





NARRATOR

Summer's at its hottest. When we last talked, a man fell afoul in the winter snow, and his fate was sealed by the choices you helped him make. And while we took our little Spring Break, many of you wondered what would happen after our protagonist met his fate. And what story would we tell when we returned?

Now, at the end of July, we bring you a new interactive story. One that's sure to provide you with some surprises and tough calls to make. This one features a protagonist who was first featured in 2020's Patreon stories. You can start this story today whether you're an old fan or a new listener.

Witchever Path Presents Message in a Bottle Part One: Singing Scales.

[sound of the sea]

The water is quiet today before dawn. The working men are already out to sea by now, and those who anchor their little boats near Pickering Wharf won't see me as I make my way out to my favorite rocks after I get into the water. It's getting across the beach and back without being stopped by someone I'm afraid of.

The stony path from the apartment is cool on my feet. No one in my neighborhood seems to be awake. The morning, for the moment, is mine. The cloth mask I wear over my mouth is warm and moist from my breath. My scars itch underneath the cotton, but I don't dare take it off. Not until I get to the water.

Bella is staying with me this week, helping me with various tasks that have proven difficult in the years since the world reopened. The lease of my little studio is in her name. I have never seen the landlord, and he has thankfully never seen me. She says that as long as people are paid and there are no complaints, they stay away. She has been correct.

Old black seaweed lines the shore, and I'm tempted to pull an armful up to drape it across my shoulders like a boa. To sway my hips and dance across the sand in time to the calm sighs of the waves. To harmonize my voice with the tide, without fear or consequence.

But as I begin to open my mouth, the tightness of my cheek reminds me why I can't.

I put my yellow towel on the sand and then strip off my summer dress, before slinging the cord of my knit bag across my shoulder. The chilly breeze feels good against my skin. It's been a week since I've been in proper water. I run toward the small waves lapping onto the shore and dive into the dark water.

[underwater sounds]



Ohhh. It feels good to breathe this way again. The air of Salem is too dry. I've been soaking in the tub for hours a day, but it's not the same. Here in the dark, under it all, I feel like myself again. The water is warmer than it was in Maine. I tried telling Bella that, but she looked at me like I was mad. It tickles my sides as I breathe in, and when I exhale I feel the little current of my breath on my arms while I kick myself forward.

My eyes adjust to the dark water quickly. On the ocean floor, there are glints of shiny plastic and yet-to-be-corroded metal...refuse from the people who crowd the water's surface. Occasionally, I feel the vibrations of a school of mackerel and a dogfish swimming in their wake.

As I swim further out, I feel the undercurrent pull at me, and I let it aid my swim. After some time, I see the rocks before me, jutting up from the ocean floor and breaking up through the waves above my head. I prepare to begin my ascent when I hear it.

[glass clinking against a hard surface]

Glass knocks against the rock's outcropping. It's a bottle. I'm curious. As I get closer to the surface, I see it's been corked. How it's still intact and afloat is a mystery. I grab it in my left hand and swim around the rocks to find the safest place to pull myself up without risking my find.

[sound of the sea air, slight rush of waves]

The predawn sky is a deep blue above me. I can smell the mussels that are living on the Eastern side of this rock... and I will take some of them on my way home... But first, this bottle. The glass is thick... and while it's still too dark to determine its color, it's likely green. It's made for wine. It's not too heavy, but it isn't empty.

[shake it]

There's some liquid at the bottom, but something else is within. A type of cloth. I'm intrigued.

[sound of ship]

I'll open it after I finish my routine. Here, a good two miles from shore, I won't be heard, I don't think. I place the bottle into a deep divet in the rock and sit up straight. My feet still in the water. I fill my lungs with air and I began to sing.

[song of the siren...]

The notes pull away the caul of my near constant anxiety and guard. I'm younger, whole again. I sing to the beautiful young man who heard me on his kayak near Stage Island. Richie. His beautiful, brown skin and calm eyes looking at me with lust and wonder as he paddled



closer to me, my arms outstretched to him. How my stomach's rumbling was subsided by the moment he reached into his bag and presented me with a fish he'd caught, and instead of sinking my teeth into a handsome man, I ate his offering... and, confused by his gesture... and how he didn't judge or look away from my sharp teeth tearing into his catch, I slipped off my perch by the shore and disappeared into the kelp and shadows until he paddled away.

And how he began doing this every fifth day for weeks... drawn in by my song. Feeding me, making it so I was less tempted to sing on the days he wouldn't come in order to lure a man into my embrace. I remember the smell of his scalp. The texture of his lips on mine. The gifts he brought me, and the first time we made love. Within months, I even invited him to my home. The old colonial my family had built by the sea in a spot yet to be incorporated into any town. He was happy to stay with me when he wasn't working on his lobster boat.

But the world of the mainland is not simple. And a man came, someone Richie knew. Jean Lionel. He smelled of nicotine and a chemical that made me dizzy. The scabs on his arms were jagged and ever present. And his own song to Richard was one of money and obligation. And while I sang my Richie to sleep, I would kiss away his uncertainties and get him to promise me that Jean Lionel was not going to take him from me.

But it was the sea that took Richie... and then it was Jean Lionel who, with his knife and horror at seeing me for what I was, took away even more from me.

And my voice cracks. And with a sob, I lower my voice as the memory of Bella, my land-living cousin, finding me on the shore... weak and dying... and taking me away from the burning remains of my family home. Down here... where I somehow can hide among people despite...everything.

[voice trails off]

I will sing to Richie, lost to the deep until I die. I love y-

[the glass]

The bottle.

[there is a sound coming from within]

Something taps against the glass from within. With the sky turning a lighter shade of blue, I lift the bottle to the sky to get a better look. The cloth had covered a shiny piece of jewelry that slipped from the wrapping. It's knocking against the glass—a thin, gold chain with a pendant... in the shape of some winged creature. It swings back and forth on its chain like a pendulum, but the charm only hits one side of the bottle. West. Back toward the mainland. Back toward Salem.



I wonder if I should open this here to take a closer look at this charm, or should I bring it back home with me?

Narrator

The choice before you is clear. Does our aquatic friend open the bottle now, or does she take it home first? Or... does she instinctually toss it back into the sea?

You can vote now at WitcheverPath.com/vote
You have until August 7 to decide what happens next.

Witchever Path is Journee and Etienne LaFond
This episode was written and produced by Etienne.

Jean, the Siren, was voiced by Valentine Buchanan.

The Witchever Path theme was written and produced by RYDR.

The song, A Mermaid's Eulogy is by Etienne Roussel and comes courtesy of Epidemic Sound.

Thank you for listening. Please vote and remember to sleep with a clear conscience. Choose the Path. -----