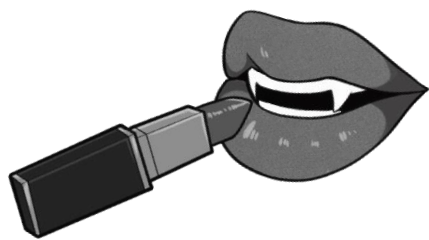


Whispers
In The

Abyss

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WHISPERS IN THE ABYSS

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Cover — Yanndra Neves



The ocean had always been beautiful. A fine array of hues that ranged from light blue to pitch black.

Without remembering how she ended up there, she admired where she was: in the middle of nowhere. No creatures around, no sounds, no worries. Calmness flooded her like the cold currents that tickled her skin. Her hair flowed around her, her arms open, contemplating.

The silence was a bit strange, she had to admit, but sometimes things were just like that. Admiring the shape of her own nails against the blue shadows of the water, she thought about how much she loved being a mermaid. She didn't envy any creature, not even humans.

A feminine song began in the distance, and she smiled, recognizing the song of someone from her group, one of the eight Kingdoms spread across the world. She wasn't so alone anymore, apparently. "The ocean was like that," she thought, laughing to herself.

Opening her arms, she twirled around, enjoying her hair tangling around her arms and the feeling of dizziness. Despite already being an adult, she cherished the moments when she could still be jovial.

Her sister was already seventeen years old, and her five-year age difference allowed her to participate in banal conversations and relaxed moments.

Her goal before the group was to be a Cantilena, which consisted of training her vocal magic to enchant all creatures and feed the Kingdom. Thalassa, on the other hand, would soon be the Caretaker of the Corals.

Her grandmother was the last Cantilena that the Kingdom of Marenthis saw, and when she was killed in an unfortunate accident, no one else showed up, until her.

The writings of her ancestors were the only thing that kept her connected to information about her power, and being forced to discover everything on her own made her feel both trapped and fortunate, which is why she clung to her free moments so strenuously.

The water began to get darker, and that could only mean that the day was finally turning into night.

Maybe it was time to go home. Go home...

The thought was soon overshadowed when she moved to the side for a brief second and found a silver wave so dense that it seemed to devour her vision while a greenish glow grew, giving a dangerous light to the darkness.

Her chest tightened, fear taking over her body when she realized that it was mermaid blood.

Desperately, she felt around for where she had hurt herself, but the water had become even more murky. In fact, with each new flutter of her eyelashes, more black spread around her, joining the remnants of silver, merging one into the other until they became a deep gray, leaving her with only the real shape of the darkness and the scent of fresh blood.

Deciding to swim out of there even if she couldn't see clearly, she couldn't. She was trapped in something. But how, if there was nothing there but water?

A greenish glow began to emerge from the background, then turned into a blue so bright that her corneas ached as they tried to adjust to it. The song she had heard before became clearer, closer, as if the owner of the voice were beneath her.

But now the tone was not bringing similarity, empathy or a sense of belonging, but rather the opposite. The feeling of being in danger grew with each new note, and the light grew, becoming something, she could not yet distinguish.

She tried to move at any cost but failed. And as she struggled, the more trapped she felt, and the more the light turned green again, taking on a shape so large in the darkness below her that the fear of death stung her.

Eyes suddenly found her, and the oxygen was gone; the feeling suffocating her. She needed to escape from whatever it was. Her nails grabbed onto something sticky and rocky. She wondered where she was, but there was no time for that.

She had to escape, and so she did.

She used all the strength in her arm, dragging herself upwards, ignoring the sensation that stuck to her skin and scales, as well as the clear smell of death. The pair of orbs seemed to be watching her only, and the higher she went, the further away they became.

Her tail was cut by who knows what, as were her arms, but the clearest strip of water kept her steady, there was light somewhere. Her chest moved strongly with effort and fear, but nothing but staying safe crossed her mind.

She swam. She climbed. And when she thought she could no longer, the light bathed her, and she found herself emerging from a cavernous abyss. Her body was covered in silver blood, and when she tilted her face down to check if the thing had disappeared, she saw only massacred bodies.

Flesh and blood.

It was there that she screamed.

And screaming, she woke up. The echo of her voice brought her back to the present, the piercing fear in her veins, making her desperate to hold on to something other than what she had just seen.

“Nerissa?” Her sister was in front of her, her face pale, scared. “You’re finally awake! Look, I don’t know what’s happening, but everyone is acting weird.”

“What do you mean?”

She replied, trying to bring naturalness to her tone as her hands grabbed the corals that formed her home, and the discovery that there was no blood or flesh on her relieved her tremendously. Her head hurt, still echoing that song.

“I can’t say. I only saw the rushing outside and some murmurs. I tried to wake you up for more than ten minutes and you didn’t even move!” Thalassa said, her tone bordering between fear and despair at the unknown.

“Don’t go outside.” She ordered. “Let me see what’s happening.”

Swimming to one of the holes she used as a window, she tensed up immediately when she saw nothing. No fish, no mermaid. Only sporadic silvery spots floating in the currents that lived within her Kingdom.

The voice from her dream grew louder, and her temple throbbed. Climbing out of the crack, she swam a little in front of her home and looked for signs of anyone else. The silence became corrosive, and the fear she felt in her dream resurfaced, now as if it were real.

“It was just a nightmare,” she said to herself, trying to comfort herself somehow.

Turning around, she saw a silhouette coming from afar, and soon smiled, a hope of confirmation arising when she recognized one of her friends, Caspien.

She sighed in relief when she saw him approaching, but as his form got closer, his posture seemed stranger. Her spine stiffened when he finally swam past her at full speed.

The eyes that had been purple were now white, and there seemed to be no shadow of recognition when her face turned to his, even for a millisecond.

“What was that?” Thalassa’s voice resounded.

Turning to her, he became irritated.

“I told you not to leave!”

Another mermaid came from afar, passing by as quickly as the first, then no one else.

The only sound was the song in the background and the beating of her fins against the water that had begun to stir as if it were furious.

“Nerissa... I’m scared.” Her sister said, her voice trembling. “What’s happening to the water?”

The desperation in her tone was the perfect mirror of her inner self. Nothing like that had ever happened before. It was as if a storm that only happens on the surface had found its way there, moving everything around.

“Where did everyone go? Why was the water moving like that?”

She wondered. The feminine sound echoing in high notes and in a perfect crescendo tone grew louder, making it impossible to reason.

“What the hell kind of song is this?” he growled, allowing a little bit of a mismatch.

“Are you listening too?” Thalassa asked.

“What do you mean ‘are you listening too?’”

“It’s so beautiful, don’t you think?”

“What?” she asked, confused.

“The song, now.”

Her sister suddenly seemed different. Her previously fearful tone gave way to an alarming calm.

“I understand now why there’s no one here,” she smiled as if she had found the end of the rainbow. The happiness in her voice was incomprehensible, there was no other way to describe it. “She’s calling us, sister! Let’s go! Caspien’s already gone, wow, he’s so lucky!”

Her sister suddenly swam so fast that she had to make an effort to keep up.

“Thalassa! Where are you going?”

No answer, just laughter and more speed.

“Answer me, damn it!” She screamed, desperately trying to catch up with her. “Thalassa! Please!”

Her heart was beating so fast it hurt. The air bubbles leaving her body mixed with those of the tracks of those who had passed by there, and with each new meter she advanced, the feeling of the water on her body became heavier, as if they shouldn't be there.

Her expression was one of confusion and fear, while her sisters was one of ecstasy, and no matter how much she called to her, the girl did not respond, she just kept going.

They were walking in the furthest direction from the Kingdom, entering dark waters, near the Abyss of Tiamat, a place where legend said the Ancients imprisoned the Creator of the Mermaids.

When they sealed her under the deepest rocks, she lost her essence, spreading it across the ocean, giving life to her species.

She remembered perfectly her mother commenting that the duty to protect the sea was to honor the Chaos that had been imprisoned with the Goddess, and that each of the mermaids, because they were pieces of her, should commit to never waking her up.

And on the contrary, the bad part of Tiamat had stayed with the moray eels, which were seen as a bad omen, responsible for perpetuating the calamity by being the natural predators of all the mermaids.

One of her most difficult trainings was to charm them, in fact. She could train any shark, octopus, human and small creatures, but the moray eels were almost impossible.

First, because they were always trying to eat her, and second, because it seemed like there was a resistance in her mind that forbade her from accessing them.

The rocky peak of the abyss finally got too close, and her desperation grew, unable to reach Thalassa either by voice or body.

She wanted to shake her, slap her, hold her, anything that would take her out of that trance, but to do that she needed to get close.

Her dizzying and abrupt speed wouldn't let her.

The weight of the water wouldn't let her.

The song in her mind wouldn't let her.

It was like in the dream from earlier. Stuck in something invisible, crawling in something sticky, except now she knew it was just water.

Thalassa reached the peak of the abyss and screamed for her sister, using everything she had left to ignore the song that was now calling her name so close that she wanted to cry out of pure terror.

Throwing herself off the cliff, she dove after her, not believing the blue beam that came from the bottom. Suffocating in her own bubbles, she descended, swimming in such pain that she swore her skin would tear at any moment.

She wanted to call out for her sister, but her voice wouldn't come out. Her name echoed loud and clear, as if the bottom of the sea was calling her, and for a moment she doubted if she wasn't still trapped in a dream.

Unfortunately, she knew she wasn't because of the vividness of the pain. And because she felt presences around her, and as she dove even deeper into the darkness, hundreds of yellow eyes appeared in the gloomy surroundings.

The moray eels swam around her, descending with her. She knew they were moving because the height of their eyes followed their movements, but if it were someone from the outside, they would say they were motionless, only their eyes sparkling in the darkness: not attacking; observing, as if they were waiting for something.

As if they were part of a puzzle and knew it.

As if she was too but had no idea yet.

She needed to save Thalassa.

They were going to eat her; the damned moray eels were going to tear her apart!

For a few seconds the darkness seemed to terrify her, keeping her suspended even though she was trying so hard.

The vibration of the water was frightening, as if Evil was there with her, waiting for her.

When she realized this, the tension was suddenly released, the darkness taking on shades of blue that seemed to belong to another world: it was a shade she had never seen before.

Someone whispered her name near her ear, and this made her stop swimming, turning to the side behind the fountain, finding only a school of moray eels still staring at her.

They called her again, this time from another direction, and her eyes turned to Thalassa, who was diving ever closer to the light, which she now understood to be an immense fissure in the core.

The closer she got, the more undeniable the silvery spots emanating from the opening became, and to her complete despair, Thalassa was too close, laughing in a tone that bordered on hysteria, and just when she managed to gain the strength to control her voice, the reproduction of her name was silenced by a scream of pain.

Something held her body, stopping her completely. It was impossible to do anything, including blinking and breathing, but somehow these functions had not been undone.

Suspended and helpless, she only watched as her sister passed through the crack, instantly transforming into a shimmering, silvery wave, which was immediately absorbed as if something from deep within the earth was sucking her in, absorbing her.

The light grew brighter and the song that had previously fallen silent came back so loud that it deafened her. She felt herself losing consciousness of something that wasn't even there.

And amid all the chaos, pain and fear, she felt the presence of a woman enveloping her, the music entering her body as if it were exchanging places with her blood.

The weakness gave way to an urgency of something she couldn't name.

She simply stopped fighting.

It was then that an immense shadow emerged from the fissure, and although she couldn't see anything, she could see.

She felt claws squeezing her and a macabre laugh echoed through the water.

"I found you."

The moray eels stirred, and her body was overcome by the feeling of recognition.

She shouldn't fear but serve. That was her purpose, while she knew it wasn't. Whatever it was, was controlling her mind just as it had with Thalassa.

"Daughter," the voice said again, the water moving at the same frequency, forming the syllables. *"Go to the others. Bring back my blood."*

She wanted to say no, but her whole body wanted to sing. And to enchant.

And for the first time she managed to connect with the minds of the moray eels, and they were all calling her name, encouraging her to say yes, to give in.

Hundreds of voices together that made her want to rip her throat out to stop herself from making the connection, but the order was so powerful that her sense of right or wrong was lost, ending any trace of who she had been before she had arrived there.

She evoked Tiamat's name along with a language she didn't even know existed, and when she finished what seemed like a long song, she knew that all the moray eels were under her power.

And that she should leave there with them ready to do their duty.

"Yes, ma'am," she answered to the sea, and when she left, she didn't even remember that she had once had a sister.