseus himself who captains the vessel.

Jaws drop and the harsh sun flashes off rows of deadly teeth. Lorelai's brow furrows. "You're certain?" she demands.

Senna nods, golden curls bouncing. "I swear, Lorelai. I heard his name and his men call him 'prince.' He is the man they tie to the masts. He wants to listen to our songs."

"Arrogant fool," Imogen snarls. "He shall soon learn the strength of our songs is no match for mortal man."

But Senna shakes her head. "They know to fear us. The sailors are stuffing their ears with beeswax as a ward against our songs. Odysseus alone shall listen, and his men are under orders to ignore his pleas to be released."

Snarls of frustration overpower even the crashing of the sea. "Let us try anyway," says Celisa. "Are not mortals frail, easily moved by pain and the sight of suffering? When the sailors see the tears slick on his face, his wrists and arms chafed raw against his bonds, the blood from his bleeding throat sprinkling his lips, they will release him. They may not hear his cries but the vision of his agony will be too much to bear. If he pleads and fights to be free long enough, his men will give in."

"No," Senna interjects, "the risk is too great."

"Fightented, youngling?" Imogen taunts, and soon a dozen voices are raised in a shouting match loud enough to reach the ears of Poseidon in his watery realm beneath.

But Lorelai hardly hears her debating sisters. She is thinking of a deal made long ago, the assurance of a strange goddess that Lorelai's siren song would be the most powerful in all of history, a song potent enough to cause any man to fling himself into the sea before her...

She knows what must be done.

"Lorelai?" Senna's tentative voice severs Lorelai's thoughts.

Before Lorelai can respond Imogen cries, "I will wait no longer; I at least am not afraid. We must sing them to the sea." She turns to swim for the ship but Lorelai stops her with a single word.

"No." Lorelai's voice is cold. "I alone shall sing."

The sirens stare at her in shock, Imogen sneering in displeasure. But Lorelai's very blood sings that this is the way, the path, her fate.

She alone must claim this victory. She will sing Odysseus, the man whose name even the gods whisper, to his grave. And when she succeeds, perhaps her fool's bargain will at last be worth it. Perhaps the glory of Odysseus' blood on her hands will somehow soften the blow of eternal hunger.

As Lorelai turns to swim for deeper waters, Senna grabs her by the arm. "And what if you fail?" Her fear makes her beautiful voice tremble.

“I shall not,” is all Lorelai says. She has the promise of a goddess. She has a jagged scar on her arm from a deal sworn in blood. She has nothing to fear.

Lorelai grins as she wets her pointed teeth and slips into the ocean’s fond embrace.

As she effortlessly weaves her way through clusters of kelp and pink coral reefs, Lorelai envisions how the greatest scene of her life will unfold. Her voice will shatter Odysseus’ mind. He will beg until his throat bleeds. And if he is not strong enough to break his bonds himself, the sight of his agony will pierce the hearts of his men and drive them to the brink of madness until they slice through his ropes with knives of rusted copper. And then the great Odysseus will leap from his great ship into her waiting arms.

Lorelai is close now, swallowed by the ship’s hulking shadow. As she surfaces, salty spray teasingly showers her face. Along the horizon, a dolphin leaps from the sparkling waves, perhaps a sign of Poseidon’s blessing.

She lifts her head and catches sight of Odysseus at last. The prince is somehow underwhelming, more man than legend. But handsome enough, with broad shoulders belying a warrior’s strength, windswept chestnut hair, and green eyes that sparkle with cunning. She cannot wait to trace every line of his proud face, her claws gentle and teasing. She will watch the adoration in his song-clouded eyes. She will drown him slowly as he smiles.

She might not be able to drug herself on his fine blood, but at least her name and song will be written of in all the tales of mortal men. Lorelai, the mighty temptress of the ocean deep, who snared and killed the mighty Odysseus whom even the gods themselves could not vanquish.

Opening her mouth, Lorelai unleashes her most intricate melody, a ceaseless assault of notes that rise and fall and rise again until their brilliant crescendo. She swims a breath closer, a few more easy flicks of her tail. She watches Odysseus catch sight of her and somehow hears the exact moment his breathing hitches as her song reaches his ears.

Odysseus begins to scream. Lorelai watches as he writhes against his bonds. She catches the irresistible aroma of his blood as he chafes his wrists raw. She changes her song to carry the enchantment of her name.

Soon Odysseus begins to scream for her. Her skin erupts in goosebumps at the beauty and power of her name on his lips.

Lorelai, Lorelai, Lorelai, over and over and over until it becomes a sort of counter-melody to her own song.

She basks in it, the knowledge that she is beautiful and wanted and known.

When she sings to him of her lips and hands and the things she will do to him, he begins to beg, calling for his crew to free him. The roaring of her pulse in her ears almost overpowers her song.

Any moment now. Any moment the crew will cut his bonds and he will join her in the sea.

Lorelai opens her arms, reaching for him.

But minutes pass and somehow the sight of their screaming, writhing leader does not rattle a single one of Odysseus' men. Their resolve is stalwart, his bonds too strong. Even her legendary song cannot lure him.

Odysseus is weeping now, shining tears rolling down his tan cheeks. She wants to catch his tears, feel them fall like cooling rain on her monstrous hands. She wants to taste them, taste him. She wants him more than any prince or warrior or man she's sung to.

Now Lorelai is weeping too, for her hunger is unbearable and her song is useless and the whisper of a story, the memory of a warning, lurks at the dark edges of her racing mind...

Men who escape a siren song doom the immortal singer to death. A siren whose song fails will turn to stone. She will be cast into the depths of the ocean and forgotten.

A gale erupts out of the stillness. The sails of the ship suddenly catch wind. Lorelai now sings out of pure desperation as this strange wind threatens to pull the ship out of range of her song.

Somewhere on an island of black sand beaches and caves of bone, a goddess laughs.

The goddess returns to Lorelai as the siren lies dying on a gray slab of wind-smoothed stone.

"Oh little Lorelai," she says, stroking the siren's face with a warm hand, "Was our bargain worth it, child?"

"Who are you?" Lorelai chokes, recoiling from the goddess's touch.

And because the siren is dying, because she will soon be nothing but stone hidden beneath the depths of the sea, the goddess tells her.

"I am the goddess of thieves and cheats, the immortal mistress of mischief and illusion. I grant you what your heart most desires but in return take something even more precious. I lead man and woman and monster alike down a path of ruin. I am Aite. Say my name."

Lorelai opens her mouth to do as the goddess commands, but when she reaches for the name it is like trying to grasp mist. It is already forgotten.

"See?" the goddess chuckles. "I can even steal my own name."

"Why have you come?" Lorelai asks.

"The underworld waits for your soul." The goddess lifts Lorelai's arm and nods toward the scar marring her pale skin. "This mark of our bargain is a signal to Hades. I am a servant of the Underworld, come to deliver what is promised to him."

"Will Odysseus remember me?" Lorelai asks. Somehow, despite all she has heard, this is the question that weighs most on Lorelai's heart. Even as death draws close, she cannot banish his emerald eyes and the alluring scent of his blood from her memory. Cannot forget the way he screamed her name.

"Yes," the goddess answers. "The memory of your song shall haunt him until the end of his days."

Lorelai smiles, clinging to this smallest solace. Something in the siren's smile strikes a chord of sympathy in the goddess's immortal heart. So she borrows the face of Odella once more.

"Mother," Lorelai breathes. A gentle wind stirs the dark hair on her brow, a gift from Poseidon to ease her passing.

"I am here," the goddess soothes. She cradles Lorelai's head atop the billowing black robes that pool in her lap. Lorelai looks up, looks up to the stars that sit like bright jewels in the dark pendant of the sky.

"It is not so bad to die beneath the watch of the stars," Lorelai sighs.

The goddess stays silent, just takes her hand and holds her tight as Lorelai slowly turns to stone.

Somewhere on the still blue sea sits a storm-battered ship. A man named Odysseus stares across the endless waters. He has heard what no man has ever lived to remember. He is haunted by the memory of a song. By a strange and beautiful name that echoes in his mind.
