

Chapter 63: The Accession Tear

Rhylix

I do not ask it lightly.

Several hours later, I understood why Raimie had seemed so opposed to the idea of sailing. He'd only stopped puking his guts up a little while ago, about when my tincture had kicked in.

With a fleet of ships crashing through the water around us, he was hanging his legs over the deck's edge now, passing them and his arms through balusters with his forehead leaning against a rail. Standing behind him, I watched Ada'ir growing steadily smaller behind us with something akin to melancholy. I knew what awaited us in Auden, a place that would make this nation feel like a fairy tale land.

"That's my home, Rhy, the place where I grew up," Raimie said. "Why do I get the feeling I'll never see it again?"

I had so many platitudes that I could give my friend. That Auden would soon feel like home. That surely he'd return to Ada'ir someday.

But I didn't know if any of them would help him. So, I said nothing.

Eventually, Raimie sighed, pulling himself back through the railing. He stumbled a bit on getting to his feet, enough that I had to steady him.

"Thanks," Raimie said.

With his head bowed, he trudged below deck, and seeing this, I decided to leave him alone for the night.

The next morning brought the first of the storms with the daylight. When possible over the next few days—whether due to my tinctures or his own fortitude—the kid was on deck, helping how he could, which meant I got lashed by the wind and rain too. Someone needed to keep Raimie safe,

and I wasn't sure if this ship's sailors could or would do it.

Their stoicism about their leader quickly turned to gratitude, especially after an evening where he adamantly insisted on waiting in line for his food, but while it was good that Raimie was already earning these soldiers' loyalty, it wouldn't make them quick to rescue him yet.

For the next few days, I gave Raimie as much space as possible. I knew how hard the last few months had been for him, and that, combined with the kid's near persistent nausea and my own... *difficulties*, didn't lend themselves toward learning new things.

Eventually, though, Creation started hovering close to me while in the physical plane, keeping their vacant gaze set on a fixed point, and on noticing this, I made my way to Raimie's cabin. Once there, I waved for him to follow me.

"I've got something to show you," I shouted over the wind's howl.

With the ship's pitch making the hall into a mountain cliff at times, reaching a ladder was a laborious process, but we got there soon enough.

I stopped Raimie before he could climb outside.

"Always keep ahold of something while we're out there, ok?" I shouted.

When Raimie nodded, I led the way into the storm.

Passing above deck was like entering another world, one where nature's fury had been unleashed. All around the ship, waves rose and fell in sharp inclines while the fleet's other ships joined this one in the struggle to overcome them. Rain pounded down in a discordant beat while lightning forked across the sky, illuminating it so intensely that it occasionally blinded me.

Across the deck, the few sailors left above deck scrambled to complete their tasks, which would make avoiding them difficult. Still, I grabbed a rope before climbing the ladder's final rung. After Raimie had joined me, I closed the hatch behind us. I carefully crossed to my intended railing, changing handholds when needed, and once there, I clutched the top rail in a death grip.

To fore, salvation waited, a glorious refuge from the gale. There, the sea's swells had calmed down, and only a light drizzle fell from the sky.

This was our only hope of reaching Auden together. In that patch of calm, the fleet's captains could make course corrections, regrouping before facing the storms again.

Soon, the fleet would reach that break in the storm wall, but by then, our current surroundings wouldn't be quite as impressive.

On the ship's port side, the storm railed its fury unabated for as far as the eye could see. Perpetual lightning lit the sky as if it were a sunny day. Their strikes smote the ocean's surface almost as often as they played in the clouds above, and through this light show, I could barely make out the

rise of an island in the distance.

Hovering above that dark lump was the Accession Tear.

Stretching halfway to the clouds, its black smudge yawed open, eager to devour anything caught in its grip. The white light around its edge served as a beacon, warning sailors away.

Once again, the Tear's size and raw power stole my breath, and as if nature wanted to emphasize this magnificence, a water spout shot from a distant spot on the sea, soon after we'd reached our current handhold. The Accession Tear made that whirling mass of wind and water look insignificant.

Turning to Raimie, I caught his eye and was rewarded with a smile to match my own.

On the other side of him, three splinters clung to the railing, leaning over it as far as they could. Bright and Creation paid no mind to the enemy at their side, just as Dim seemed oblivious to them. All three had eyes only for the Tear, an opening to the source of their power, and with glazed expressions and stupefied smiles, I'd think them drunk if I didn't know better.

Not that I could blame them. Even without laying my eyes on the Tear, I could feel the alluring pull of what lay behind it. When I was near a tear, the temptation to shuck off every responsibility and tragedy, forever indulging in the sense of oneness that my body ever craved, always whispered sweet nothings in my ear, but it was infinitely stronger here.

Just like I remembered.

So, once Raimie had marveled for quite some time at this one-of-a-kind wonder of the world, I tugged on his sleeve, pointing toward the hatch.

We'd almost reached it when the wave hit. With the ship sliding down a swell at an awkward angle, a wall of water crashed over the deck, slamming into me and Raimie. As that water sloughed away, dragging one poor sailor into a railing, Raimie lost his grip on a rope, right as the ship began its climb up the next wave.

When he started sliding across the deck, he clawed for a handhold, barely catching my outstretched hand as he passed me. Even still, his fingers almost slipped through my grip, and as I tightened it, my knuckles turned white with Raimie dangling from my hold.

We crested the wave, and the descent that followed had my friend heavily sandwiching me with a conveniently placed crate. As soon as I could breathe again, I dragged him to the hatch, hustling us below deck.

At the bottom of the ladder, I leaned on the wall opposite Raimie, carefully watching him. His shoulders were shaking, which sent a tendril of cold to my core. Had our brush with death been enough to send him over the edge?

Then, Raimie lifted a beaming face to me, and I chuckled at my worries. The kid had long since proven that he was tough enough to handle anything life threw at him.

My expression had Raimie doubling over with laughter, and as my chagrin faded away, I let what was bubbling inside of me out too. My friend and I howled along with the storm.

Soon enough, Raimie was wiping his eyes.

“Thank you, Rhy,” he gasped. “I needed that.”

He turned deadly serious, piercing me with solemn eyes.

“Let’s never do it again.”

I flashed a grin at him.

“Agreed,” I said. “Maybe once we’re through this storm, we can discuss how tears like that are related to your newly discovered ‘talent’.”

Snapping his eyes to slits, Raimie donned a pout.

“You can’t tease me like that!” he whined.

“Sure I can,” I said with a smirk. “Now, here’s a sleeping tincture for your nightmares tonight and another for how sick you’ve been feeling.”

Pulling the mentioned items from my pocket, I handed them off while Raimie made a face.

“I never thought I’d miss the baby storms that we found near the coastline,” he said. “Thanks for these.”

“No problem,” I said. “Try and get some sleep, all right?”

“I will,” Raimie said. “Good night!”

Watching him stumble down the passageway, I wondered if I’d follow my own advice. No matter how strongly I brewed them, my tinctures didn’t work on my nightmares. Sometimes, sleep loss seemed like a better option than enduring those horrors.

Heaving a sigh, I made my way to my hammock, crammed in a lower deck. Maybe the Accession Tear’s lure would rock me into untroubled sleep tonight.

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