

BEGINNINGS CHAPTER 3 -- THE TRANSFERENCE

By Miss Alister

The old man James was at the helm of the Zebedee, a scowl of command on his face. He squinted across the sea reading the water.

I kept my eyes on him.

He didn't look like much, leathery and shrunken, one suspender keeping his oilskin pants up. But he was half predator, half fish, as old as the ocean, and as fierce.

Suddenly he stiffened, his eyes locked on a far off patch of water and he changed the trawler's course for it.

I waited at the drum winch.

Down went the old man's hand and I let the giant trawl net unreel from the stern, guided it out, and placed the doors in the water.

The old salt cut the power to 2 knots.

I had forty minutes to prep for the second haul of the day.

It'd been three years since I fell into the drink that first year, and all of this was clockwork now.

I looked at the old man, the sun glinting off beads of sea spray in his mess of white hair, an unlit cigar clenched between his teeth. He turned and gave me a quick nod of approval then away again to light up.

By now I didn't need more than that. I knew how much I'd gained and grown, didn't need anyone patting me on the back for it.

My muscles are adapted to moving heavy loads on a heaving deck as fast as possible, keeping the rhythm of the operation tight, and my mind is geared to tapping into reserves of strength I didn't know I had.

It's a primitive sense of survival that drives me, being at the mercy of the sea, knowing Death lurks at the elbow of every fisherman.

I fingered the coin in my pocket, the one the old salt had tossed me when I first signed on to this fateful tour of duty. He needed me for more than just my youth. What that was exactly, I couldn't tell you, but I could feel it.

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We cruised into Haifa Bay and docked at Joint Acre. I hauled our iced crates from the fish hold onto the deck and the cranes lifted them onto the dock.

Once paid and the Zebedee serviced and refueled, we headed to Marine Services to replenish our supplies.

Amidst the all the noise of the dockyard, a man bellowed, "Zedekiah!"

I looked in the direction of the voice, saw another ancient soul like the old man James waving majestically from a table outside a pub on the promenade.

The old man shouted back, "Josiah!" and he ran to the man and hugged him like a long lost friend.

Zedekiah? I followed, confused as hell, stood a ways back from them like a third wheel.

Finally, the old man came to himself.

"Sorry," he said. "Josiah, this strapping lad is my first mate, Steve."

I cocked an eyebrow and shook hands with him.

"James' and I go way, way back, lad," Josiah said.

I looked at the old man. He nodded.

"Pleased to meet you," I said, still confused, skeptical.

"Will you join me for a pint?" Josiah said.

"That would be splendid," the old man said.

Splendid? What is with the old geezer I wondered.

The old man took me aside, said, "Lad, you go on to the marine supply and order everything we need to set sail tomorrow."

This didn't feel right, but I couldn't begrudge my captain a good catching up with an old friend.

"Alright," I said.

"Meet me back here when you're done," the old man said.

"Will do," I said, and I took off.

I walked a ways and looked back. The two old men were on fire, talking back and forth, jovial at points, but mostly serious.

I walked on and stopped short of Marine Services and doubled back, went up the hill off the path and down to the pub, and I found a place in the shadows where I could listen to their conversation.

"It's the age-old quest, isn't it?" the old man said. "To avert the destruction of a mindless people who couldn't possibly make a right choice if it was written in the sky for all to see."

"I suppose you could put it like that," Josiah said.

"In our day," the old man said, "The stakes were mere nations, the Master having three times destroyed the depraved generations of his peoples, and here we are, round four, seemingly the final round, the stakes being an entire world.

"True enough," Josiah said. "But the prophets are spread thickly across the world, doing the very best they can."

"Ah but it won't be enough, will it, Josiah? It never has been. The peoples are ever as whales that beach themselves, their radar has gone kaput. They were doomed then, they are doomed now."

"It appears so, Zedekiah, but have you not received good reports from the other kings?"

"I wouldn't call them good," the old man said.

"Not even from Augustus?"

"No."

"Cyrus?"

"Listen, Josiah, I fish the world's seas, I've been to every viable port, communed with every king and prophet, and I've come away from it all with only an ounce of hope."

"Even that is something, Zedekiah," Josiah said. "We must keep our minds open to the possibility that the Master ultimately seeks to reverse his decision to damn the world."

"The Master will not change his mind," the old man said, heatedly. "It would be against his nature which has held true since the beginning of time."

"Aye, but what of the lad?" Josiah said. "Is he not the chosen one?"

The old man looked away to the sea. "The kid?" he said.

"Yes, the lad Steve," Josiah said impatiently. "Is he not being made ready to sacrifice?"

I drew a sharp breath. I wanted to bolt but I made the wiser choice to stay put, hear them out, then do whatever might be called for.

"Aye," the old man said. "But he is as a son to me..." He took a shaky breath in and sighed, long and labored. "I knew it would be that way when I first laid eyes on him..."

Josiah put a hand on the old man's shoulder. He had a twinkle in his eyes. "Which is why you tossed him one of your kingdom's coins, am I right, Zedekiah?"

The old man's face flushed.

Josiah gave way to a hearty belly laugh.

"So, you sly fox," Josiah said, "What your 'ounce of hope' for humanity really amounts to is all the hope in the world!"

Josiah shook with laughter again and the old man patiently endured it.

"Presumably the lad recognized your likeness on the coin?" Josiah said.

"Aye, he saw it right away."

"Then he has but to receive the Ultimate Invincibility."

"He is making quick progress."

"But will he be ready in time?"

"He'll be ready," the old man said.

The coin began to get warm in my pocket of its own accord. I touched it and felt tenfold the pull I'd felt the day the old man tossed it to me. And now I knew why, knew what I had to do.

To be continued by the next destiny-writer...