

# The Memory of Moraine

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Nikolai stood at the rail of the ship, watching as the waves broke against the hull. The sea was peaceful today, the storm that had hit them when they were further up the coast had died out over night leaving clear blue skies dotted with wispy clouds. Taking another drag on his cigarette he looked towards the horizon. Independence Port was just coming in to view, its cranes standing out against the blue sky as dark hazy blobs.

Behind him two crewmen walked by on their way to the stern. There weren't any passengers onboard at the moment, but the captain had mentioned picking some up when they docked. Everyone knew Álex was in with the Mob, quite deep according to some, and this meant that he did them special favours every now and then. Some times it was passengers and other times it would be unmarked cargo. No one asked any questions. They all got paid a bit of extra cash for keeping their mouths shut and those who couldn't didn't stay around for long – they were set ashore and, well, they didn't take work on any other vessel. Nikolai suspected the Mob picked them up, but it was never talked about and he didn't fancy finding out.

As their course was altered to bring them in to Paragons shipping lanes a small fishing boat came in to view. It was some distance away and heading out to sea, but Nikolai could just make out the thin lines of the masts.

It reminded him of his father's boat. A forty foot trawler they had sailed out of Talos. That's how Nikolai had grown up, leaving school at fifteen and taking to the waves. His mother had left them when he was only three and he didn't have any brothers or sisters. There was just him and dad. He had spent most of his childhood on his dad's boat or hanging around the docks talking to the other sailors. School had never suited him and he ended up spending more and more time on the trawler. In the end he just stopped turning up for classes. They chased after him for a bit, but when his father showed little interest in complying the authorities gave up. After that he started joining the boat on every trip.

Nikolai felt a pang of sadness touch him as the memories of that last day he had seen his father rose up in his mind. His death was listed as lost at sea and Nikolai remembered the day all too well. There was a forecast for a storm moving down the coast. They had briefly discussed not setting out, but all the predictions said the bad weather wouldn't hit until later that morning and they thought they would be back long before even the leading winds hit. As his father had pointed out, there was also the money. They were two months behind on the rent and could ill afford to let another payment slip. A catch on a day when few others were willing to take the risk would bring them in more cash, so they both decided it was worth the chance.

There had been few other trawlers leaving that night as they set out from the dockside. The sky was clear but the oppressive feeling of a storm brewing could not be ignored and they discussed getting back as soon as they could. A short run would still be more than profitable.

They were both preoccupied with hauling in the catch and neither of them spotted the weather changing. It wasn't until dark clouds had rolled over their heads and the wind had begun to whip at

the stays that they realised they had delayed too long. The nets were almost gathered and they hurried as quickly as they could, but by the time the last of the catch was secured the boat was pitching and the peaks of the waves had started to top the gunwale. They set course back to Talos docks and battened down the hatches, the pumps working overtime to expel the water as it flowed in.

No more than thirty minutes in to their return journey they thought they'd struck it lucky. The wind died away and the waves flattened out. Nikolai imagined this is how the eye of a hurricane would be, but he knew they weren't trapped in anything that bad. It was when he looked back over the stern to see if the storm was breaking up that he spotted the fog rolling after them. It moved with an eerie speed, gaining on the little trawler rapidly. Both he and his father watched through the windows of the cabin as the edges of the fog passed them by on either side and within minutes they were surrounded by it.

A ghostly horn echoed across the still waters and drew their eyes to the starboard side of the trawler. They heard another sounding of the horn and Nikolai felt a shiver run down his spine. Then from out of the fog bank came the bow of a large tanker. It took him a moment to realise what was wrong with the thing, but when the realisation struck him, Nikolai felt his body stiffen with fear. The ship had a greenish glow to its hull and in places it appeared transparent.

Pushing the engine as much as he could Nikolai tried to get away from the apparition, but as his father watched their progress through the rear window it became evident that they were not going to out run the thing. It didn't matter which heading they changed to, they couldn't find the edge of the fog and the tanker continued to gain on them.

"We're done for," his father cried in the end. "That thing is after the boat and we'll not shake it."

"There's nothing more I can do," Nikolai responded. "We don't have the power."

"The Devil take them," his father shouted more to the ghost ship than to his son. "Let's leave the trawler and try to swim for the fog. That may hide us from them."

"But we're miles from shore. There's no way we can make it."

"Better that then the Moraine take our souls," his father replied, throwing open the bridge door.

Nikolai glanced back out the window at the ship that followed them. "It might just pass us by," he said, but his words fell on empty air and he looked down to see his father running across the small deck of the trawler.

Leaving the tiller Nikolai threw himself down the ladder and on to the deck, chasing after his father with the hope he could stop the older man. Even as he ran he felt a new wave of fear wash over him and he realised that some horror emanating from the ghostly vessel was taking hold of both their minds.

His father reached the rail on the port bow and glanced over his shoulder, his gaze passing over his son's head and on to the apparition. Then he made the jump and was gone. By the time Nikolai

reached the gunwale his father was already halfway to the wall of fog. Nikolai was still calling his name as the ghostly ship passed the trawler on the starboard side.

A horn rang out across the deck of the ship and broke Nikolai from his memories. The boat he had seen on the horizon had long since passed them by. The second sounding of the horn moved him to action and he pushed himself away from the railing and turned towards the stern. The captain would be eager to make sure they were all ready for when they reached the docks.

As he looked past the bridge, he noticed that the skies were darkening. There would be a storm when they reached Independence Port. A storm always seemed to follow the Moraine in.