

From a very young age, Emily Robinson has always loved whales.

She hesitated, staring at the scuba mask in her hands.

Large, majestic ocean creatures, full of mystery and wonder, especially to a ten-year-old little girl. Whereas some kids had obsessions with dinosaurs, or different kinds of bugs, Emily's had been whales.

She'd finally gotten her first taste of her dream. Finally, after years and decades, she could finally realize her dream, and work with the creatures she'd always admired.

Blue whales, sperm whales, whale sharks... if it was a member of the *Balaena* family (Or any sea creature like them), then she had a borderline unhealthy obsession with it. Always had, always would.

Deep breath. Scuba mask on, secure. Tank in place. Everything on her mental checklist passed the mark, she stared at the wintry water in front of her, grasping her pendant in her hand.

Lo and behold, that obsession had never wavered. As she grew up, as her life changed in so many different ways, the obsession remained. A violent car crash had ripped apart her family at the age of ten, but that hadn't touched her obsession. Her freshman year of high school, as she was forced to follow her family on a cross-country move and leave behind everything she'd ever known, but the obsession remained. Throughout change, the only constant was her innate love for a creature she'd never met, and that was enough to get her through the darkest of times.

And it only intensified on her eighteenth birthday.

Emily clutched the pendant around her neck even tighter, getting into position on the edge of the boat. A small onyx charm hung from it, clearly in the shape of an Orca. She thought back to when her mother had given it to her, the night of her 18th.

Small wooden box. Surprise gift, after she'd opened everything else.

*'What's this one?'*

Her mother had smiled.

*'Just open it!'*

Pure elation at seeing the pendant. She'd immediately put it on, feeling the smooth stone under her fingers.

*'Oh wow! It's beautiful! Where'd you get it?'*

Family heirloom. Passed down for generations, as long as the family could remember.

*'And now it's your turn to inherit it! Oddly fitting, as it's a whale, too.'*

*'Orca, mom. It's an Orca.'*

Her mother had smiled again.

*'Of course. Another thing, my mother, your grandmother, when she gave that to me, told me of the story that goes along with it. Supposedly, our family comes from the sea, and that pendant will call us back whenever it's time. I'm sure it's just old myths and whatnot, but a little bit of family history for you!'*

The pendant will call back whenever it is time.

Emily leaned back, allowing gravity to take over as she slipped beneath the waves, taking the plunge.

The water was cold. Frigid. Her many years of college hadn't prepared her for this, only told her different genetic classes of marine life and proper documentation procedures for tracking migratory patterns. It didn't take long for her to get used to the water, the skin tight wetsuit providing an insulating layer of air between Emily and the chill. Her entire world was nothing but bubbles for a moment, dancing around her goggles and obscuring her vision. She followed them up, back up to the surface, breaking through to the wintry Maine air.

She didn't notice as the pendant around her neck began to give off a soft blue glow.

As she dived below the surface again, she felt strong vibrations in her chest. Unable to hear the sound with them, she had to surface again, which confirmed her thought.

A pod of Orcas was nearby.

Her pendant kept glowing.

As Emily dived below the surface again, a sudden warmth seeped through the wetsuit, right underneath her pendant. It took her a moment to realize, and she finally stopped, letting herself bob back up to the surface as she took notice of the glowing pendant around her neck, feeling the warmth emanating from it, seeping deeper and deeper into her chest.

*'What- what's going on? What's happening?'*

The pod called again, much closer than they had been before. The pendant glowed in response, and she gasped, grabbing at it.

Several things happened at once.

One, she realized the light was... pulsing. Soft, rhythmic beats, mirroring her heart. OR, at least until the pod would call again, then it would glow even stronger, accelerating the changes.

Two, her skinsuit was much more... rubbery than it had been before. Something in the back of her mind whispered that it was fusing with her, becoming her new skin...

And three, she suddenly became aware of the warmth spreading into her hand, down her arm... joining the warmth in her chest, which felt oddly swollen and bloated.

Sudden realization hit her, and she quickly let go of her pendant. But she was still too slow; a slight webbing was starting to form between the fingers on her right hand, where she'd held the pendant.

*The pendant was changing her.*

The pendant was changing her, slowly, and she had a fair guess as to what she was becoming. She should have been panicking, should have been wildly trying to make her way back to the boat and calling back to the others for help-

But she only felt calm. As the nearby pod continued their song, causing the pendant to continue to pulse and glow in response, she managed to wiggle the scuba mask off her face with her left hand, seeing as the mass of webbing binding her right to itself rendered it almost useless. As a hand, that is.

Emily dived below the surface again, letting her growing bulk do the heavy lifting of the descent. The warmth permeated her entire chest, her stomach, and started to creep its way into her neck and legs, causing them to start to swell with muscle and blubber. Her legs started to grow increasingly harder to move. A simple glance down revealed why; not only were they growing heavier, swelling out with the same blubber insulating her, but her wetsuit was snaring them together as it melded with her skin. She paused, watching as her feet gradually rotated, smoothing out and merging with her flippers to become the rear fluke of an Orca. And all the while, her brand-new tail continued to swell and bloat, smoothing out into one singular appendage that swelled directly into her stomach and chest, leaving no distinction of where one ended and another began.

All the while, Emily felt absolutely no panic. Just pure, even calm.

*'Alright, so this is happening- this is happening! You'd always daydreamed about something like this, no? Oohkay, it's actually happening!'*

She rolled over in the water, feeling a small protrusion from her back continue to take shape, jutting out and becoming more and more pronounced. Her entire right arm had finished transforming, her left fusing with itself and flattening into the pectoral fin of an adult Orca. Mostly cartilage, perfect for propelling her through the water, along with her newfound tail, which was still packing on mass, along with the rest of her.

The entire time, the pendant remained around her neck, glowing continuously now. Even as her entire body swelled and grew, her neck distending and becoming indistinguishable from her torso, the pendant only grew with it, the band somehow adding more length to itself to avoid choking her. She could feel it clearly now, with her entire wetsuit having fused with her to become rubbery, changing colors to the clear indistinguishable black and white of the species she was becoming.

Emily broke the surface again. The nearby pod was close, *extremely* close. Their clicks and trills stirred something deep in her mind, in the dark parts warmed by the gentle glow of her pendant.

She could *understand* them.

*We see you.*

*We know you.*

*We are your family.*

*We are here for you.*

*Come home, Emily. Come home.*

Sudden emotion took over her, and an inexplicable instinct caused her to cry out. Not human yelling, but as her face started to pull outwards into an Orca's head, pulling her eyes apart and making her vision distort, she cried out in trills of her own, answering the call of her newfound brethren.

*I am here.*

*I hear you.*

*I am coming.*

She started swimming, as dextrous and as skillful as if she'd been swimming like this her entire life. She didn't care as her nose pulled back into her face, leaving only a hole that travelled up the length of her head. She didn't care as her skin finished changing color, identifying her as the animal she so proudly was. She didn't care.

The pendant had called her home, and she intended to answer it.

There!

As her transformation finished, her body finishing its growth into a massive adult killer whale, the other Orcas in the pod met her in the middle, greeting her as one of their own.

She didn't notice as one of them quietly snipped away the pendant, and how it slowly drifted down into the depths, no longer glowing.

Emily Robinson was no more. She had been called back to the sea, and as she swam away with her brand new family, the pendant sank into the frigid waters, as lifeless and dull as when it had been given to her.

It had called her back, and she had listened.