

Shy not from the Future-Storm

By Uluscri

Billowing through the waves was a length of fabric, torn and purple. Lligni watched its halting course. It swam closer, then farther, then closer again. In another life, he would have found its indecision frustrating. Not then. Not in that world of waiting. The thick air sludged through his throat and filled his lungs with its weight. *Wrong* it was, so very *wrong*. It would have been more right had the islands, too, fallen. The sun blared directly overhead, and even that felt off-kilter. The world should have been tilted, deflated, had its breath knocked out.

He was surprised the ship floated at all. It had been built for air, not water. Still, the way it groaned and shifted over the waves did not give Lligni overmuch confidence that the thing would stay above the surface much longer.

It was a meaningless wait for the end. The inevitability stood stark as the lack of food. The water had proved salty and poisonous. The rest had been claimed by the crash--it was only him, Peydis, and Baronil, and those two could barely communicate with him. Not that they would have if they could. Lligni was cursed to sit with his thoughts alone and stare at the flotsam, those bits of wood, cloth, and blood. Everything else had sunk.

Memories swirled in the rubble, displayed before him like a gallery. He barely recognized their colorless forms. They had happened in another life, he was sure. One he would never return to.

Someone shouted. Lligni glanced up to find a dot hovering over the boat. The focus of Lligni's staring shifted to that, and the world rotated with it. Why were they yelling at an insect? His eyes had to adjust to see that the growing point lay far above. It was a ship. Time stretched, and with it the sails. Green. Ithirus, then.

Saved.

The realization hit Lligni hollow, not because he did not want life, but because he had long accepted his own death. All the despair had run through him, a cleansing flood that had left him empty. To be lifted back to his life filled him with an emotion he could not place. Perhaps emotion was the wrong word. More like sand. It had mass and texture, but no flavor.

Lligni had been so sure he would die. Before that, before the crash, he had been utterly certain of his promotion. A long line of predictions, some right, most wrong. Never before had he been so convinced of a thing as his death. The descending impossibility flipped reality.

What a pale joke knowing seemed then. Finally, a true emotion bloomed, and with the humor rasped a dry laugh. The first he had used his voice since the crash. It hurt and stung, but he did not care--peace had already dragged him into an embrace. No more knowing. He leaned himself into the stormy fronts of what-might-be, and at least for a blessed moment, worry fled.