

Prologue



I don't know exactly how I landed a short while ago at the tide's edge on this island, with its blue rocks, singing sea grasses, and powdered sand. My memory's still a little fuzzy. I suspect I had help. I recall feeling the water propelling me as if I were riding atop a rocket. And I still feel the firm imprint of unseen hands guiding me.

Ah, yes, a giant wall of water was about to engulf me. Then everything went black. I remember that part now. I hope I remember the rest soon.

Older memories are more intact. I know who I am: Ell Gossamer, in her twentieth year of life. I know I put on this wetsuit, which I'm now peeling off, to shield me from the icy river that brought me from home to the sea and then to here...wherever here is.

I know what I've concealed inside the wetsuit: a family heirloom, *Dreams of Song Times*. I'm counting on this book to help me understand what happens next.

I'll take a moment now to feel the hot sun on my naked skin, the color of walnuts, someone once told me. Actually, my skin looks more like the blue-gray of the ocean, sleek and smooth. The wind makes the grasses sing, a soft handful of notes gliding up and down a scale. The island is so small I can see the other shore. A speck of land surrounded only by water as far as the eye can see.

Left so completely alone, shouldn't I be terrified? I'm not. I suspect this isn't a permanent situation. Change is sweeping in with the tide. This excites me, but I worry that my future could erase my past. I'm not ready to lose the memories of those I've loved and lost—their smiles, their scents, the feel of their skin against mine.

Ahr and Per. Kay. Val. Bibi. There's even a tiny corner of my heart reserved for Angel.

If no one objects, I'd like to dwell on the past for just a bit longer.

I'm not hungry or cold, just gloriously naked, sitting on a blue rock. As night falls, I'm committed to reminiscing until my heart aches. Up in the night sky, my secret constellation, Lyk, winks at me.

I arrived at this place, and at this moment in time, because of secrets.

Secrets have defined me for so long, I am eager to learn who I am without all the baggage. My parents swaddled me from infancy in secrets, crooning lullabies in a strange tongue they never taught me. They tutored me to remember who I am, yet sent me out into the world forbidden to speak my truth.

They were trying to protect me, even if they made a mess of it. I understand that now. I have forgiven them.

I also understand that when you live your whole life as a secret, falling in love will break your heart.

I came of age only once I began telling the truth. And the truth is that I am a mermaid, possibly the last of my kind. And possibly also a carrier of deep and ancient magic, long forgotten and ripe for rediscovery. Love anchors me to the past, but magic may open the door to my future. I will know soon enough.