

# AQUAMAN

## LEARNING TO SWIM



# Chapter One

## Arthur

My parents came from two different worlds, two worlds that, by all logic, should never have crossed paths. But fate has a way of ignoring logic. My father, Tom Curry, was the lighthouse keeper of Amnesty Bay, Maine. He loved that old lighthouse more than anything—until the day he nearly drowned. That was the day he met my mother.

She was an enigma wrapped in mystery. The only name my father ever knew her by was Lana, a misunderstanding that she never corrected. He'd fallen overboard during a storm, and as the cold, relentless waves pulled him under, she saved him. She was unlike anyone he had ever seen—graceful, powerful, almost otherworldly. And she was gone before he could ask any questions.

But something about my father intrigued her. Maybe it was the way he refused to break under the weight of a lonely job, or how he still found wonder in the sea even after it tried to kill him. She came back, again and again, to learn more about him. Eventually, learning turned into love, and love turned into me—Arthur Curry.

For a while, life was good. My father would tell me stories of how I was born from a love that defied boundaries, how no matter how vast the differences, love could always build a bridge. I believed him.

Until the day my mother left.

She had gone out to buy groceries and never came back. My father was frantic. He filed a missing person's report, but the police turned up nothing, no records, no identification, no trace of her existence anywhere. It was as if she had vanished into thin air. The people of Amnesty Bay meant well, but to them, it was just another case of a mother running out on her husband and child. It happened all the time.

But my father never accepted that. He became closed off, jaded, withdrawing from the town and pouring all his time into raising me.

He was my best friend. We did everything together. When it was time for school, he decided to teach me himself. My childhood was a blur of lessons, long walks along the shore, and hours spent swimming in the ocean. I cherished every moment.

But being different in a small town comes with a cost. The other kids noticed that I wasn't like them. I was faster, stronger, and spent too much time in the water. They called me fish boy, mocked me every time I stepped into town. One day, a couple of them shoved my head into a toilet, laughing as they tried to hold me down.

That's when I realized I wasn't just different. I was something else.

The moment my head went under, I didn't panic. I didn't struggle. In fact, I felt incredible—more alive than I ever had before. A rush of energy flooded my veins, as if the water itself was waking something up inside me. I threw my bullies off with ease, sending them flying across the bathroom. I didn't stick around to see what happened next. I ran.

When I told my father what happened, he listened carefully, but I could see the doubt in his eyes. Oxygen deprivation can do strange things to the mind, he reasoned. A rush of adrenaline, nothing more. But I knew it was real.

That night, I slumped onto the couch, defeated. My father didn't believe me. Maybe I was crazy. Maybe I had imagined it. My eyes drifted to the aquarium sitting in the corner of the room, its water shimmering in the glow of the lamp.

It had been my father's idea, a way to feel connected to my mother after she left. I watched the fish swim lazily, drifting left, then right. Absentmindedly, I thought about them moving together—turning left, then right, then left again. And then, they did.

Every single fish in the tank moved in perfect unison with my thoughts. My breath caught in my throat. I bobbed my head left. They turned left. I bobbed right. They followed.

Behind me, the sound of shattering glass snapped me out of my trance. My father had dropped his plate, staring at the tank with wide eyes. Neither of us spoke for a long moment.

Finally, he swallowed hard and said, “I didn’t know everything about your mother.” He never met anyone from her side of the family. She had wandered into his life, and then—just as suddenly—wandered right out of it. But now, the truth was undeniable. Whatever I was, it came from her.

From that day on, we did everything we could to keep my abilities a secret. But secrets don’t stay buried forever.

Twenty years later, everything changed.

## Chapter Two

### Tom Curry

It was a morning like any other. I was finishing up my coffee when a knock echoed from the front door downstairs. “I’ll get it!” I called down to Arthur, setting my mug aside as I made my way to the door. Swinging it open, I was met with a familiar face, Dr. Stephen Shin, an old friend I hadn’t seen in years.

“Stephen,” I said, surprised. “It’s been too long. Come in.”

He stepped inside, shaking the dampness from his coat as I took it from him. But his eyes weren’t on me. They were searching, scanning the house, looking for something, or someone. “Thank you, Tom,” he said. “How have you been?”

“Better than I deserve,” I replied, leading him into the living room. “But what brings you back to Amnesty Bay? I thought a man with a fancy marine biology degree would have left his quaint hometown behind.”

A thin smile tugged at his lips. “Well, Tom, I’ve been hearing... stories. Rumors.”

Before I could press him further, Arthur strolled down the stairs, making his way toward the kitchen. Stephen’s eyes lit up.

“Is this him?” he asked. “Is this Arthur?”

Arthur turned back toward us, offering his hand the way I raised him to. “I’m Arthur. Who are you again?”

“Dr. Stephen Shin,” he said, shaking Arthur’s hand firmly. “I’m an old friend of your father’s. Grew up right here in Amnesty Bay.”

“Oh, cool,” Arthur said with a nod before heading back into the kitchen. “Nice meeting you.”

Stephen watched him go; his excitement barely contained.

“So,” I said, folding my arms, “back to the real reason you’re here.”

Stephen exhaled, shifting in his seat. “You know I’ve devoted my life to studying Atlantis.”

I rolled my eyes. “Here we go...”

“No, listen,” he insisted. “I believe Atlantis is real. That it never truly vanished, only adapted. And your son, Arthur, I think he’s part Atlantean.”

I barked out a laugh. Stephen had always been a bit radical, but this? This was something else.

Just then, Arthur reappeared. “Hey, Dad, I’m heading into town to grab some Choco-O’s. We’re out. Need anything?”

“No, I’m good. Thanks.” Arthur gave me a nod, grabbed his keys, and walked out the door. The moment his truck rumbled down the road, I turned back to Stephen. “You really think this theory of yours holds water? Atlantis? Like the lost city?”

“I don’t just think it. I know it.” Stephen’s voice carried the certainty of a man who had dedicated his life to a single pursuit. “And the people of Atlantis didn’t just disappear. They changed. Adapted. Evolved. The power that sank their city didn’t destroy them, it made them stronger.”

I frowned. “And how exactly does Arthur fit into this?”

“I’ve heard things, Tom,” he said, leaning forward. “Strange incidents. Accidents that always seem to happen near water. Unnatural strength. And the way he moves in the ocean, it’s not just talent, it’s instinct. These are the traits of someone who wasn’t meant to live on land.”

I crossed my arms, unimpressed. “And?”

Stephen hesitated, then said, “I need a vial of Arthur’s blood.”

The room went deadly silent. Then, I shot out of my chair, the wooden legs scraping against the floor as it tumbled backward. “Absolutely not.”

“Tom—”

“I will not let you turn my son into a damn science experiment!” My voice thundered through the house.

Stephen raised his hands defensively. “It’s just one vial! For research purposes only! No harm, no—”

“I know exactly how these things go.” My blood boiled. “You take a sample, tell me it’s nothing, but then you need more. And then more. And before I know it, Arthur’s being poked and prodded like a lab rat. I will not let that happen.”

Stephen opened his mouth, but I wasn’t done. “I don’t care what kind of ‘groundbreaking discovery’ this would be for you. Arthur is not your test subject.” A heavy pause hung between us. I expected an argument; some attempt to change my mind. But Stephen wasn’t that kind of man. He had conviction, but he also had fear.

He swallowed hard. “Of course, Tom,” he said, standing up. “No need for threats.”

I didn’t say anything as I watched him walk to the door.

He hesitated, hand on the knob, before adding, “You know this would help my research tremendously.”

I stepped closer, lowering my voice to something far more dangerous than shouting. “If you ever breathe a word of this to anyone,” I said, “I will personally see to it that your life’s work is burned to ash. And you’ll be lucky to teach second-grade science by the time I’m done with you.”

Stephen paled. Then, with a stiff nod, he opened the door. “Well,” he muttered, stepping outside, “have a good day.”

I slammed the door shut behind him.

## Stephen Shin

I was so sure Tom would give me the blood. I mean, what are old friends for if not to provide a tiny, harmless sample from their kid—especially when that kid could be part Atlantean?

This was my life's work. The proof I needed to silence the critics who dismissed me as a crackpot.

But Tom didn't see it that way. He couldn't understand that I wasn't trying to hurt Arthur—I just needed evidence. Something to prove I wasn't insane. Something to validate everything I had spent my life chasing.

If Tom wouldn't give me what I needed, I'd have to procure it another way. There was a man I rarely dealt with—someone I only called when I had no other options. He specialized in obtaining things... when conventional means failed.

This was one of those times. I pulled out my phone and dialed. After two rings, the line picked up. "Yeah? It's me," I said. "I have a job for you."

A pause. Then: "What's the job?"

"I need a sample of blood from a young man named Arthur Curry," I said, lowering my voice. "He lives in a lighthouse with his father. I believe he may be part Atlantean, and his blood will further my studies. I'll pay your rate upon completion."

Silence. Then, a chuckle. "Atlantean, huh?" His tone had shifted—less transactional, more... intrigued. "Tell you what, I'll forgo my usual rate."

I frowned. "Why would you do that?"

"Because in exchange, you're going to give me all the research you have on Atlantis."

A chill ran down my spine. This wasn't just business for him. "What's your angle?" I asked.

Another chuckle. "Let's just say I have a vested interest in your work."

I hesitated, gripping the phone tighter. This wasn't the deal I planned to make. But what choice did I have?

"Fine," I said. "You know where to find me once you have the sample." I ended the call, exhaling slowly. One way or another, I would get my proof. And soon, the whole world would know the truth.



## Arthur Curry

After grabbing some cereal from town, I made a detour to the docks. I didn't tell my dad—I knew he wouldn't approve. But this had become part of my routine. I'd sit on the edge of the pier, staring out at the dark waves, waiting. Watching.

For the past few months, I had been quietly helping people—sailors caught in sudden storms, fishermen who lost their footing, the occasional reckless swimmer who ventured too far. The sea was unforgiving, but I wasn't.

I had no name, no recognition. Just the satisfaction of knowing I had done something. The stormier the night, the better it worked in my favor. No one questioned the unseen force that pulled them to safety.

Tonight, though, the weather was getting worse. The sky churned with thick, rolling clouds, and the wind screamed through the docks. The forecast promised it would only intensify. I wanted to stay. I wanted to help. But even I needed sleep. Reluctantly, I headed home, climbed into bed, and let the sound of the distant waves lull me into unconsciousness.

Then, a crash, I jolted awake, my heart hammering. My room was dark, but the moonlight cast eerie shadows through the window. Then I saw it, saw him.

A massive figure in all black, pinning my father to the floor. My breath caught in my throat. My dad struggled beneath him, but the man barely budged. A shattered syringe glinted on the hardwood floor beside them.

The adrenaline hit like a tidal wave. "Get off him!" I roared, surging forward.

Before he could react, I grabbed the intruder and hurled him across the room. He crashed into the dresser, sending books and picture frames tumbling to the floor. I turned to my father, kneeling beside him. "Are you okay?"

He coughed, wincing as he pushed himself upright. "I'm fine, son." His voice was steady, but there was tension in his eyes. "I came upstairs to check if you were home. I saw this guy standing over you, and... well, that brings us to now."

I clenched my fists, my pulse still racing. “Who was this guy? And what the hell did he want with me?” I thought to myself.

The man in black lunged at my father again, his focus clear—take him out first, then come for me. My dad barely had time to react before the intruder slammed into him, sending him crashing to the floor. A pained gasp escaped his lips as he clutched his chest. He was hurt.

But first, I had to get this guy out of here. I grabbed him from behind just as he loomed over my father and drove a hard punch into his side. He grunted, staggering from the force.

“If you want a fight,” I growled, squaring my stance, “then let’s do this.”

He recovered fast, whipping out a knife and slashing toward me. The blade gleamed for a split second in the darkness before it struck my skin and snapped clean in half.

The look of shock on his face was priceless. I didn’t waste a second. Taking advantage of his hesitation, I threw a vicious uppercut that sent him stumbling backward, his mask flying off in the process. Not that it helped. The room was too dark, the storm outside having knocked out the power. I couldn’t make out his face, just the vague outline of his features.

I landed another punch, this one harder, then drove my shoulder into him, sending him crashing through the door and out into the raging storm. Wind howled around us, rain pelting against the ground. I stepped forward, ready to finish this.

Then I heard my father call out. I hesitated, glancing back.

The man took the opportunity. He scrambled to his feet and bolted into the darkness, retreating into the storm. I had half a mind to chase him, but my father’s labored breathing made the decision for me. I turned away from the fight and rushed to his side. The bastard had gotten away, but this wasn’t over. Not by a long shot.

"Arthur... Arthur, are you there?" My father’s voice was weak, strained, as he clutched his chest.

"I'm here, Dad. I'm right here." I gripped his hand tightly, as if holding on to him could somehow keep him here, keep him safe.

He exhaled shakily, his grip tightening for just a moment. "Arthur... you're special. You have a gift. Use it for good. For the world. Don't let this make you bitter. Don't make the same mistakes I did when I was young."

"What are you talking about?" I shook my head, trying to fight back the rising panic in my chest. "We're gonna get you to a hospital, Dad. You're gonna be fine. Better than fine. Just hold on."

His breathing hitched. His eyes fluttered. "Arthur... don't... Arthur, don't tru—" Then, his voice failed him. His hand slipped from mine.

"Dad?" My heart pounded as I gave his hand a shake. "Dad!"

Nothing.

I pressed my fingers to his neck, desperate to find a pulse.

There was none. I stared at him, willing him to wake up, to cough, to say something—anything. But he didn't move. His eyes, once so full of warmth and life, stared past me now, cold and empty.

My father had just died in my arms, and I knew exactly who was responsible.

My hands trembled as I reached up, gently closing his eyes before covering him with a cloth. I forced myself to breathe, to push through the suffocating weight pressing against my chest long enough to call the cops.

The words felt hollow as I spoke them. "Someone broke into our home... my dad... he's dead."

They arrived a little while later, their radios crackling, their voices hushed with the kind of practiced sympathy that meant nothing to me. Some of them had known my father their entire lives. They grew up here in Amnesty Bay, just like him. They looked at me with sorrow in their eyes, told me how sorry they were, that they'd do everything they could.

"Don't go after the man who did this," one of them told me, resting a hand on my shoulder.

"Let us handle it."

I nodded but said nothing. Deep down, I knew the truth, I didn't believe they could handle it. And I wasn't about to wait and find out.

## Chapter Three

After the cops left that night, I wasted no time. I sprinted toward the cliffs near the lighthouse and dove headfirst into the ocean. The storm raged above, the wind howling like a beast let loose, but the moment I hit the water, everything changed. The exhaustion, the grief, the three hours of sleep I had gotten, all of it vanished. The sea welcomed me, charged me, filled me with strength.

I cut through the water with ease, my mind focused on one thing, the man who had taken my father from me. He was running. The roads were too dangerous to drive, the nearest airport too far to reach. But I had seen a suspicious boat docked earlier that day, and now it was gone. He had to be on it.

I pushed forward, scanning the dark, churning waves. The boat couldn't have gone far—not in this storm.

Then, I spotted it. Fighting against the currents, trying to make headway through the violent sea. A lone figure moved across the deck, fastening down supplies. It was him.

The sight of him sent a surge of fury through my veins. I launched myself out of the water, landing hard on the deck. Wood creaked beneath me. Rain pounded down. The man spun, eyes wide with shock as he scrambled for a shotgun nearby.

I didn't stop him. I took a step forward, water dripping from my frame, letting the moment stretch, letting dread settle into him. "You're going to pay for what you did," I growled.

He fired. The first shot slammed into my chest, but the pellets bounced harmlessly off. Another blast, same result.

His hands shook. His breathing grew rapid. Then, in desperation, he reached for something else, something bigger.

"A rocket launcher? No way he actually has it loaded." I thought to myself. The explosion hit me dead on.

I barely had time to react before I was sent flying backward, crashing hard against the mast. Pain flared through my body, but I gritted my teeth and forced myself up. It hurt. But it wasn't enough to stop me.

The man was already reloading. Not this time. I moved. Fast. The next shot fired, but I dodged, letting the rocket sail past me—right into the mast. The wooden beam groaned, splintered, then collapsed. Right on top of him.

A deafening crack rang through the air as the mast pinned him down. He gasped, struggling beneath the weight.

Then, from the darkness, "Father!"

I turned sharply. Another figure had appeared on deck—a man older than me but young nonetheless, his eyes stretched wide with horror. I met his gaze, realization sinking in. "This is your father?" I shouted over the storm.

"Yes!" he cried. "You have to help him!"

I stared down at the man beneath the mast. The man who had pinned my father to the floor. Who had stolen my last chance to save him. I took a breath, then stepped back.

"You can ask the sea for mercy," I said coldly. Then I turned. And dove back into the ocean.



I thought that avenging my father would bring me peace. That it would fill the hollow space his death had left inside me. But it didn't. The emptiness remained. A heavy, suffocating void. My father had wanted me to do something with my gifts, but was I really honoring him by spending my days pulling drunken fishermen out of the water? It wasn't enough. It couldn't be enough.

The days passed in a restless haze. I drifted through them, unable to focus, unable to shake the nagging feeling that I was wasting something—squandering whatever potential my father had seen in me.

The townspeople were kind. They helped arrange his funeral, offered words of comfort, but none of it settled the weight in my chest. When I returned home after the service, the silence was unbearable.

The next morning, a thick envelope arrived in the mail. Inside was a copy of my father's will. The formal reading would come later, but I didn't need to wait to see what was in it.

I had inherited everything. The lighthouse. The house. Every asset my father had. There were no debts, no unfinished business. Just me. Truly alone. The realization hit like a knife to the gut.

But then, something else slipped from the envelope, another letter.

It wasn't from my father. It was addressed to him. I picked it up, brow furrowing as I read the sender's name. Dr. Stephen Shin. He must not have heard about my father's passing. My fingers hesitated over the seal, but curiosity got the better of me.

I unfolded the letter and read.

*Dear Tom,*

*I'm sorry we weren't able to come to an agreement when I last visited Amnesty Bay. I know how protective you are of Arthur, but I feel strongly that this should be his decision.*

*I truly believe that he is part Atlantean. That he could be the key to understanding the hidden world of Atlantis. I want him to have the opportunity to hone his abilities, to discover who he really is. I believe I can help him do that.*

*Please, Tom, let him make the choice.*

*Hopefully still friends,*

*Dr. Stephen Shin*

I stared at the letter, my mind racing. I remembered hearing Shin's talk about Atlantis the other day, but I'd brushed it off as nonsense. But now... now, I wasn't so sure.

If this man really thought he could help me—if he actually had answers about what I was, about why I was different—maybe this was the path I'd been searching for. Maybe this was how I could honor my father. I glanced down at the address printed at the bottom of the letter. Boston, Massachusetts. I made my decision. I packed a bag, locked the doors behind me, and set out for Boston, to find Dr. Stephen Shin, and to find out who I really was.



## Chapter Four

I arrived at the university where Dr. Stephen Shin worked, stepping into the main lobby and making my way to the front desk.

"Hi, I'm looking for Dr. Stephen Shin," I said to the receptionist.

She glanced up, her eyes flicking over me with mild curiosity before offering a polite smile.

"Of course. Dr. Shin's office is on the third floor, west wing. Anything else I can do for you?"

She batted her eyelashes slightly.

I forced a small smile in return. "No, I'm good. Thanks."

I turned and made my way toward the stairwell. As I ascended, I passed by rows of pristine, well-lit offices, their nameplates engraved with the polished authority of tenured professors. None of them belonged to Stephen Shin.

I kept walking until I reached the farthest end of the hallway, where the glow of fluorescent lights barely reached. There, attached to the smallest office, was a nameplate—except it was blank, with a crumpled piece of paper taped over it.

*Dr. Stephen Shin, Doctor of Marine Biology.*

I hesitated for a moment before knocking.

"Coming!" a voice called from behind the door, followed by the sound of multiple locks clicking open. The door creaked ajar, revealing Dr. Shin—his expression shifting from curiosity to outright shock the moment he saw me. "Arthur? Oh my, does your father know you're here?"

My stomach tightened. "That's why I came." I took a breath, steadying myself. "Shortly after you left, we were attacked in our home. The stress, the confusion... the doctors said it triggered a heart attack." My voice faltered. I looked down, swallowing hard. "My father died, Dr. Shin."

Shin's face fell, his excitement vanishing instantly.

"But before he did," I continued, "he told me I needed to do more with my life. I know you've heard the rumors about what I can do—I read the letter you sent him." I met his gaze. "Can you help me?"

Dr. Shin exhaled, his shoulders sagging. "Oh, Tom..." He shook his head, his voice filled with genuine sorrow. Then, after a moment, he stepped aside. "Come in, come in."

I entered his cramped office, maneuvering past stacks of papers, books, and scientific equipment that looked decades old. A microscope sat on the only spare chair, so I moved it to the floor before sitting down.

"Sorry for the tight quarters," Shin said, rubbing the back of his neck. "My theories about Atlantis haven't exactly made me the most popular professor on campus."

I glanced around at the cluttered mess. "Yeah, I can see that."

"But you didn't answer my question," I pressed. "Can you actually help me?"

Shin's demeanor shifted. His eyes gleamed with something between excitement and scientific curiosity. "Of course, I can, Arthur. The first thing I'll need is a sample of your blood—to understand your biology, determine exactly what we're working with."

I frowned. "Okay, but I have to warn you, my skin is tough to penetrate." To demonstrate, I picked up a needle from his desk and pressed it to my forearm. The steel bent instantly, snapping with a faint ping.

Shin's eyebrows lifted. "Yes... that could be a problem." He tapped his chin, thinking. Then his eyes lit up with an idea. "The softest part of the human body is the eye."

I tensed. "My eye?"

Shin nodded. "Yes. I'd insert the needle into the retina—just enough to reach a blood vessel."

I instinctively took a step back.

"Relax, Arthur," he said, holding up his hands. "It's a common medical procedure. Uncomfortable, yes, but not dangerous."

I clenched my jaw, still uneasy. "Fine. If you say so, Doc."

"We won't do it here, though," he added. "My private lab is better equipped."

As we stepped out of his office, he turned to me. "Do you have a car, or did you take a cab?"

"I took the bus."

"Well, jump in then," he said, unlocking his vehicle. I hesitated for a moment before climbing into the passenger seat. The drive was quiet, rain tapping lightly against the windshield as we left the city.

Eventually, we pulled up to an isolated, rundown building. The windows were dark, the structure weathered and worn. It looked completely abandoned.

Shin must have noticed my expression because he chuckled. "I know, I know—it doesn't look like much." He turned off the engine and faced me. "But I invested all my resources into the inside—because that's where the real work happens."

I wasn't sure whether that made me feel better or worse. But I was here now, and I was ready for answers.

I followed Dr. Shin inside, and immediately, I saw what he meant.

The outside of the building might have looked abandoned, but the interior was something else entirely. Machines lined the walls, blinking monitors displayed streams of data, and shelves overflowed with scientific equipment. The air smelled of metal and sterilized plastic, the hum of machinery filling the space like a constant whisper.

Shin led me to a chair in the center of the room. "This is where you'll sit for the procedure," he said. I hesitated for a moment but nodded.

"You'll be unconscious during the extraction," he continued. "It's the safest way to take the sample from your eye without causing unnecessary pain or risk."

"Got it," I said. I leaned back, and before I could process anything else, the world blinked out like a light switch.

When I came to, everything was exactly as it had been before, except now, there was a faint ache in my eye. Instinctively, I reached up to touch it, relieved to find my vision was still intact.

"You're fine," Shin assured me as he jotted down notes. "The procedure went smoothly. No damage to your retina. And, more importantly, I have the blood sample I need."

He was already running tests, feeding my blood through various machines, analyzing it against who-knows-what kind of data. While we waited for results, he had something else in mind.

"If we want to fully understand your physiology, we need to run a few more tests," he said.

"Like what?"

He motioned for me to follow him to another part of the lab, where a treadmill was set up.

"First, endurance," he said.

I ran. Longer and faster than I expected. The treadmill whirled beneath me as Shin took notes, monitoring my stamina, heart rate, and oxygen levels.

Next, strength. I was given a series of increasing weights, then moved on to more direct tests—Shin measuring my grip strength, how hard I could strike a reinforced panel, how much pressure my bones could withstand.

Then, vision. He had me stand before a vision board, running a series of tests—depth perception, night vision, reaction speed. The more I focused, the more I realized how sharp my sight truly was, how much clearer the smallest details became.

Shin studied the results, glancing at his clipboard. "You definitely have some enhanced physical abilities," he mused, "but nothing as powerful as I initially hypothesized."

I frowned. "So, what? I'm just a slightly stronger, faster guy with decent eyesight?"

Shin tapped his pen against his notes, thinking. "Not necessarily. We're missing something, some kind of trigger that brings your full potential to the surface."

That's when it hit me. "Is there a shower here?" I asked. "I haven't been in the water since I left Maine."

Shin blinked, then his face lit up. "Of course! Why didn't I realize it before? Atlantis is an underwater civilization—your abilities must be tied to your hydration levels!"

He scrawled something quickly onto his clipboard, muttering under his breath. "Yes, that makes perfect sense. Your body is adapted to an aquatic environment. Dehydration limits your potential." Then he looked back up. "Yes—down the hall, to the right. And don't dry off when you come back. I want to test you at your peak."

I nodded and made my way down the hall.

Turning on the shower, I stepped in, clothes and all.

The second the water hit my skin, I felt it, a rush of energy, clarity, power. It was like breathing fresh air after being trapped in a smoke-filled room. The exhaustion, the stiffness, the dull ache in my muscles, it all vanished in an instant. I exhaled, letting the water soak into me, revitalizing every inch of my body.

Then, dripping wet, I walked back to Dr. Shin.

"Ah, yes—much better. Let's run the tests again," Dr. Shin said, excitement brimming in his voice.

We repeated every test, and this time, my results were vastly improved. My strength, endurance, and speed had skyrocketed.

"Astounding," Shin muttered, scribbling notes furiously. "When your only exposure to water is ambient humidity, your abilities are only slightly enhanced—comparable to peak human condition, at best. But after full submersion, when your body fully absorbs water, your physical capabilities are off the charts in terms of strength, stamina, and endurance."

A sudden beep from one of the machines interrupted him. He turned to the monitor, eyes narrowing.

"Your blood test is done, Arthur."

I stepped closer. "What does it say, Doctor?"

Shin scanned the data, his brow furrowing in concentration. "Well... it's fascinating. Your DNA is not fully human. The system automatically flagged the unknown sequences as meta-human, a relatively new classification in the scientific world, but I believe what it's detecting as 'meta-human' is actually something else entirely."

"Atlantean," I murmured.

Shin nodded. "Possibly. Unfortunately, I don't have an Atlantean sample to compare it to, so I can't prove it definitively. But what I can say for certain is that your mother was not Homo sapiens."

I exhaled, letting that sink in. "So... my mother wasn't human. Possibly Atlantean. She met my dad, they had me, and that's why I have these abilities?"

"Correct," he confirmed.

Before I could process the revelation any further, Shin's phone buzzed. He checked the screen, then glanced at me. "Excuse me, I have to take this. Why don't you continue honing your abilities? You're welcome to use the pool downstairs."

He stepped away, already answering the call.

I nodded and headed downstairs to check out the so-called pool. But when I got there, I stopped short. It wasn't a pool. It was a massive aquarium—glass-walled and filled with live fish.

That made sense, given that Dr. Shin was a marine biologist. But it was weird that he'd call it a pool, as if he expected me to treat it like one. The fish didn't bother me. They never had. Even as a kid, I could swim among sea life without fear.

I smiled faintly at the memory of the time I had worried my father sick—when a great white shark carried me home on its back. He had panicked, rushing out onto the dock, ready to fight the thing off. But the shark had only delivered me safely, letting me hop off before swimming away. That was the night my father made me promise to never do something like that again.

So, I just got better at hiding it.

Thinking about him pulled at the grief still lodged deep in my chest. But I pushed it aside. The only thing I could do now was move forward. I dove into the aquarium, cutting through the water effortlessly. I swam lap after lap, feeling my energy surge with every movement.

After a while, I noticed Shin standing near the glass, watching me. He must have finished his call. I propelled myself up and leaped from the water, landing beside him in a fluid motion.

His jaw nearly hit the floor. "You just jumped out of a 20-foot glass aquarium," he said, stunned.

I smirked. "Oh, so now we're calling it an aquarium and not a pool?"

Shin chuckled, rubbing the back of his neck. "Fair point. But 'Go jump in the aquarium' just sounded... weird."

"Makes sense," I shrugged. "But for me, any water works just fine."

He shook his head in amazement. "Arthur, I was monitoring your laps while you were down there. Do you always move that fast in the water? Because it vastly outpaces your speed on land."

I wiped some water from my face. "Actually, I was taking it slow. It's hard to hit full speed in a confined space like this."

Shin's eyes widened. "Slow?"

"Yeah," I said. "If I had room, I could go a lot faster."

"Absolutely amazing," Dr. Shin muttered, shaking his head in disbelief. "But, Arthur, there's something else I want to bring up, but I want to approach it carefully."

I raised an eyebrow. "Okay... what is it, Doc?"

He hesitated for a moment before finally asking, "Do you want to find your mother?"

The question hit me like a wave crashing against the rocks.

"What?" My pulse quickened. "We can do that?"

Shin nodded. "Based on what you've told me... I have reason to believe your mother may not have abandoned you after all."

I stared at him, barely breathing. Something inside my chest—something hollow and aching—began to stir, filling with warmth. The possibility that I wasn't alone.

Shin continued, watching my reaction carefully. "I believe she was taken back to Atlantis against her will. If she never came back, it may not have been because she didn't want to—but because she couldn't."

I swallowed hard, gripping the edge of a nearby table. "So... we need to find an ancient lost city that people have been searching for forever, and then, if we somehow pull that off, we have to break in and find her?"

Shin gave me a sheepish smile. "Well, I won't be doing the finding."

I blinked. "Wait, what?"

"My body wouldn't survive beyond a certain depth in the ocean, and I don't have access to technology that could take me far enough. You, on the other hand, do. I can help guide you, point you in the right direction, but the actual journey?" He gave a small shrug. "That's all on you."

I exhaled, processing. Then, after a moment, I straightened. "Okay. Let's do it. Where do I need to go?"



Shin's face lit up with excitement. "One of the ancient texts I've studied references the Pillars of Hercules. Most scholars believe this refers to the Strait of Gibraltar, but I have another theory. I believe it actually refers to the mountains on either side of the Gulf of Laconia in Greece. If I'm right, that location could hold records of Atlantis—written accounts from those who may have fled during its fall."

I frowned. "Wait, you don't think Atlantis is in the Gulf of Laconia?"

Shin shook his head. "No. But I do think there's a trail there. Something that could tell us more."

"Sounds like something you could research, Doc," I pointed out.

"It would be," Shin admitted, "but there's one problem—those records are likely underwater. Deep underwater. I can't get to them. But you?" He gestured toward me. "You can."

I folded my arms. "And let me guess—you want me to use my ability to 'talk to fish' to help, right?"

Shin winced slightly. "Well... yes, but—"

"I don't talk to fish," I corrected him. "I ask them to do things, and they do it. I can't exactly hold a conversation with them."

"My apologies," he said quickly. "But that ability will still be crucial. You can command the fish to guide you to underwater caves that have pockets of air—those are prime locations for ancient relics. If any records exist, that's where they'd be."

I thought about it for a second. Then I nodded. "Alright," I said. "Looks like I'm going to Greece."

The idea of finding Atlantis was incredible—but the thought of seeing my mother again? That overpowered everything. For the first time in a long time, something felt right. I wasn't just drifting anymore. I had a purpose.

## Chapter Five

After a 15-hour flight and a few layovers, I landed at the Kythira International Airport. There would be a boat that would go the mainland of Greece for those that needed it, but I chose to start my journey here. Dr. Shin told me that I would be looking for anything that could lead me to information about Atlantis. I took a 15-minute car ride to the beach of Parali Diakofti where I was going to start my search for Atlantis.

I stepped out of the taxi, the scent of salt and seaweed filling my nostrils as I made my way toward the beach. The waves rolled in, gentle at first, but then a shadow emerged from beneath them, a figure rising from the ocean like a specter from the deep.

He was clad in a sleek, black diving suit, reinforced with armor plating along his legs and shoulders. Thick tubes ran from his breastplate to a bulky apparatus on his back. But it was his helmet that sent a chill down my spine—silver, oval-shaped, with two large, glowing red eyes that burned like embers in the night.

Those eyes locked onto me. The red glow darkened, intensifying like molten steel in a forge. Then, without warning, twin beams of searing energy erupted from them.

I barely had time to brace before they struck me square in the chest. The force sent me hurtling backward, crashing through the glass window of Café Minas. The impact scattered tables and startled diners, who gasped and shrieked as I tumbled across the floor, skidding to a stop near an overturned chair.

"Sorry," I muttered, shaking off the ringing in my ears as I staggered to my feet. My chest burned—not just from the impact, but from something far more unsettling. I glanced down. My skin was charred. That was new. Stepping out of the wreckage, I barely had time to react before my attacker lunged. A flash of silver in his hand—then searing pain as his blade sliced into my side. I staggered, pressing a hand against the wound. Blood. My blood. He'd actually cut me.

"You're going to pay for what you did to my father," he growled, his voice distorted by his helmet's modulator.

His father? My mind raced. Did I know this guy? "Who the hell are you?" I gritted through the pain, tightening my stance.

"You don't know?" His voice rose in fury. Then he charged again, blade flashing.

The fight was brutal. He was fast, relentless, switching seamlessly between slashing with his blade and firing off his eye beams. I dodged the worst of his swings, twisting and blocking where I could, but he was good—damn good. Each time his eyes flared with energy, I knew I had seconds before another blast. The moment I sidestepped one attack, another came from a different angle.

Then, without warning, he activated a jetpack. Flames roared from his back, and he shot into the air, hovering above me. Unfair. Totally unfair.

From above, he unleashed a volley of energy blasts, forcing me to dive and roll to avoid them. The sand exploded around me with each impact. I had no way to reach him up there, no leverage, no weapons, nothing.

My eyes darted around, searching for something—anything—I could use. Then an idea struck. Scooping up a handful of sand, I flung it high, aiming for his visor. The grains scattered into his lenses, and I sprinted toward a nearby alleyway before he could recover.

The plan was simple: get to higher ground, then take him down into my territory—the ocean.

I scaled the side of a low building, muscles straining, and waited. The moment he hovered into range, scanning for me, I launched myself at him.

The tackle was perfect. We tumbled through the air, crashing into the surf. Water exploded around us as we hit the shallows, and I tightened my grip around his torso, dragging him down into the sand beneath the waves.

He fired another wild blast, but I was ready for it this time. Twisting my body, I let the force of the shot drive him deeper into the seabed. Before he could react, I slammed my fist into his helmet, cracking the visor.

"Who are you?" I growled, grabbing the sides of his helmet. His fingers clawed at my arms, his blade swinging wildly, but I twisted hard, ripping the helmet free.

For a second, I just stared. A face I thought I'd never see again.

"You..." My breath caught in my throat. "You're the guy from the boat. Your father killed my dad. Is this some kind of retribution?"

His eyes, now unshielded, burned with pure, undiluted hatred. Blood dripped from his mouth as he forced himself upright, his breath ragged but his fury unshaken.

"You took everything from me," he snarled. "Now, I'll take everything from you." His voice trembled, but not with weakness—with rage.

Then, his glare sharpened. "You killed my father."

The accusation hit like a tidal wave. "What?" I took a step back. "No—your dad only had the mast fall on him. That shouldn't have killed him, maybe crippled him, stopped him from hurting anyone."

Manta's expression twisted with something between fury and grief. "The mast did cripple him. But the damage you caused—the storm, the sinking ship—left us stranded. Left us to die. I tried to save him. I tried to carry him. But he wouldn't let me."

His voice cracked. "My father... he knew I wouldn't abandon him. So, he made the choice for me." His fingers curled into fists. "He pulled the knife from his belt and stabbed himself in the chest."

A heavy silence filled the air. "I had no choice but to let him sink with the wreckage while I swam for the surface," he finished, spitting blood onto the ground.

A slow, cold realization settled over me. "It sounds like he made his choice," I said, my voice quieter now trying to defend my rash actions.

Manta's whole body tensed. "He made his choice?" His voice rose, shaking with rage. "You're saying my crippled father committed suicide? That it was his decision? No." His teeth clenched. "No! He just finished the job you were too weak to complete!"

His eyes flashed with venom. "'Ask the sea for mercy'—that's what you said."

The words hit me like a fist.

Manta's voice turned bitter. "Like you didn't just leave my father with a death sentence."

Then he lunged but I moved faster, dodging the attack, gripping his wrist as I twisted sharply. The snap of metal rang out as I broke the blade from his gauntlet and shoved him back down onto the ground.

"You want to talk about weak?" I growled. "I fought a skilled man in my home. And when I faced him again on the boat, all he had to offer was a shotgun and a damn rocket launcher."

Manta coughed, but even as he lay sprawled on the ground, a dark smile crept onto his face.

"You still don't understand, do you, Arthur Curry?" he said, his voice quieter now, but more dangerous than ever.

His next words sent ice through my veins.

"My father didn't break into your house." He lifted his head, his grin widening despite the blood trickling down his chin. "It was me."

## Black Manta

There were three things that mattered to me most in life: treasure, revenge, and my father.

My father raised me alone after my mother disappeared. He taught me how to be tough, how to survive, how to trust no one. He drilled into me the importance of keeping score, who owed you what, and who needed to pay.

He also taught me how to hate.

He was a pirate in the Manta Crew, a group of ex-Navy men who turned their backs on their country after the war. They felt betrayed, discarded by the people they had once served. So, they took what they wanted. They made their own way.

My father believed in one thing—if you couldn't take care of yourself, you didn't deserve to survive, and I listened to every word.

As a child, I became obsessed with the stories of Atlantis. My father spoke of untold riches, hidden beneath the waves. He wasn't interested in fairy tales; he saw Atlantis as the ultimate prize. And so, as I grew older, I dedicated my life to finding its lost treasures.

I found pieces—trinkets, steel weapons not made by human hands, ancient coins etched with strange symbols. But it wasn't enough.

That's what led me to my benefactor.

He was a scientist researching Atlantis, and he needed things he couldn't get through legal channels. That's where I came in. I was a mercenary, treasure hunter for hire. If someone needed something stolen, smuggled, or recovered from the depths of the sea, I was the one they called.

One day, I got a job. Simple. Retrieve a vial of blood. From a kid. 21 years old, barely an adult. It was supposed to be easy.

The job was in Amnesty Bay, and as luck would have it, my father was fishing there that weekend. It was the perfect setup. I called him, told him about the job, and he agreed to let me use his boat as my base of operations.

Everything was planned. That night, I left the boat and slipped into town. I moved silently, finding my way to the house, picking the lock with practiced ease. No alarms. No cameras. Easy.

I crept up the stairs, checking the rooms. First door, the father. Asleep. Second door, the target. The son.

I eased the door open and stepped inside, syringe in hand. I moved quickly, pressing the needle against his arm. Snap, the needle broke. My blood ran cold. That wasn't normal.

"Arthur?" A voice called from the hallway.

The father. Damn it. My cover was blown. I needed to retreat. Now.

Before I could move, the door swung open, and the father stood in the doorway, staring me down. I tackled him, taking him to the ground. He struggled beneath me, but then I heard behind me.

"Get off him!"

I barely had time to register the voice before I was thrown off.

The son, Arthur, was awake.

By the time I got back up, the father had positioned himself between me and the exit. I needed to get out. I shoved him aside. He gasped, his hand clutching his chest, but I didn't have time to stop. Arthur moved into my path, blocking my escape.

I pulled out my knife. I didn't need to kill him—just cut him, get the blood I needed, and get out. I drove the blade forward and then metal met flesh and bent.

I froze. What the hell? A syringe breaking, I could write off as a freak occurrence. But an entire knife?

Arthur's eyes widened in shock but not as much as mine, and in that brief moment of hesitation, he struck. His uppercut connected, sending my head snapping back. My mask flew off, clattering to the floor. Panic surged through me.

The room was dark though and that was my only saving grace. He couldn't see my face clearly. I stumbled back. He didn't stop. He hit me again—hard—then drove his shoulder into me, sending me crashing through the door and out into the rain. I hit the ground, dazed, looking up at him as he stood over me.

Then, "Arthur!"

The father's voice called out again. Arthur hesitated. Just for a second. Then he turned and ran back inside.

With my cover blown and the job botched, I fled back to my father's boat, panting as I climbed aboard. "Set sail. Now," I ordered, my voice tight with frustration. I didn't wait for him to question me; I disappeared below deck to dress my wounds.

By the time I finished, exhaustion overtook me, and I drifted into a restless sleep.

I woke to the sound of an explosion.

The deck shook beneath my feet. I shot upright, heart pounding, and scrambled up the stairs just in time to see the mast crashing down—right onto my father.

"Father!" I shouted, but before I could reach him, my eyes landed on someone standing on the deck.

Arthur Curry. Rain poured down, lightning flashing behind him. He stared at me for a long moment before speaking.

"Ask the sea for mercy." Then, he was gone. He just left us there stranded with a sinking ship.

I turned back to my father, shoving debris aside. "We have to get you out of here!" I grabbed at the mast, desperate to lift it.

My father coughed, his face twisted in pain, but his voice was sharp. "No. What's the first thing I taught you?!"



I froze. My body acted on instinct. My lips moved before my mind even processed the words. "Rely on no one."

A thin, pained smile crossed his face. "Good. I know you've always been soft on me—but that can't be so now." The ship groaned, tilting as water rushed onto the deck. It was going under.

"I can carry you!" I shouted over the storm.

He slapped me across the face. "Boy, you're gonna be lucky if you can get yourself to shore, considering how far out we are." He looked me dead in the eyes, his voice calm despite the chaos. "I won't be your dead weight."

I shook my head. "No!"

He exhaled, his strength fading. "This is goodbye, son. You didn't turn out useless after all."

Then—before I could stop him—he pulled a knife from his belt and drove it into his chest. He let go. And the sea swallowed him whole.

"NO!" I screamed at the heavens, at the ocean, at Arthur Curry, at the entire world. But no one answered.

I stayed afloat only because of the burning rage in my heart. Stroke after stroke, I powered through the endless waves, my body numb with exhaustion but unwilling to stop. I swam through the night, my mind focused on only one thing. Revenge.

After an arduous journey, I made it back to my base of operations, a hidden sanctuary where I had stashed all my treasures, weapons, and research. Every piece of gold, every artifact I had claimed over the years meant nothing compared to the revenge burning inside me.

I reached for the phone and dialed. The moment my benefactor answered, I didn't waste time. "Your time is up," I said, my voice cold and unforgiving. "You never told me the target was enhanced."

There was a pause. Then, his nervous, trembling voice crackled through the receiver. "I... I believed that mentioning he was part Atlantean would be warning enough," he stammered.

I clenched my jaw, my grip tightening around the phone. "That belief cost me my father's life," I growled. "Because you failed to give me all the details. And now? I'm giving you an option."

The line went dead silent. I let the weight of my words settle in before continuing. "Either you send Arthur Curry to me—or I come directly to you."

There was a sharp intake of breath on the other end. "B... But Arthur is a... a treasure trove of information!"

"I don't care," I said, cutting off his pathetic plea.

I leaned forward, my voice lowering into something deadly. "I'll be watching at Kythira International Airport. Bring Arthur to Café Minas in the next 48 hours..." I paused, then delivered the final blow.

"Or I come for you." Then, I hung up. It was good to end on a threat. Let him stew in his fear.



I had a lot to do before I faced Arthur again.

I needed to be stronger.

I needed to be unstoppable.

My father had always spoken of his old Manta Crew, of the brotherhood they shared, of the power they once wielded. To honor him and to destroy the man who took him from me, I would become something greater.

I would become Black Manta.

I had read about a high-powered energy beam—one that could burn even underwater, strong enough to cut through solid steel. After a little hacking, I secured the schematics and erased all traces of the original design.

I forged my helmet, silver and gleaming, with a heads-up display to track my target. The eye receptors would house the energy weapon, giving me the power to burn through anything in my path.

Next came the blades.

No ordinary weapon could cut Arthur's skin. I had seen it firsthand—the way my knife had bent against him, the way bullets had bounced off like he was untouchable.

But I had something special. I sifted through my collection—relics stolen from the deep, treasures forgotten by the world. Then I found it.

Atlantean steel.

A metal beyond modern science, forged by hands that had long since vanished from history. The only thing that might pierce Arthur's flesh. I reforged it into a retractable wrist blade, sleek, deadly, and impossible to disarm.

The final piece of my arsenal was mobility.

Arthur was fast in the water, but I wouldn't let that be a weakness. I integrated a jetpack into my armor, allowing me to take the fight to the skies.

On land, I would rain fire from above. In the water, I would become his equal.

When I was done, I stood before the mirror, clad in black armor, my helmet gleaming under the dim light.

There was only Black Manta now. And I was ready to end Arthur Curry.

I chartered a private flight to Kythira International Airport, setting up my position near Café Minas.

I wanted to hurt them both, the benefactor for his lies, and Arthur for what he had done to me. But when the car pulled up outside the café, my plans shifted. Only Arthur stepped out.

The benefactor had tricked him. He had sent him alone, probably hoping Arthur would kill me before I got to him. It didn't matter. Arthur was the one I wanted most.

I left to suit up. I would strike from the water—because that's where he left me to die. And now? It was his turn.

## Arthur Curry

"What do you mean?" I shouted, lunging forward, pressing the broken blade against his throat.

Manta didn't flinch. "The storm was so bad that night," he said, his voice eerily calm. "You mistook my father for me on the boat. In your rage, you attacked him—because we have similar physiques."

The words hit me like a wave crashing against a cliff. I thought about the path that my anger had taken me down and the pain it had caused.

My grip on the blade faltered. "You killed my father..." I murmured. "But I killed yours. Just... an innocent man caught in my revenge."

Manta let out a bitter laugh, blood dripping from his mouth. "Oh, he wasn't innocent. But when it came to the break-in?" He met my gaze. "That was all me. He had nothing to do with it."

The weight of it all crushed down on me.

I pressed the blade against his throat again, this time with more purpose. "Then who hired you, Manta? Because I have a hard time believing you did this on your own."

He let out a slow exhale. "I don't care that you have a knife," he said, his voice steady. "But I'll tell you—because I want him to get what's coming to him. Honestly, he played both of us like chess pieces."

I tightened my grip. "Give me the name, Manta."

Manta smirked. "Shin."

My heart stopped.

"Dr. Stephen Shin."

I staggered back, the knife nearly slipping from my hands. "No." I shook my head, the shock ripping through me. "You're lying."

Manta's eyes burned with fury. "No, Arthur. After your father refused to give him your blood, Shin called me." He took a ragged breath. "I've done a lot of jobs for him. But this one? This was the first time I dealt with someone like you. And he didn't tell me what you were. He set me up."

I barely heard him. My mind was spinning.

Shin? My friend? The man who helped me understand who I was? The man I trusted?

"He lied to me," I whispered. "This whole time, he pretended to be my friend... when he was just using me."

I turned to Manta again. "I'm sorry," I said, my voice hoarse. "I never meant for it to go this far. I let my anger blind me. We should both be angry with Shin."

Manta's breathing was shallow, but his glare was sharp as ever.

"I'm going to talk to Shin," I continued. "You can do what you want, but... I hope you can forgive me."

Manta's eyes darkened. "Forgive you?" He spat in my face. "I will never forgive you."

I wiped my face and took a step back.

"I'm sorry you feel that way," I said. "But don't come after me again. This feud is over." I turned and walked away, the weight of my actions pressing down on me like the ocean itself.

Behind me, Manta let out a raw, guttural scream. "It will never be over!" His voice cracked with hatred, rage, and something deeper, pain. "You hear me?! NEVER!"

I kept walking and I didn't look back.



I left Greece immediately, heading straight for Boston. The moment I landed, I grabbed a cab and gave the driver Dr. Shin's address. My mind was set.

The car barely stopped before I stepped out, marching straight to his private office. I didn't knock. I ripped the door off its hinges and strode inside.

Dr. Shin jumped from his seat, eyes wide with shock. "Arthur! I—I didn't know you were back."

I stepped forward, voice low and steady. "Tell me it's not true."

His face paled. "Tell you what's not true?"

"Tell me you're not responsible for my dad's death."

Shin swallowed, his hands trembling as he took a step back. "I didn't kill him, Arthur."

I clenched my fists. "That's not what Black Manta said."

Shin flinched.

"The man you hired. The one you sent to steal my blood."

His breath hitched. "You... talked to him."

"Oh, yeah," I said, stepping closer. "And he had plenty to say." I let the words sink in, let him feel the weight of what I had learned.

"He told me everything. How you were supposed to bring me to him—and how he was going to kill us both. But things didn't go according to plan, did they?"

Shin opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out.

"So, instead, he spilled his guts about you. And I'm guessing he was hoping I'd be so angry I'd kill you like I accidentally killed his father."

Shin's lips quivered. "Are you... are you going to kill me, Arthur?"

I exhaled slowly. "No."

Shin's shoulders sagged, relief washing over him.

"I had a lot of time to think on the plane," I continued. "Before my father died, he told me I could use my abilities for something better. But so far? All I've done since his death is act in anger and fear." I met his eyes, my resolve clear. "It's time to do something different."

Shin let out a shaky laugh. "Oh, my... I was so concerned. I thought I was in danger."

I didn't respond. Instead, I turned and smashed his computer.

Shin's relief vanished, his jaw dropping in horror. "What are you doing?!"

I grabbed his server tower and hurled it into the ground, wires sparking as metal shattered.

"You don't get to keep my blood." Shin lunged, trying to get between me and his machines, but I shoved him aside. He stumbled, catching himself against the desk.

I ripped open the storage unit that housed my blood samples—then crushed them in my hands. The vials shattered. Red dripped between my fingers before vanishing into the concrete floor.

Then I moved to the rest of his equipment—the monitors that tracked my stamina, my heartrate, my every biological response.

One by one, I destroyed them all. By the time I was finished, the entire warehouse looked as decrepit as its rotting exterior.

Dr. Shin fell to his knees, staring at the wreckage around him. "This was my life's work," he whispered, voice hollow. "You destroyed it all."

I looked down at him. "No," I said. "You told me yourself—the only data you had here was the data you gathered on me."

Shin's eyes flickered, and he gave a hollow nod. "That's... that's true. But you don't understand, Arthur. The research I had on you? It was the key. Without it, the rest of my work is just... just ramblings."

I turned to leave. "I'm sorry, Dr. Shin. But no one is going to have information on me that I don't want them to have."

Shin lifted his head as I walked toward the exit. "Where are you going?" he called after me. "What are you going to do now?"

I paused, standing in the doorway. "I don't know, Doctor." I glanced over my shoulder. "But it's going to be something that makes my father proud."

Then, I walked out. I had to go clear my head, so I found a park bench on the Boston pier where I could be near the water and let it clear my head. All the events of the past few days washing over me. One thought persisted.

What was I going to do now?



# Epilogue

I sat there, staring out at the restless ocean, lost in thought. Then, a shadow moved over me.

A man in strange garb approached, his stance rigid, his presence deliberate. "Arthur. Arthur Curry?"

I turned to him, wary. "Yeah. Who's asking?"

The man inclined his head slightly, his voice calm but firm. "My name is Vulko, your majesty."

I frowned. "Your majesty? I think you've got the wrong guy." I stood up, already walking away.

"Your mother, Atlanna, sent me to find you." He said as I walked away.

I stopped in my tracks.

My heart pounded as I turned back to face him. "You knew my mother?" My voice was quieter now. "She's... she's still alive?"

Vulko's expression darkened. "I had the honor of knowing your mother," he said. "But she has passed."

The words hit me like a wave. I barely registered my own voice. "My mother is dead?"

Vulko nodded solemnly. "Yes. I was informed by the High Council that she passed away in her chambers. No foul play—natural causes. She was alone when it happened."

I exhaled sharply, trying to process it.

I had spent my whole life wondering about her. Whether she had abandoned me. Whether she had ever loved me at all. Now, I would never get to ask. Never get to know.

A silence stretched between us before I finally asked, "Then... why are you here? If she's gone?"

Vulko straightened, his voice clear, unwavering. "I was sent to bring you to meet your mother. But now... my mission has changed." He met my gaze. "Arthur... I am here to bring you to claim your birthright. To be crowned the new king of Atlantis."

I stared at him. "King?" I let out a breathless laugh. "King of Atlantis? I think you're making a mistake. I've never been the ruling type."

Vulko took a step closer. "Arthur, tension between the surface and Atlantis has never been higher. Even though it is impossible, there are rumors that Queen Atlanna was killed by a surface-dweller. These whispers are spreading dangerously fast."

I frowned. "You're saying people think a human killed my mother?"

"Yes," Vulko said. "And that belief could start a war."

I swallowed hard.

"It is critical that you come to Atlantis," Vulko continued. "As a son of both worlds, you have the chance to bridge the gap between them. There is no greater calling than uniting two peoples who have long lived in fear of one another."

His words sank in, colliding with my father's last words to me. "Do something better with your life, Arthur."

I had spent weeks acting on anger. Fear.

But this? This was a chance. A chance to do something that mattered. A chance to be more.

I took a breath and squared my shoulders. "Alright," I said. "I'll go with you, Vulko. I want to help. Tell me how."

Vulko's face softened. "I will take you to Atlantis. There, we will formally submit your claim as the eldest son of Queen Atlanna. Your brother, Orm, will step down as regent, and you will take the throne."

I blinked. "Brother?"

"Yes," Vulko said. "Your mother had a son after you, from her arranged marriage. Prince Orm."

I ran a hand through my hair, exhaling. "So... I lost my father. I lost my mother. But now, I have a half-brother I never knew about." I nodded slowly. "Alright. That's a surprise... but one I can handle."

Vulko gave a small smile. "Then let's go." Without another word, he turned and leapt from the dock into the dark waters of the Atlantic.

I watched as he disappeared beneath the waves—moving like a dart, cutting through the water with inhuman speed. It was my first glimpse of what it meant to be Atlantean.

I took a deep breath.

Then, without hesitation, I dove after him. The ocean welcomed me like an old friend and for the first time in my life, I wasn't running from something. I was swimming towards it.

Toward my destiny.

Toward Atlantis.