

Petra Williamson

The full bloomed night was beginning to furl.

Shades of deep indigo coloured the sky, still laden with the weight of lulling darkness. The world was shrouded in a nocturnal veil. Kora sat upon the marble surface of the balcony wall, legs tucked against her chest. Silent, she gazed out beyond her stone perch, eyes resting on the sea.

The balcony reached out from the highest peak of the castle. Elaborate but weathered, it almost appeared to have been fashioned from the very body of the small, rocky isle on which it resided. Blackened by the wild sea, the island stood alone amidst the endless ocean, waves whispering upon its rock-strewn shoreline. What exactly lay beyond that unbroken horizon was a mystery to Kora; her memory was foggy. All she knew now was the castle. Whatever life she knew before was not something that she needed to concern herself with, she had been assured of that. Her legs unfolded to dangle over the edge of the balcony. Far below the sea softly sighed, lazily swirling against the stone and sand, just as sleepless as she was. It was the liminal time before dawn, where the faint moon still resided in her dark canopy amidst the flickering stars. From here, so high up, they felt close enough to touch. Kora liked to imagine the stars would feel like pearls against her fingertips. Perhaps she could pluck them from the velvet night and roll them about in her palm. An idle fantasy.

The briny winds brought a refreshing coolness to her skin. It was a relief from the heavy air of the castle, tasting of salt instead of stone and burning wax. She drew in a deep breath and closed her eyes, settling to listen to the quiet.

Instead, a discordant splash caught her ear.

Kora's eyes snapped open. Moving quickly, she was able to glimpse something pale slip beneath the blue surface, disappearing into the depths as the bubbles fizzed away. Her mind clambered to discern what she could have seen. Her eyes strained to see in the weak light, waiting to see if whatever had retreated into the water would return, but the sea remained unperturbed.

The ocean was a place full of dark things. It was dangerous, home to creatures that lingered beyond the reach of light. Sinister beings that lulled and ensnared the mind, coaxing victims with sweet songs of temptation before pulling them down into the cold abyss. Imagining the horror of screaming underwater made Kora's chest tighten. She felt herself leaning forward, her pulse pounding in her ears... until a hand grasped the inside of her arm.