

A Siren's Cry
by Brittany Passmore

Kalama opened her eyes.

Fluorescent lights brighter than the sun assaulted her gaze, forcing her to squint. She lay on grainy sand, waves of salt water rushing over her tail periodically. She winced. The water was salty enough, sure, but it wasn't authentic ocean. She could feel the chemicals of the processed liquid gathering between her scales like algae. She hated synthetic water.

Shielding her eyes, she pushed herself up on one elbow. Glass walls surrounded her in the life-like beach setting, allowing her to glimpse a lab full of tables with tanks, chemicals, and instruments in all shapes and sizes. Humans dressed in pristine white lab coats lumbered around the room. Kalama noticed a larger tank to one side formed by a glass wall running the whole length of the lab. Others of her kind glided by in the water there, occasionally treading to converse with nearby humans.

"Don't be alarmed," a clipped male voice called out to her over an intercom.

Kalama sat up straight and searched the room until she spotted him—a researcher smiling far too widely.

"You may not remember much from the storm—it was a category 4 hurricane—but you're safe now. We've seen to your injuries."

Kalama glanced down at herself dubiously. She did remember trying to outswim the storm during her escape from a trafficking vessel. Even death would have been better than remaining captive. But her memory was all flashes after that. Had she really escaped anything?

"Where—"

"You'll be pleased to know that you're safely in the hands of IMAGE. I'm afraid I can't hear you at the moment due to the soundproof nature of this glass, but we still have a few tests we'd like to run."

She nearly stopped breathing. If the International Mammalistic Association of Genetics and Evolution had her, she really was still a slave. What were these monsters testing her for?

The human continued to speak, oblivious to her horror. "You see, we've modified your vocal cords in the hopes of recreating the legendary sirens of old. Kindly direct your attention to the screen there in the corner and recite or sing the various texts according to the prompted emotions."

Kalama glared at him. "Are you insane?" she spat. "I'm not going to help you with any of your *research*! I know what IMAGE does. I heard all about the werewolves you created last year." She gripped the sand in her fists. "What have you done to me?" she demanded.

"Hm." The man stared at another screen. "You don't seem to be following the prescribed text or emotion." He glanced back up at her. "It's in your best interest to cooperate. Now, tell me, does your voice sound recognizably different to you? We attempted to alter your hearing to compensate for the modifications in your vocal cords, of course, but . . ."

Kalama couldn't help fingering her throat. They had done something to her voice. Her breath quickened and her eyes stung. "*What have you done to me?*" she screamed hysterically. Glass cracked.

The water in her tank surged into the room, leaving her stranded on the man-made sand. She looked around wildly. She could survive without water, true, but not for long if she wanted her tail to last.

"Help me!" she cried desperately, looking at the stunned humans near her.

She saw their eyes glaze over. A few nodded dumbly, and they began to gather around her. "How may I serve you?" one asked in awe.

Kalama trembled. Had her voice just *hypnotized* them? "Just . . . just get me into water. Get me away from here."

Every one of them obeyed.