



# A Mother's Love

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“Argh, you’re useless boy.” The Admiral pushed the model boats away.

“No, father,” Azareth said, a hint of desperation in his voice. “Let me try again. Please?”

The retired naval officer shook his head. “We’ve been at this for months and it’s always the same. You’ve no head for it.”

“Mother doesn’t like it when you say such things.”

“Your mother fills your head with ghosts, boy. It takes a man to know their limitations.” The old man’s eyes bored into him. “Are you a man? Well are you boy?”

Azareth couldn’t meet his gaze. “Yes father, I am a man.”

“I can’t hear you, boy.”

“I am a man!” As soon as the words left his mouth, he fled the room. His eyes brimmed with tears as he ran through the wide corridors of the house. He had to get away. Away from his father, and the disappointment that lurked in his eyes.

He didn’t enjoy spending time with him. No matter what the activity, it always ended with angry words and tears. But Azareth wasn’t one to give up. He knew that if he applied himself, if he kept trying, he would be able to please him. Even if it were just for one day. It wasn’t much to ask, was it? Just one day, when his father would be as proud of him, as he was of his brother, Simeon.

Simeon was four years older than Azareth. He'd just been accepted into the Wrestfall Naval Academy. Azareth recalled the look of joy on his father's face when he read the letter of admission.

*Would he ever look at me like that?*

Simeon was his father's favourite. Everything that Azareth struggled to learn came easily to Simeon. Azareth sometimes felt as though their father was purposely making sure that he would fail. He wasn't of course. Azareth's mind simply couldn't grasp the concepts his father tried to teach him.

Mathematics, language, and metaphysics. These things came easily. He had an excellent memory, and could recall obscure facts from books that he had read. His problem, as far as his father was concerned, was that he couldn't translate those skills into anything practical.

What use was mathematics if it couldn't calculate the amount of rigging needed in a stiff breeze? What help language if he couldn't inspire the hearts of men with his words? That he excelled in these things was irrelevant. What was the point of excelling in things that serve no purpose?

Just thinking about these things made him feel sad. He loved his father, and he wanted to make him happy, but so far he'd just been a disappointment.

Mother would know how to make him feel better.

When he was feeling sad, or angry, he thought of his mother. She was always ready to make things right. She would tell him he was special, and she

would comfort him. Inasmuch as Azareth believed his father hated him, he was equally sure that his mother loved him.

He ran to his mother's chambers. Ducking and weaving his way through the well-appointed halls of his family's residence on the coast of the Inner Sea. When he reached her door, he pushed it open and stepped inside without knocking.

His mother was sitting at a table by the window. It was her favourite spot. From there she had a beautiful view of the coast, and Azareth was not surprised to find her admiring the vista yet again.

He paused by the door, ready to run into her arms, when he realised that she was not alone.

A short, fat, man, with a ruddy complexion, and a large bulbous nose, stood by the fireplace that warmed his mother's chambers. He wasn't anyone that Azareth recognised.

The fat man looked at Azareth as though he were deciding how he might taste. It made him feel very uncomfortable, but he was unable to look away. He stood by the door, frozen like a fly trapped in amber.

"Hello darling." His mother's musical voice broke through his fear. He turned to look at her. He saw her expression turn from happiness to concern when she noticed his tears. "Have you been working with your father again?"

Azareth could only manage a nod in response. He then ran toward her, and buried his face against her chest.

As his mother stroked his hair the other man spoke.

“This is him?”

“Yes, this is my little Azareth.”

“And you're certain he has the gift?”

Azareth couldn't see the man's face, but he could tell from the man's tone that he was somewhat sceptical.

“Most definitely. His potential is being wasted here. His father is unable to properly harvest what Azareth has to offer.”

His mother stopped hugging him, and pushed him away from her warm embrace. She held him at arm's length, an intense look in her eye. It was not an expression that Azareth had seen before.

“This is Garend,” his mother said. “He is going to help you be the man you are destined to be. You must listen to him, and do everything he says without question.”

“If you say so mother.”

She smiled. It was a sad smile, not one of her usual sunny smiles, then hugged him tightly for a long time. When she released him, Azareth could see that she'd been crying.

He was about to say something but she pressed a finger to his lips.

“No more questions, my love.” She kissed him three times, once on each cheek and once on his forehead. It was a traditional farewell.

“Take him,” she said, and looked away. She was clearly upset.

The fat man approached Azareth, and took him by the hand.

“Let’s go, boy.”