

A Summon for the Seas

A Little Selkie short story by K. M. Shea

Dylan took a deep breath before the kelpie plunged into the ocean. The cold waters were a frosty splash on her skin, and the currents tugged at the tight braid her hair was secured in as the kelpie surged through the water on a wave of its own creation.

They passed brightly colored fish; long, green strands of kelp; and a wary pack of seals. Dylan was stuck to the kelpie with the animal's oily magic, and gripped its neck as it brushed an underwater rock formation. The water horse dove through the water with the power of a typhoon, his storm gray mane floating in the water.

When Dylan felt her lungs pinch, she squeezed the kelpie with her knees, and the animal shot towards the surface. Together they gasped for air before the kelpie pitched back into the ocean. He cruised for a few moments before leaping out of the water like a breaching whale.

Dylan threw her arms wide as the sunlight warmed her skin. She sang two notes before they plunged back into the ocean. The kelpie wove through a forest of kelp. Dylan spotted two of her cousins in their seal bodies and waved. They shook their round heads at her as the kelpie gushed past, reaching speeds even Dylan in her sea lion body would have struggled to match.

They reached the sandy ocean floor, and the kelpie grunted, all of his muscles going taut. He pushed off the floor, rocketing them through the water and into the sunshine. This time the kelpie heaved upwards, climbing on top of the water, and used his magic to stand there.

Dylan sang, her voice arcing in the air, stretching like a whale's song. Her water sea serpents sprouted from the ocean, rising far above her.

The kelpie snorted and tossed his head, and one of Dylan's serpents struck the ocean with its head, spraying sea water and foam. Dylan stretched her arms for the sky and pressed her toes towards the ocean. "To the glory of the ocean!"

The kelpie swished its tail and shrieked.

Dylan relaxed on the dangerous animal's back, placing her hands on its hindquarters and leaning back. When she glanced at the shore she saw a blue flag emblazoned with a sea lion—her personal symbol designed by the royal family—strung from a flag pole. She squinted, watching as an emerald and saffron colored flag was hitched up on a separate pole.

"Phooey," she said, her mouth twisting in displeasure. "We're being called in."

The kelpie snapped at one of the sea serpents.

"I know. I'll still give you some fish. Come on, back to shore," she said. She sang a note—dismissing her sea serpents—and squeezed her heels into the kelpie's side.

The kelpie shrieked, but it plunged head first into the water, racing to the shore with the speed of a tidal wave. They surged from the ocean to the sandy beach so fast they brought a wave with them, making the three soldiers stationed on the shore flinch.

Two men—a giant lump and a smaller bump—didn't so much as blink at Dylan's unusual mount.

"Morri, Oisin—the fish, please." Dylan tried to pry herself from the kelpie's back, but she couldn't move until the crafty animal released his magical hold on her. He tossed his head and finally let her go when Oisin—the shorter, almost square-headed bump of Dylan's guarding duo—removed the lid of a basket and presented its contents—fish—to the creature.

Dylan slipped off the water horse and started squeezing water from her short skirts. "What's this about? I haven't been out for even half an hour."

“The prince doesn’t like it when you ride it,” Morri said. To call him a talker would be generous, but he spoke more regularly than Oisín. (It was a rare event for the shorter guard to utter something more than a grunt.)

“So? That hasn’t stopped me from riding before. The water finally warmed from winter. I can take longer swims now,” Dylan complained. She patted the kelpie’s neck, making a wet, squishy sound.

“King Róry and Queen Étaín have requested your presence, and Prince Callan’s presence,” Morri—Lump, as Dylan used to think of him—said.

Dylan wiped drying sea salt from her skin. “Any idea why?”

Morri shrugged his massive shoulders. “A royal courier from Loire arrived on a ship not half an hour ago.”

“Ahh, that will do it. It’s probably just a message saying they’ll attend **that** wedding.”

“*Your* wedding.”

“It’s nearly an entire season away. I don’t understand why the invitations had to be posted so far ahead. Landers,” Dylan sighed.

Oisín—Bump—grunted and jerked his thumb in the direction of the Glenglassera palace.

“I know. I shouldn’t keep their majesties waiting. Let’s go,” Dylan sighed. “I’ll see you tomorrow,” she told the kelpie—it spat a fish tail in her direction—before hiking across the golden beach to reach the horses waiting to carry them up the steep path that wound through the bluffs and led to capital of Ringsted.

As she reached the horses she shook her head. “Why be so concerned with the guests? The wedding food is what really matters!”



Dylan dried her wild hair and changed into an ocean-blue dress before joining Callan outside King Róry’s private study.

“Did you have a good swim?” Callan asked.

Dylan nodded enthusiastically. “The best!”

“I’m glad it grants you so much joy. However, I fear your swimming partner will give me gray hairs before my time.”

Dylan shook her head. “He’s not so bad. Mind you, the rest of the kelpies are still dangerous predators, but my kelpie is…”

“Tamed?” Callan suggested.

Dylan laughed. “No, never tamed. You cannot tame a creature like a kelpie. He is more…mindful.”

“You’re not exactly reassuring me of your safety,” Callan said.

“Safety? Why would I want safety?”

Callan sighed. “Forget it. *You* are going to give me gray hairs before the proper time,” he said before he knocked on door.

King Róry himself opened the door, a serious look pasted on his handsome face. “Come in,” he said, standing aside.

“Thank you,” Callan said, threading his fingers through Dylan’s as they strode inside.

Dylan looked back and forth between her future in-laws, catching the concerned angle of King Róry’s eyebrows, and the wrinkles of worry pinching Queen Étaín’s mouth. “Is something wrong?”

“Yes—and no,” Queen Etain said.

Dylan tilted her head. “Is it the wedding? Can you not get the grilled squid I requested?”

King Rory grinned, some of the tension leaving his shoulders. “Your wedding is fine. It is merely...it is that...”

“Ringsted has received an invitation from Prince Severin—the Commanding General of Loire—and his wife, Princess Elle, to attend a summit meeting,” Queen Etain said.

“And that’s a bad thing?” Dylan asked, her brow wrinkling.

“But we are on excellent terms with Loire,” Prince Callan said.

“We are,” King Rory confirmed. “It’s why they’ve invited us. An invitation has been extended to almost all countries on the continent to send a representative or two to the meeting.”

“What for?” Dylan asked.

“What do you mean, my dear?” Queen Etain asked.

“What is the point of the meeting. Unless—is this a common occurrence?” she asked, swinging her gaze back and forth between the Ringsted monarchs.

Prince Callan shook his head. “A summit hasn’t been held in at least a century.”

“You are correct,” King Rory said. “Loire didn’t state it explicitly in the invitation, but they implied the meeting is being held because the rampant dark magic.”

“It’s dangerous for a country to try and face the darkness alone—as we discovered here,” Queen Etain said, giving Dylan a warm smile.

“If by we, you mean me, I couldn’t agree more, Your Majesty,” Dylan said.

King Rory clasped his hands behind his back. “The summit will be held in the middle of spring. Etain and I have decided to send the two of you as our representatives—if you are willing.”

“As the future monarchs this will be an excellent chance to meet other royalty, and Rory and I thought it would be prudent to send a selkie.”

“It sounds interesting,” Dylan said, cocking her head before looking to her intended.

“You’ll go?” Callan asked.

“Yep. Unless you don’t want to?”

Callan shook his head. “I’m not against it. But what of the wedding?” he asked, looking to his parents.

“With your wedding being on the first day of summer, you should have plenty of time to return. Many of the representatives at the summit are our trading allies and partners who will also attend your celebration. Prince Severin and Princess Elle themselves have confirmed their attendance, so the meeting will surely end well before the event,” King Rory said.

“Although it pains me that you will not be here to aid with the last-minute decisions,” Queen Etain sighed.

“Now I *really* think we ought to go,” Dylan whispered to Callan.

Callan grinned. “I am equally as motivated,” he said before he turned to his parents. “We agree.”

“Excellent. It will be a historic event—I can almost imagine all the scholars who will attend,” King Rory said, wistfully sipping at a goblet of wine.

“It’s for the good of the country,” Queen Etain said, almost as if she were reminding herself.

“How soon must we leave?” Callan asked.

“You have a few weeks to prepare,” King Rory said.

“I must tell my parents,” Dylan said, her voice firm.

“Of course, my dear,” Queen Etain said, gently patting her cheek.

“No, I *must* tell my parents immediately,” Dylan repeated. “Father said he would muzzle me himself if I rushed off again without notifying him.”

“I see,” King Rory said, squinting as he puzzled through Dylan’s words. “We’ll make arrangements to send a messenger. Could you tell them through a letter, or must it be in person?”

“A letter should be good enough, I think,” Dylan nodded.

“Are you certain? We will have time. You can tell them yourself,” Callan said.

Dylan shook her head. “No, it is important to notify them, but if I go Maureen will surely hold me captive and demand that someone else should go in my place.”

“She loves you,” Queen Etain said.

“With the suffocating grasp of an octopus prying open a clam’s shell,” Dylan said.

King Rory coughed to cover his choked laughter.

“A letter it is,” Callan said, his voice sprinkled with amusement. “What other arrangements must be made?”

“We will send a confirmation back with the royal courier,” King Rory said.

“And a new wardrobe must be created for both of you,” Queen Etain said. “Won’t that be marvelous?”

Callan looked pained and Dylan’s stomach growled. “Can we visit the dressmaker by the bread shop?” Dylan asked.

“Which bread shop?” Queen Etain asked.

“The one with the pink starfish on the sign.”

“Certainly.”

“Then I agree!”

“Mother, you’ve poisoned her,” Callan groaned.

“Resign yourself, son,” King Rory advised. “Your mother is not a force that is easily thwarted.”

“RORY.”

King Rory winced. “So, who wants tea?”



When Dylan walked onto beach after her midnight swim, Callan wrapped a blanket around her.

“Thank you,” she said, tugging the blanket closer. The pair sat on the beach, Dylan snuggled into Callan’s side.

“Are you really okay with this?” Callan asked.

“Okay with what?”

“The summit. Loire has only a single port city—and it’s deeply annexed. The mainland is entirely land locked.”

“Is Loire a desert?”

“No.”

“Then I will be fine. Although I prefer the ocean, selkies have a connection with all water. One of my cousins works almost exclusively with fresh water when she uses her magic,” Dylan said.

Callan shook his head. “I feel ashamed. We’re getting married in a season, and I still know so little about your customs.”

“It’s not your fault. We have hidden ourselves away for centuries. You cannot hope to learn all the intricacies of our culture in half a year—just like I cannot fathom the actions of landers even though I have lived among you for three quarters of a year,” Dylan said.

Callan nodded as a wave crashed on the beach. The full moon made his sand colored hair shine as he said, “Tell me truthfully, Dylan. Does the kelpie help?”

“What do you mean?”

“I know the loss of your pelt was devastating. Does swimming with the kelpie help?”

Dylan buried her toes in the cool sand. “It’s different than swimming as a sea lion. There’s a wild feeling to it that I never achieved. It moves faster and with more aggression—as if it can rule the sea instead of riding in it.”

“But?”

“But it brings back the wonder, and the connection I feel with the ocean. As a human I cannot hope to swim with the same abandon I did as a sea lion. The kelpie lets me mimic the feeling,” Dylan said.

“I thought so,” Callan said. “I’m glad. I know your sacrifice was necessary, but I’ve grieved it. I’m happy that creature can bring some of your joy back.”

“I would be happy even if I was beached forever, Callan,” Dylan said. “I love you.”

“I know, and I love you—which is why I’m glad, for your sake. That being said, it still makes me wary.”

Dylan rested her head on Callan’s shoulder. “He’s like the ocean—fearsome and wonderful. I don’t know why he decided he accepted me, but I’m glad he did.”

“Do you think he will follow us north?”

“Perhaps.”

“That will make quite the show for our allies at the summit,” Callan chuckled.

“You’ll do well.”

“Hm?”

“With the summit. I’m confident you will properly represent Ringsted.” Dylan leaned closer and kissed his cheek.

“Thank you,” Callan said, sliding an arm around her to tug her closer. “Though I am glad you are going with me.”

“Do you think we could bring Cagney and Dooley with?”

“I’m certain we could, but I don’t think it would be advisable.”

“Why not?”

“We’ll be sailing for weeks. Imagine days with that pair in a small space,” Callan said.

“Dooley wouldn’t survive the voyage.”

“It’s not likely,” Callan said.

“Why will the voyage take weeks?” Dylan asked.

“It’s a vast distance to cover.”

“So?”

“The winds may not be favorable, and the currents might not go with us,” Callan said.

Dylan’s forehead wrinkled. *What does that have to do with anything?* She thought. *Hmm. Perhaps I should talk to Murphy about using our magic to move boats.*

“I love you,” Callan said, his words breaking the silence of the night.

Dylan blinked at the abrupt words. “I know,” she said, a smile bending her lips. “I love you, too.”

Callan kissed her for exactly ten seconds before Oisín—stationed in the shadows of the trees with Morri—cleared his throat.

Callan groaned and pulled back so he could lie on the sand. “I can’t get a break. Your parents insist on limited physical contact, and *my* parents insist on a summer wedding so all our trade partners can attend—will nothing go my way?”

“I don’t think Oisín or Morri report us. They’ve lectured us twice already, and Maureen has yet to appear and sit on my head,” Dylan said, waving to her guards.

“Or drop me in deep water with sharks, again,” Callan dryly said.

“I told you those were whale sharks. They would never hurt you.”

“Uh-huh. You’ll have to forgive me for not believing you. You have a magical connection with almost all forms of sea life. Just because they wouldn’t hurt you doesn’t mean they won’t hurt me.” Callan sighed.

Dylan leaned over so she could peer down at him. “I think you’re worth the wait—and I’m rarely willing to wait for anything.”

Callan chuckled. “Yes, you’re worth the wait—and the danger to my life—as well.” He sat up and drew closer to Dylan, leaning in.

“*Ahem*,” Morri said.

Callan grumbled under his breath.

“Let’s go back,” Dylan said. She stood and snapped her blanket to rid it of sand. “A wind storm is brewing about ten miles off shore.”

“As you wish, my princess,” Callan said, brushing off his clothes after he stood. When he was clean he extended his hand.

Dylan took it without a thought, linking her fingers with his. “Do you think Dooley will soon ask Cagney to marry him? He looks like he’s getting more desperate.”

“You noticed it too? I imagine he’ll crack before winter,” Callan said.

“I’ll be surprised if he lasts the summer,” Dylan said.

“You haven’t told Cagney about his feelings?” Callan asked as they walked up the beach, moseying towards the bluff-path.

“Goodness, no.”

“Why not?”

“I hinted once or twice, and then I thought better of it.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s going to be *hilarious* when she realizes he’s serious.”

Callan’s laughter echoed off the bluffs and cliffs, and into the Glenglassera harbor.

THE END