

Series Title: Following Tides II
Chapter Number: Prologue
"Soul Bound"
Author: D. Sanders

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Sascha was just coming back from adding some protective charms to his ship "The Golden Sun" that was in the finishing stages of being built. For the past eighteen months they'd been building her on Safe Harbor Isle and during these past eighteen months a gnawing dread had been growing in the pit of his stomach. Because during these same months he'd faced an inner truth he'd been trying to deny. He loved his best friend and not just affection or mild infatuation, it was full-blown desire so intense he could barely look at him anymore without wanting to throw caution to the wind and make love to him within an inch of his young life. He turned to see his desire standing on the beach, letting the sea wash up over his feet, his face turned to the water.

Oh, but he was beautiful. Even more so than his elder brother Ilya. Ilya was handsome, tall, slender and lithe and in his female aspect positively breathtaking in a slim boyish-figured frame. Yuri however in Sascha's opinion made even Ilya's female aspect seem like a wren among swans.

Yuri had always been slight of build and even after puberty came and went he still looked as if a strong wind might blow him away like a wisp of cloud. He looked almost delicate and he *was* physically due to an extreme expenditure of his talents at a tender age of five, when he had given everything he had to save his brother's life and had almost lost his own.

Sascha shivered at the memory, he'd woken up in terror out of a sound sleep with an urgent need to be at Yuri's side immediately. Olya had tried to reassure him that it was just a dream, but the cold panic had been very real and thankfully Yuri's mother had brought Sascha to Yuri's side just in time. Sascha spent the entire day feeding Yuri his strength to recover. His body however showed lingering effects from that frightful nightmare of an event. He was the picture of health and internally his healing gifts had even strengthened beyond all recognition after that day, he'd blown his talents wide-open but at a cost. His carriage would forever be fragile and delicate.

But in Sascha's opinion it made him even more unearthly beautiful. He moved with an unconscious grace, the turn of a foot or wrist almost mesmerizing. His long, sun streaked blond hair was braided and hung down his back to his waist. It was womanishly long, but then again, Yuri was 'balanced' as his mother often said. Female and male in equal measures in spirit. He wore femininity on a male frame that made that internal balance extremely evident in the androgynous figure that glided across the beach.

He even dressed almost feminine in the loose airy sleeveless tunic he wore. The color of blushing roses with a seashell pattern embroidered neckline. His dark tanned skin highly complimented by the soft almost coral pink colored garment. Soft shades always brought out Yuri's best features and natural tawny richness of color. His slim legs were poking out from the long tunic which appeared to be all he was wearing. Sascha's groin gave an involuntary twitch as he shamelessly watched Yuri meander along the seashore. Gods how he loved him, every part of him. From his big green eyes, to his breathy laugh, to his shy smile, to the tips of his toes. He was the Golden Sun that gave light to Sascha's world.

Sascha worried his lip. What was Yuri going to do when he left? Yuri was painfully shy and mild mannered. Unless he was working in a healing trance, Yuri would never approach anyone first for companionship or conversation. The only person Yuri went to of his own freewill was Sascha; the only person he confided in or shared anything personal with was Sascha. The thought of Yuri

being alone without anyone to turn to stabbed Sascha in the heart painfully, churning his gut in anxiety. If only they were the same age, Yuri would be able to go with Sascha. But you had to be of age, fifteen to be precise. Yuri was still six moons away from turning fifteen, but that half-year was everything. Sascha had just turned sixteen the day before, over the age, but because of the timing of the reunion, he'd turned thirteen while still out to sea which was the normal time one would return to the Isle to begin the two year building ritual. He didn't reach the Isle until he was fourteen and had spent the better part of the past two years building his ship. If only Yuri was six-moons older, he could then go with "the Golden Sun" as the official healer of the crew.

As it stood, it would be two years before they saw each other again and Yuri could join Sascha's crew. Sascha would have to content himself with a ship named after his love if he couldn't have his love by his side. Finding contentment with that notion was practically impossible, not when every waking moment he spent fantasizing what those lips tasted like or how that body would feel under hands. Sascha let out a sigh, they still had two more moons together and Sascha knew how he'd rather spend those precious two moons.

"Yuri!" Sascha called out and the youth on the beach turned, flashed him a brilliant smile and met him halfway across the beach. A slim hand sliding into Sascha's much larger one. Over the past two years Sascha had hit another growth spurt and was now sporting the frame of a man and no longer a boy. He'd probably not get much bigger, most of the men in his family finished growing between the ages of sixteen and eighteen and then just started filling out rather than up.

Sascha stood a good six feet and towered over Yuri's much shorter build. Just a few years ago they almost stood eye to eye, now Yuri had to crane his neck up to meet Sascha's eyes unless he enjoyed looking into the bulk of Sascha's chest. Sascha could quite easily now rest his chin on the top of Yuri's head at their current height. This was more than likely how matters would be between them from now on. Not that Sascha minded. Yuri always fit perfectly at his side, no matter the size.

"You look tired." Yuri's voice was concerned as they walked along the beach together.

"Aye. A little. I used a lot of magic today; you know how tiring that can be. I just need to eat."

"Then you're in luck. I was just about to eat myself and I've enough for us both." Yuri smiled pulling Sascha over to a blanket on the beach complete with a basket of fruit, sandwiches and flasks of juice chilling in a stream that fed into the sea.

"You look prepared for company."

"I knew you'd be tired."

"Yuri, you're always one step ahead of me."

"I just know you. You always work too hard and you didn't eat hardly any breakfast and I never saw you come down for lunch. I am a healer Sascha, I notice these things." Yuri smiled as they sat cross-legged on the blanket and shared a late afternoon dinner together.

"So I am properly scolded. You take good care of me."

"You're not inclined to care for yourself. Someone must watch out for you." Yuri smiled again, but there was a pain and sadness in his eyes. The same sadness in Sascha's. Their time was running out.

Sascha laid there in the sun, his head in Yuri's lap, eyes half lidded as Yuri finger-combed his short and shaggy black hair away from his face, every once in a while pausing to press a grape or a small slice of melon past his lips. He felt drowsy and pampered. "You have a headache." Yuri said absently before a tingling sensation caressed Sascha's brow as fingers traced and chased away pain. Sascha shivered, Yuri's touch was damn near orgasmic and even the tiny brush of power was enough to make Sascha involuntarily groan in heady bliss.

"I would have been fine with your powders Yuri." Sascha opened his eyes to smile up at Yuri who just grinned back.

"I know. But they are not here now and I am." Yuri pressed a finger to Sascha's nose and Sascha smiled.

"Thank you."

"You are always welcome. Now eat more before you fall asleep." Yuri fed him a segment of orange and Sascha obeyed and ate before he did indeed fall asleep, his head still cradled in Yuri's lap.

"I used to be afraid they'd not be ready, and now that they are they're mired in angst and are afraid." Petra sighed where she and Ilya sat in the cool shade of a palm and watched Yuri and Sascha on the beach.

"What angst? Don't tell me they think Yuri won't be going!?" Ilya asked and Petra shrugged.

"I don't know love, you know Yuri never confides what he's feeling. Not to me at least." Petra sighed.

"Then just tell them! Don't wait for them both to be tied up in anxious knots. Mercy, they're soul bound! Any distortion of their relationship real or perceived will be blown out of all proportions."

"But Ilya, neither of them have said anything to each other. It's driving ME crazy. You can see every time they even look at the other, it's no innocent glance. It's all out desire. Especially Sascha. But until they break that last hurdle themselves it's none of our business."

"Bullshit. They're afraid if they cross that last line, they're gonna spend the next two years apart. Tell them that's not the case and that last line won't be so hard for them to step over." Ilya argued and Petra shrugged.

"I can think of a million arguments for and against love. We shouldn't meddle in their bond. If they ASKED then we'd tell them. We're only guessing at the problem. We could be very wrong and then whatever the problem really is might get worse."

"Oh this is making my brain hurt. Mam, they're young yes. But have you talked to either of them? Yuri talks like some damn Zen little prophet he gives me the shivers. I'm looking at a teenager and hearing an ancient serene monk. And Sascha could give my husband lessons in tact and decorum. These are no normal teenagers. Daa is right, Sascha is sixteen going on forty-seven and I've no clue how to describe Yuri other than he's on a totally different plain."

"That is true enough. He always was different and even more so after he helped save you."

"Aye and a half! He can heal rings around me and I'm no slouch. He blew his talents open helping me and they healed open. He's pulsing all the time with power; even Danica doesn't have that much and she's wizard gifted. He's the strongest healer I've ever, EVER known." Ilya agreed watching his brother in the distance.

"And damn if I don't feel like a goose in looks next to him either. He's gorgeous. Who was his daa?"

"Some very nice Captain come to trade. Handsome. Yuri looks nothing like him."

"No, he looks like you, that's not what I meant. He's, I dunno. I know he's small because of what he did for me, but there's something else. His 'balance' is tipping heavily to the female aspect. I usually cannot wait to get OUT of my female aspect. It's just convenient when Van and I decide to expand our brood. Yuri now? I'd bet Van I'd wear shoes, every day for the rest of my life that if Sascha ever shifts his aspect, you won't see him in a hurry to switch back. He's a female stuck in a male body. I think he was born the wrong gender entirely."

"There I'd agree with you. And you hate shoes so if you're betting that you must be certain." Petra chuckled; Van had never been able, not in ten years, to get Ilya into a pair of boots.

"I can't abide having my feet bound up." Ilya wiggled his toes in the sand barefoot, pregnant and loving every minute of it apart from suffering hot flashes with this pregnancy.

"Neither can Yuri. And if he wouldn't raise eyebrows, I'd bet you would see him sporting about in women's clothes. He loves anything 'pretty'. He's forever making and embroidering me gorgeous blouses. He made what he's wearing too."

"I didn't know he sewed!"

"Oksana taught him when he was little."

"Here I am always trying to avoid it and he'd embrace it. I told you, he was just born wrong. He's transgendered I'm sure of it."

"Trans what?"

"Woman soul, Man body."

"Ah." Petra nodded as Ilya stood.

"Let's leave them alone mam. I'm parched and I'm starting to get a headache from worrying about them and picking apart my brother's aspects."

Petra and Ilya left the beach to go find something to drink leaving Sascha and Yuri alone and undisturbed.

The building was complete and a party to celebrate was in full swing and Sascha just could not find it in his heart to celebrate, something else was there inside making it ache. He could feel the torment just as assuredly as if it was his own. But there were two distinct pains in his chest, his own heart sinking with dread and a far more intense fear. Sascha's eyes scanned the crowd just

in time to catch a blond head dashing away trying not to be seen. "Yuri." Sascha breathed and before he could get up to follow, his mother arrived at his elbow crying and going on about her baby being all grown up and every and all other typical things mother's gush about when their children leave their arms as adults. It took him several minutes before he was able to escape and he raced down the path running into his cousin Danica on the way.

"He's crying. He won't tell me what's wrong. I feel his pain and it hurts." She said and Sascha nodded.

"Aye. I'll find him go on back it's okay." Sascha reassured the troubled and perceptive nine-year-old and raced to the beach on swift feet.

"Yuri?" Sascha called out, his mellow baritone was concerned.

"I'm here." Yuri answered, wiping his eyes. His soft, understated tenor fell from the shadows as he stepped out and into Sascha's arms.

"I hate when you cry Yuri. Please, tell me what's wrong?"

"You know what's wrong. I don't know what I'm going to do without you."

"We still have a week and I don't want to think about it." Sascha said holding Yuri tightly.

Sascha's eminent departure had thrown their world into chaos and now things were needing to be said that were so hard to say. "I can't stop thinking about it. Sascha I feel like I'm DYING inside."

"Aye. Me too. The thought of leaving you behind is killing me."

"Sascha, I love you, I've always loved you. I can't let you go, I can't...." Yuri broke into sobs and Sascha held him close.

"Oh gods Yuri. I love you too. I feel so damn angry that I have to leave you behind I want to scream. This hurts worse than the time I thought you were dying after healing your brother. This is that nightmare all over again for me."

"Sascha..." Yuri turned his shimmering green eyes upward, Sascha fell into those eyes, and the golden sun he held in his arms and the person he'd named his ship after without telling him. It was now or never. He couldn't hold back his emotions anymore. Not when the person nearest and dearest to his heart was in such evidently mutual and undeniable agony.

"Yuri. You are my Golden Sun." Sascha breathed leaning down to finally taste those lips he'd been yearning to kiss for years. Yuri's arms clung in desperation to Sascha's neck clinging to the youth he loved more than life itself.

Knees gave way, mouths opened, strangled cries of love long denied burst free as hands battled with clothes. Sascha's lips in his hair, his neck, his ears, made Yuri quiver with need. "Sascha, Sascha." His voice echoed his need. Sascha moaned as he buried his lips in the curve of a graceful neck as his hands divested Yuri of his breeches and his hand found purchase on Yuri's equally straining desire.

"Sure?" Sascha moaned and Yuri nodded almost frantically.

"For years." He whispered and Sascha sat up on his knees to push his breeches down, freeing his hard and weeping erection.

"Turn over beloved. I'll go slow. Tell me if it hurts." Sascha said breaking off a piece of a nearby aloe plant and coating himself with it as Yuri got on his knees, ready and shaking with fear and need.

Sascha took the excess aloe and gently tried to prepare Yuri with shaking hands, at Yuri's hiss of breath as a finger invaded virgin territory, Sascha pulled back as if burned.

"No Sascha, don't stop, Please don't stop!" Yuri begged and Sascha replaced his finger, Yuri moaned deep in the back of his throat.

"Good?"

"Aye."

"Tell me when you think you're ready." Sascha trailed kisses down Yuri's back as his fingers worked diligently, loosening, stretching, loving and longing.

"Now."

Sascha scrambled to his knees and pushed. Yuri cried out, but not in pain. "SASCHA!"

"Yuri! Yuri! Yuri!" Was grunted with every thrust of hips. "Turn over, I want to see your face." Sascha said slipping out as Yuri rolled to his back and Sascha hooked beautiful slender legs over his shoulders and pushed again and again, until he was covered and dripping with sweat, Yuri long since having come and was whimpering with joy as Sascha filled him completely.

Sascha saw spots in his eyes as he finally came in hard thrusts, deep inside Yuri who was weeping and clinging to Sascha like he was afraid to let go.

"Bond with me Yuri. I can't leave you, not now, not ever; I love you with my very soul. They will have to let you come with me if we're married."

"Aye! Oh Aye! Aye! Sascha! I love you!"

"Well it took you two LONG ENOUGH!" A very pregnant again with son number five, Ilya chuckled as he and Van walked up the beach, catching a very naked couple in a very compromising position.

"Sascha, its usually good manners to propose to the one you love BEFORE you actually screw them into the sand." Van added and both boys blushed hotly.

"Oh dear, well enjoy the evening loves, we won't wait up." Ilya waved over the top of his head as he and Van walked past chuckling.

Sascha and Yuri burst into a fit of embarrassed giggles and laughter.

"You want to again?" Sascha asked and Yuri smiled.

"Oh, Aye. But let's get off the path shall we?"

"Yes, good idea." Sascha grinned scooping up not only their clothes but Yuri who laughed and clung to Sascha's neck laughing as Sascha moved them further down the beach into seclusion and welcoming dark shadows.

Sascha dropped to his knees and Yuri slipped to his, still holding Sascha's neck, his head resting on Sascha's collarbone. Sascha breathed deeply, the scent of lavender permeated Yuri's hair and Sascha shuddered as his hands stroked Yuri's back and down over a gently curving posterior where his fingers gripped and kneaded soft flesh. Yuri moaned, dropping feather like kisses along Sascha's jaw and throat. "Love you." Yuri whispered and Sascha tipped his head to look into Yuri's brilliantly shining eyes.

"I love you more than I can possibly hope to describe Yuri. I've been denying it for years and I know better. You're my soul bound."

"Aye. I know I was waiting for you to say it. I've always known."

"Next time I'm pig-headed stubborn, you kick me."

"Never. This was something you had to admit for yourself, I couldn't do it for you. And you know that too."

"I wasted so much time agonizing over it when I could have had such wonders." Sascha said and Yuri chuckled.

"I'm hardly a wonder. Too little for my age by a half."

"You're perfect just the way you are."

"Only you think so love. I was born wrong."

"Come again?" Sascha said leaning back to settle on his heels and clasp Yuri's hands.

"My balance is off. I should have been born a girl."

"I certainly don't care that you're a boy. What do you mean about your balance being off?"

"Just that. I'm, oh it's hard to describe how I feel. I feel like, I yearn to be a girl, Like Ilya when he's pregnant. It fascinates me and I can never understand WHY he wants to get out of that body the minute he has the babies. I certainly wouldn't want to shed it so quickly, not when it's as pretty as he is. But my brother and I are very different, he's perfectly balanced, I'm not, I can't be when I want something like that all the time."

"Do you?"

"Aye."

"That's simple enough Yuri. I can change you that way if you want it so desperately. All you had to do was ask."

"I thought, well, what do you want me to be?"

"Yuri love. I don't care. Boy or girl makes no difference to me. I love YOU. It's your soul not it's container I love."

"Please?"

"Aye love." Sascha smiled and laid his hands on Yuri's hips. "Shut your eyes beloved."

Yuri shivered and shut his eyes.

"Let the inner opposite aspect out." Sascha said quietly and he watched in amazement as Yuri's form glowed and shifted. Soft hips rounded under his hands and small breasts formed on a smooth chest. Like Ilya, the face remained the same but unlike Ilya the almost dainty hourglass shape would never be called boyish. Waif-like perhaps, but certainly quite shapely.

Yuri had been beautiful before, Sascha's throat was parched by the time the change was complete. He was positively angelic as a woman. Oh but Sascha felt a stab of possessiveness sweep over his senses. Almost covetous of this creature. "Oh my." Was all he managed to say past the lump in his throat and his half-awake erection roared to life.

"Is it over?" A soft, lyrical mezzo-soprano asked.

"Aye. So beautiful." Sascha croaked, his hands twitching at Yuri's hips as they slid upwards to explore new breasts.

Yuri still hadn't opened his eyes and moaned as Sascha toyed with his new body. "That's so nice." Yuri breathed and Sascha leaned over and purred in Yuri's ear.

"Very, very nice." Sascha's voice was laced heavily with lust and Yuri giggled.

"Wait. We don't want accidents Sascha. Remember what happened to my brother when they began playing about with aspects?"

Sascha stopped kissing Yuri's breasts and leaned back as if burned. "Aye." His voice cracked.

Yuri just chuckled and scanned the beach, Maiden's Breath liked sandy soil, and he found a clump of the white blooms just beyond their trysting place and plucked a handful of blossoms and ate the bitter tasting blooms with a grimace. "These taste awful, it's why we powder them with sugar." Yuri shivered.

"How long until they take effect?" Sascha asked, not wanting children either.

"Immediately once taken, you should take some too. Double precaution." Yuri said passing blooms to Sascha who swallowed them whole.

Yuri spread out their clothes and laid down holding open his arms. Sascha almost pounced on him and began devouring him in earnest. Yuri gasped as Sascha entered him. "Did I hurt you?"

"Nay! Oh Sascha it's beautiful!" Yuri wept clinging to Sascha's back as he set a languid tempo.

"Think of nothing but how I am going to love you like this for the rest of our days." Sascha purred into Yuri's neck as he pushed deeply and Yuri moaned in response. He seemed to like it when Sascha drove his thrusts. He responded by mewling and whimpering and the harder Sascha moved the more Yuri thrashed. Not so delicate after all Sascha mused as he set a driving rhythm that brought them both to a shuddering completion.

The moon was high in the sky as they returned to the celebration, Yuri's arm wrapped around Sascha's waist and Sascha's arm about Yuri's shoulders.

Ilya caught sight of them and leaned over to his mother. "I told you. No shoes for me!"

"You did. Oh dear they'd better have taken precautions!"

"I'm sure they did mam. Yuri's no fool and he learned from my mistakes. Maiden's Breath grows all along that beach. God but he's gorgeous. Wow."

"What on Earth?" Sergei gasped seeing his son and what looked like a very female Yuri step into the light.

"Daa, we want to be bonded." Sascha said as the couple stopped and all eyes turned to look at them.

"Well it's about BLOODY TIME!" Sergei grinned and everyone cheered and clapped. Yuri blushed hotly and turned an embarrassed smile into Sascha's chest. Sascha's arm clutching him protectively, as he'd done since they were small children.

Sergei leaned over to smile at Yuri. "I don't know what you see in him, but you always have been the best thing that ever happened to my son. Think you can give me the honor of bonding you to him?"

"Aye." Yuri smiled a dazzling bright smile and his whole being glowed with joy.

"But tomorrow because I claim the rights to finding my son something beautiful to wear on his new aspect." Petra said as she and Ilya approached.

"Mam!"

"Don't you mam her. Take it from me, you're gonna have absolutely nothing that will fit you properly now. Do you feel balanced now?"

"Aye. You knew?"

"Aye, I am your brother and I am a healer. Your skin never sat right, it does now. You look radiant."

"I feel wonderful. But a bit off-balance in the mundane sense."

"Aye, you'll adjust to your new center of gravity in a few days." Ilya grinned leaning over to hug his brother. "Just be happy."

"I am over the moon." Yuri hugged back turning back to Sascha's loose embrace.

"I don't have to tell you to take care of him, I know you will and have known longer than you two have." Ilya winked at Sascha who smiled.

"Aye, I can be a bit slow on the uptake." Sascha grinned and Ilya laughed.

"Oh enough, we have a bonding to plan!" Anya crowed as she and Petra seized Yuri's hands and dragged him off to goodness knew where.

"Just leave them son. They're in their element right now. They'll bring him back unscathed eventually." Sergei said as Sascha sank into a chair.

Van appeared and pressed a glass of wine into Sascha's hand. "Bachelor party!" He called and all the men congregated around Sascha and began giving him tales that made him blanch.

"And take it from me Sascha. Just smile and nod when he's in a state. When you do have children, pregnancy blows all rationale out the window." Ilya said and Van nodded emphatically.

"Not to mention the cravings and getting up in the middle of the night to raid the galley for your spouse with things that are positively revolting to watch them eat." Van added and got a scowl from Ilya.

"You try waddling down stairs when you're big as a house. You can knock us up the least you can do is fetch food."

"See what I mean Sascha?" Van grinned and Sascha looked pale.

"I don't think you'll be seeing us with babes any time soon. Yuri's not even fifteen yet. I wouldn't do that to his body. Hell I'm not ready to be a Daa yet!"

"Sixteen going on forty-seven." Alexandre chuckled. "I'm not worried at all."

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"Bonded"
Author: D. Sanders

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Sascha stood facing the most beautiful creature he'd ever laid eyes on. Yuri stood beside him, dressed all in white. The tunic he wore embroidered with roses at the collar and the billowy harem pants in an almost see-through cotton embroidered at the ankle in a matching design. He was barefoot and his hair was loose and flowing down his back, white daisies in a ring around his brow. He looked like a bride of all brides when in-fact he was another groom. The female aspect belonged on Yuri's frame, it suit him head to toe. He always had liked pretty things; he looked divine dressed in them.

The bonding was over before Sascha's mind could register the words he was so caught up in just looking at his beloved. Then Sascha was suddenly kissing him as cheers rang out all around them. Yuri was blushing as Sascha released him from the kiss and they turned as one to face the rest gathered on the beach.

Children cavorted with kites, adults laughed and food was eaten and wine poured as Sascha and Yuri strolled hand in hand along the shore. "Now I know how Van feels. I don't know whether to call you me wife or me husband."

Yuri laughed. "It's why Van says 'spouse'. It's genderless." Yuri laughed smiling up at his husband.

"I have to be honest. I really like you this way, you're amazing."

"Good, because I like it this way too. I want to stay this way."

"You just want to wear clothes like that all the time."

Yuri laughed. "That too!"

Sascha laughed and swung his spouse around in his arms. "Then I won't be changing you unless you ask for it."

"Good." Yuri laughed as he and Sascha shared a long kiss, Yuri's feet suspended in the air where Sascha held him up off the ground. Having a larger mate had its advantages and Yuri hooked his legs around Sascha's waist.

"Think we can get away yet?" Sascha asked and Yuri grinned.

"Impatient?"

"Very."

"I think they'll turn blind eyes. It is our bonding day." Yuri chuckled as Sascha headed for the ship and their cabin.

They didn't reappear until several hours later, both slightly askew and rumpled and looking exceeding happy.

Yuri and Sascha stayed only as long as was courteous and then left the party once more. Flasks of wine and satchels of food slung over shoulders as Sascha led Yuri by the hand into the ship and their cabin within.

Yuri fell backward with a sigh into the soft mattress of the bed a smile splitting his face in joy. Sascha crawled in beside him and leaned over for a kiss. Sitting back to run fingers through Yuri's hair, fanning it out over the pillows. "I've always loved your hair. All that golden sunshine just begging to have my fingers in it."

Yuri chuckled. "You always did like playing with my hair. Why do you think I let it grow long?" Yuri asked and Sascha grinned.

"I don't appreciate half the things you do for my benefit as I should. I never knew that."

"I never told you." Yuri winked as Sascha moved to divest his beloved of his clothes.

"You are a treasure Yuri. Don't ever change."

"I hadn't intended to. Oh that's nice." Yuri sighed as Sascha traced lazy patterns on Yuri's naked skin.

"You've got gooseflesh." Sascha teased.

"It's your fault, you spark my desire just breathing sometimes."

"Do I?"

"Aye."

"That's good to know." Sascha grinned as he stood to undress and return to bed. Yuri folded himself into his arms. They lay entwined as the day caught up with them before either of them were ready for it to be over and fell asleep with contented smiles still lingering on lips.

Sascha awoke first and the sight of a very naked and still very much asleep Yuri made Sascha warm with desire. The way the early rays of sun danced on his skin, the way his hair cascaded over the pillows and over the side of the bed. The way his new breasts rose and fell with every breath and the way one knee was bent just so, revealing a now well traversed and well loved territory. Sascha couldn't help himself as he slid down the bed to nuzzle Yuri intimately. Yuri moaned but didn't awaken.

Sascha licked his lips and softly spread apart the folds of Yuri's new sex and very softly ran his tongue over the small nub of flesh he found there. The moan was even louder, but still sleep had not quite lifted. Sascha felt absolutely wicked for tormenting Yuri, but those moans were like a drug and the scent of Yuri's sex maddening. Another swipe of tongue and another deep throated moan. Sascha felt heady and began lapping in earnest; a finger finding it's way inside to add to the sensations.

Yuri woke up moaning, Sascha was hungrily devouring him and Yuri's hands flew into Sascha's hair as his back arched. He was already close to losing his mind and he had just awakened. "Sascha!" Yuri cried out as his body grew taught and then shuddered in pleasure. Sascha was up and between Yuri's legs before he could even regain his breath and driving his sex deep within in

a frantic pace, practically pounding Yuri into the mattress and finding his release in sharp grunts and groans before collapsing sweating and panting on top of Yuri gasping for breath.

"Well, that's certainly a way to wake up." Yuri was wide-eyed; he'd never expected that from Sascha. But then again, He'd never known this side of his beloved. The hunger had been awakened.

"You're too beautiful by a half! You drive me crazy." Sascha groaned disengaging himself from Yuri and rolling onto his back. "You aren't mad are you?"

"Do I look mad? That was a wonderful wake up call." Yuri laughed trying to stand up on shaky legs. He stumbled to the bathroom and began drawing a bath then coming out and pulling Sascha's hand to drag him out of bed. "Come love, I'll wash your back."

"And other bits?"

"And other bits." Yuri grinned as they crawled into the tub together to enjoy the thrill of their new bond.

They spent the last week on the island stocking the ships, getting crew assignments together, getting Yuri a completely new wardrobe for his new aspect and loving each other whenever and wherever the mood took them. Sascha was indeed a sexual being to be reckoned with, it was like he was catching up for lost time and he had the stamina of a charging bull. He was young, in love, and had a beautiful young spouse, it was only natural once the forbidden fruit was supped, he'd hunger for more. At least that was his excuse and he was sticking to it.

Yuri was with Ilya on "the Golden Sun" checking his supply cabinet and garden one last time before setting sail. "I've not forgotten anything?"

"Yuri, you'll do fine. You're a better healer than us all and you do Gran proud with your remedies and herbs. Don't be nervous."

"I'm not nervous. It's just this is it, I won't have Gran to double check with anymore."

"It's not like we're out of touch. Use Sascha's mirror to call me if you have questions. You know all you have to do is look in it, say my name and whoever is monitoring our mirror will come get me. We thankfully have good communication between ships. You'll do fine. I'm proud of you." Ilya said leaning over, the newborn in the sling across his chest cooing. Three days old, and son number five just as beautiful as his four older brothers and one older sister. Yuri leaned over and kissed the tiny crown of black hair.

"Another like Van." Yuri chuckled and Ilya rolled his eyes.

"Danil is the only one to look like me. I may win the battle of coloring yet."

"You're not having more!" Yuri gasped and Ilya shrugged.

"I'm married to a seventh son, seven's a lucky number. I've two sons left to try and cook yet. I promised Van we'd at least try, it's a shame to break the lineage ya know." Ilya winked as Danica and Danil came racing over.

"Daa's looking for you!" Danil said out of breath.

"What have I told you two about running on a ship? You can get hurt. Tell him I'll be right there and WALK to tell him." Ilya said turning to his brother. "Not too late to change your mind. You SURE you want to be a woman? Monsters who never listen tend to fall out of you."

Yuri laughed. "Aye. I'll manage." Yuri said patting a full container of Maiden's Breath before shutting the cabinet.

Ilya just chuckled, kissed Yuri's cheek and passed Sascha on the way up the stairs. Pausing to hug and kiss him goodbye, let him coo at the baby a moment before parting ways.

"All set?" Sascha asked just as Yuri finished locking up the workroom.

"Aye. As ready as I'll ever be to fly solo. You?"

"Nervous as hell, but we got the all clear. Everyone's on board, I just finished a scry and we're to head north of here. All that's left is to lift anchor now."

"Then it looks like its time." Yuri said as Sascha smiled and led him up to the deck. Everyone was on the pier, gathered to properly see "The Golden Sun" off on her maiden voyage.

"Andrik!" Sascha called to his first mate, Andrik came to attention and saluted with a wink.

"Aye Captain!"

"Weigh Anchor!"

"Aye Captain. WEIGH ANCHOR, DROP SAILS, ALL HANDS TO YOUR STATIONS!" Andrik barked the orders and everyone cheered as the sails unfurled, the anchor lifted and "The Golden Sun" began to ease her way out of her moorings. Sascha and Yuri stood waving back at their families as they set to sea. Oksana, a sorceress herself and Andrik's wife walked up to stand beside Sascha.

"I still don't know why you and Andrik don't want your own ship."

"Because I'd SUCK as a captain. I like fishing and farming, I don't want to give the orders. Besides, I'm only a really strong weather witch. I don't want to shift matter; I mess up too much than I care to admit. Let me watch the storms and you can take care of everything else."

"Fair enough. How fair the skies?"

"Fair enough. I've already pushed a thunderhead out of the way, so we'll be clear skies for three weeks."

"Then let's scare us up a good south wind." Sascha said holding up his hands as the wind blew and filled the sails.

"Show off." Oksana winked noticing Yuri's blouse. "Oh, love the seashell motif. Teach me?"

"Aye. You taught me after all." Yuri smiled as Oksana turned toward her husband and Yuri and Sascha watched Safe Harbor Isle grow small in their wake.

Series Title: Following Tides II
Chapter Number: Two
"Bertany Bay"
Author: D. Sanders

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It had been a year since they'd set out to sea, everyone had expected a few rough trials the first few encounters, but Sascha was a good captain, he kept a level head, thought out his tactics and issued orders with an astonishing efficiency. He was definitely living up to his grandfather's expectations of him. Wise beyond his years.

Yuri had settled into his role as everyone expected he would. He'd already been doing this work on "The Nightwind" for years; it was second nature to him at this point. He'd hide in his cabin during the fracas as then become a ghost of healing as he drifted from man to man with quick beautiful grace and then like every other healer would look positively green by the time he was finished.

Sascha held back Yuri's hair while he purged over the side and then help him sit on shaky limbs. "I really hate that part." Yuri sighed, as Sascha pressed a cool rag against his brow and handed him a skin of orange juice.

"As do I. I always wish I could go through that for you."

"No you don't love. It's awful." Yuri said draining his juice still looking pale.

"You look worse than usual."

"It's just my moon is due on top of everything else. It makes me tired the week before."

"Those really don't bother you?"

"They aren't so bad. I'd rather die without, but they're worth it in the end."

"Whatever you say love. Come on; let me help you downstairs so you can eat. Then to bed."

"Aye." Yuri said leaning heavily on Sascha who settled them in their cabin and had food brought to Yuri in their rooms. Yuri only nibbled on a few cubes of cheese before seeking the bed he shared with Sascha and curling up to sleep still dressed. He'd taken to wearing lovely embroidered tunics and blouses over half breeches or full harem cut pants. Every female on board wore a variation of those items. Dresses were impractical for everyday wear. Yuri had yet to wear one, even if he had made himself a few for special occasions, making Sascha matching vests to go with the dresses. They made an extremely handsome couple. Sascha was damn near obsessively protective and possessive, but not smothering. Yuri felt pampered and loved and he pampered and loved right back. He got outrageously jealous if a woman eyed Sascha at supply islands. He never worried, Sascha never even noticed. He had eyes for one woman or man. Yuri. Sascha pulled the cover over Yuri and pulled drapes closed over windows to shut out the light. He kissed Yuri's temple before leaving Yuri to sleep.

The large supply island of Bertany Bay was a bustling port of call. The floating city was so large, they had proper moorings for large galleons like "the Golden Sun" and spanned three miles from

the dry land of the Island it surrounded in all directions. Yuri held Sascha's arm as they walked the marketplace. Yuri pausing to admire bolts of patterned fabric. "See anything you want love?"

"Aye, all of it." Yuri grinned running his hand over a brilliant red brocade. "I want at least a few yards of this. You'd look wonderful in this as a long coat. You look good in red."

"I'm not going to have room left in my wardrobe if you keep making me things. Get something for you this time." Sascha said leaning against the railing as Yuri shopped.

"I will, but I like making you things. You're too handsome not to dress up."

"I'm not a bloody DOLL."

Yuri just grinned and continued looking. "Your wife is a damn fine hand with a needle sir. I'd say best not argue with her. She might poke yer eye out." The old man sitting behind the table smiled, the vest Sascha was wearing was covered in intricate and bold patterns of suns and blue waves. "The Golden Sun" in all its glory embroidered on the back. Yuri was indeed very good with a needle. Sascha swelled with pride.

"Aye. Yuri is a fine hand, I've never been dressed better since we wed."

"She'd make a fortune here. Missus I'd buy anything you had for sale."

"Oh my, I'm not that good. It's just a relaxing hobby for me."

"Hobby? You don't work it for trade?"

"Nay, Yuri is our healer. I sadly keep you busy enough."

"It's my calling love, I do wish you'd stop apologizing for things beyond your control."

"A Healer? Oh Missus, I'd give you anything you want in this store if you'll take a look at me Grandson. Sick and no one can help him."

"Oh dear! Take me!" Yuri dropped the fabric back on the table and hurried after the old man to a small dwelling behind the shop. A small boy was sleeping on a cot in the corner, wasting away and coughing a ragged cough.

"Mercy. Sascha love, take my bag and mix me up some Feverfern and Yallow root in tea please. A pinch of each." Yuri said handing Sascha the bag from his back and sitting down next to the boy and laying a gentle hand to his brow. "It's lung rot. How long has he been like this?" Yuri asked and the old man sighed.

"He started the cough about six weeks ago. Nothing we gave him helped, he's been a bed now two weeks."

"Where are your healers?" Yuri was angry as his hand glowed where he laid it on the boy's rasping chest. Lung rot filled lungs with fluids and a victim would drown slowly with their own infection. It wasn't contagious, it was caused from the bite of a certain spider that made funnel like webs in rotting wood.

"They be always comin' and goin' pirates carry 'em off faster than they can help."

"Aye. My brother had a fate like that. Thankfully his husband saved him from that life." Yuri sighed as Sascha set the tea down beside them.

"And glad of it I am. My Uncle not only saved your brother, but he led me to you too in a way." Sascha smiled at Yuri who tended the child.

"Aye. That too." Yuri replied as the rasping and wheezing began to abate. Soon the child was sleeping, breathing without pain. "There, that's most of it. Just the little fluid that's left, the infection is gone. Have him drink that tea cold. It won't taste as bad. It will make him cough, but they'll be productive coughs. Don't let him swallow what he coughs up out of his lungs. Have him spit it out. He'll be fine in a few days if he stays abed. I'll leave you the ingredients for more tea. Have him drink some every six hours for the next three days."

"Oh bless you Lass! Bless you!" The old man cried and Yuri just smiled.

"It's what I am here in this world to do. It's my calling, no more, no less. We're here for a few days, if he takes a turn send someone to "The Golden Sun" and I'll come back. He shouldn't though, he's a strong boy."

"Just look for the red Sails old man if you need us, that's our ship." Sascha said offering Yuri a hand up from the floor.

"Red sails! You're the Captain of a Red Sail?" The old man gasped and Sascha nodded.

"S'truth! A Wizard in me home! And his healer wife! Always good fortune you bring where you port! I'll be praying for your safe journeys now and forever I will!"

"Thank you." Sascha said setting a small purse of money on the table. "That's for the whole bolt of the red brocade, please send it up."

"That's too much sir."

"No, I think it's just right. Good evening friend." Sascha smiled taking Yuri's elbow.

"Remember, send me word if you need me." Yuri reminded, as Sascha led him back out to the market arms linked once more.

"Aye lass. Never a more beautiful lady I ever done saw. I pray the gods do ye kindness as you do to others lass." The old man said to himself, stunned as he held his grandson's hand as he slept peacefully for the first time in far too many weeks.

"Love you make me so proud to be your husband. You just humble me." Sascha said slipping his arm around Yuri's shoulders as they walked, Yuri's arm finding purchase around Sascha's waist.

"I just did what I have to. I can't see anyone suffer if I can stop it."

"And you do it graciously. I love you."

"I love you too. Why did you buy the whole bolt?"

"Because you liked it."

"You spoil me."

"Aye. I like to." Sascha replied leading them over to a stand that sold flavored ice, Yuri also liked that too. Orange and Peach flavors mixed in particular and it would sit well in his now more than likely slightly upset stomach. Sascha knew healers and this one more than others. Yuri thanked him and they sat sharing the treat together watching the marketplace traffic pass by.

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Sascha and Andrik were out that evening arranging the delivery of the sweet-grasses and feed for the livestock and Yuri was sitting laying out cut pieces of the red fabric to make into a long coat for Sascha when a knock came to the door.

"Yuri, there's an old man here to see you. Said you helped his Grandson earlier today."

"I'll be right there." Yuri said standing and grabbing his backpack and headed down to meet the old man.

"Is he worse?" Yuri asked in concern as he raced down the gangplank to meet the old man on the pier.

"I don't know. He drank the tea and the coughs have brought on trouble breathing."

"I see, I'll come look, we might just have to adjust the dose, that happens if little ones are too sensitive to Yallow root." Yuri said as he followed the old man to his home again to hear the boy coughing inside.

Yuri smiled as he sat next to the boy and reached into his sack and handed him a honey drop. "Suck on that. It'll soothe your throat. Just too much Yallow, he's okay." Yuri smiled once more touching the lads chest to alleviate the stress of the medicine. "Half a pinch in the next dose and the coughing won't be quite so harsh. You do have to cough though love, you have to get that fluid out of your lungs."

"Aye. Thank you Ma'am." The boy said eyes wide as he gazed at the beauty at his bedside falling headlong in a youthful crush. Yuri had long since stopped correcting people who addressed him as a woman, it took too long to explain the truth of things and he really didn't mind. Like Ilya who positively hated being addressed as a woman. Even Sascha now referred to Yuri as his wife to outsiders, it kept things from being confusing. Not everyone could switch genders or even knew it could be done. Yuri never minded, he did like being a woman; he wasn't going to complain about something he liked.

Yuri patted the young boys hand. "You're more than welcome. Just rest now."

"Aye." The boy said dreamily and Yuri chuckled to himself and stood brushing off his skirts as he stood. He'd put on a dress seeing as they were in port and was going to surprise Sascha with a romantic dinner later in their cabin so he wanted to look nice. He put his pack back on and turned to the old man.

"Goodnight. Again find me if you need me."

"Aye Missus." The old man bowed and kissed the back of Yuri's hand. "You bless my home fair lady, Goodnight to you Mam."

"Goodnight." Yuri smiled as he made his way out into the darkening paths of the city. His eyes traveling the stalls still busy with commerce. It wasn't far back to the ship and Yuri wasn't paying attention to anything other than the colorful sights and stalls. Until a voice jarred him out of his meanderings.

"Ain't you a pretty one? What's a lass like you doing out on her own?" A voice purred with a sinister edge and Yuri froze.

"P-please, just going b-back to m-my ship." Yuri's voice quivered with fright. He was no good with strangers, he never had been. Oh how he cursed his debilitating shyness.

"What's the rush dearie? Come stay and have a drink with us." Another man materialized at the first's elbow.

"Aye. Never seen a prettier lassie. Humor poor old sailors with your lovely face."

They moved to surround Yuri, he was terrified. "P-please. My h-husband is waiting."

"So, the goods be already touched and the fields plowed then, all the better, ye know how to please a man then."

"Oh gods." Yuri panicked and tried to just run, he was caught up and he screamed as the men quickly clamped hands over his mouth.

"None of that dearie. We just want to share the wealth." One said reaching over and ripping open Yuri's blouse to fondle Yuri's breasts as he was pressed against an alley wall, another lifting his skirts.

"Legs as fine as the face and spread easily enough I'd wager." Another leered and Yuri was sobbing in hysterical panic.

"YURI!" Sascha was suddenly there, having felt Yuri's panic he raced to find his worst nightmare. Yuri was up against a wall struggling and kicking and men dropping laces on their breeches to have their way with him. Sascha saw red and he glowed with fiery pulsating power. "Let go of my wife before I kill every last stinking one of you." He throbbed with powerful rage, moments away from shredding their matter in a bloody mess. Every inch a very pissed off wizard and he looked it as his eyes blazed dangerously.

"S'truth! Wizard, we we're in jest!" One cried before running hell bent for leather away. The other's dropped their hold on Yuri and he went racing, sobbing into Sascha's arms.

"Jests usually involve laughter and not tears! Get ye gone before I take every tear shed out of your hides!" Sascha growled and men scattered. Sascha scooped Yuri up into his arms. "Love, are you alright?" Now Sascha's voice held an edge of fear.

Yuri just choked and nodded, unable to speak as he curled into a ball in Sascha's arms. His blouse neck torn open exposing his breasts as he clutched the fabric to cover himself. Sascha carried him home and passed concerned crewmen silently as he disappeared with Yuri into their cabin and wrapped around Yuri protectively as he cried. Sascha stroking his hair in a calming gesture. Yuri's beautiful dress ruined and the remains of a cold dinner sitting on their table.

"Sascha." Yuri hiccupped and Sascha just kissed his brow.

"Pigs Yuri, forget them beloved. I will always protect you from them."

"I shouldn't have gone out alone."

"You couldn't have known beloved. There are always bastards out to try and take what's not theirs."

"I feel dirty. I hate my face!"

"Don't say that beloved. Please. It's not your fault and being beautiful is not to blame for this!"

"I hate getting so scared around people. Why, WHY can't I be stronger?"

"Yuri, beloved. You've always been this way, you can't help it, we all know you try love. You can't help your fear of strangers anymore than Andrik can't help fearing hurricanes. It's just a part of who you are. I am here; I will always be here for you. I always feel your emotions and I will always come when you need me."

"Sascha. They touched... Oh gods make me forget!" Yuri sobbed, his hands trembling.

Sascha lay them down and gently traced patterns on Yuri's face with his fingers. Gentle soothing strokes as he kissed closed eyelids. "Yuri, just relax. It's over beloved." Sascha reassured as his hand tenderly cupped one of Yuri's exposed breasts. Lightly, softly, just a palm laid like a blanket of tenderness over Yuri's still frantically beating heart.

Yuri sighed and tried to calm his nerves. Sascha's hand was warm where it rested, love poured into Yuri's breast warming him to his soul. He could always feel Sascha's emotions, ever since they were children. Sascha loved him fiercely, loved him obsessively, possessively. He was angry still with the men who dared touch Yuri. He burned with a rage of indignation and fury. Yuri belonged to Sascha and those men had not realized how close they had come to having their matter torn to shreds.

"Oh beloved." Yuri gripped Sascha's hand and kissed every fingertip. His own fear evaporating as his need to comfort Sascha rose from within. Sascha was a highly passionate creature; he cared so deeply about others it was his single most driving force. His care for Yuri because of their bond was disproportionate to reality. Sascha's anger burned and needed to be cooled before he did what he was contemplating. Waiting for Yuri to sleep before he went back out and did a foolish thing by hunting the men who'd hurt Yuri down and taking his rage out on them and like as not killing them.

"I'll be okay Yuri. I'm fighting my own emotions too. I do not think logically where you are concerned. You're mine and I don't take kindly to men even looking at you let alone..."

"Aye. I know." Yuri said moving to undo the laces of Sascha's shirt. "Love me. Purge away tonight for both of us. You need this and so do I." Yuri knew Sascha did need this, to mark his territory in his psyche. Yuri needed the gentle hands that knew how to touch and love and give joy with the simplest of gestures.

Sascha's kisses obliterated the night's close call and his slow, deep movements as he loved his spouse brought them solace as Sascha's seed, filled Yuri from within with a molten warmth that spread throughout his body as it filled his womb. They slept clutching each other for mutual comfort and it was dawn before either of them stirred.

Yuri was awake and looking out of sorts still as Sascha rose and moved to their couch where Yuri sat, his hands folded in his lap and twisting the fabric of his robe nervously. "Love? It's over."

"It's not that Sascha." Yuri said, his voice ghostly pale in sound.

"What is it then beloved?"

"You'd better sit down."

Sascha knelt before Yuri, looking up into eyes that looked scared and joyful all at the same time. "Tell me Yuri. What is it?"

"Well. There are a few men and women who are immune to Maiden's Breath. I seem to be one of them."

"I don't understand." Sascha began and then his eyes rounded as understanding dawned on him. "Are you saying?"

"Aye. Last night. I'm pregnant. It's a boy." Yuri said his face taking on a serene acceptance and happiness.

"Now? How?" Sascha stammered and Yuri couldn't help but chuckle.

"Now? No. In nine-months? Yes. How? Really now Sascha, I think you know how. Or does your memory fail you when you are so readily and often sowing your seed between my legs?"

"Yuri!" Sascha stammered again and Yuri fixed Sascha with an almost comical look.

"Come now Sascha, like that shocks you? You know perfectly well you are... how should I put this? A Randy cur in heat."

"Okay, that is true. But I meant HOW? As in what did you mean by immune?"

"Some women are. Like Olga. She can take it everyday and it just has no effect. I think for me, it's because I am technically a boy, so it reacts to my body as it would a male and has no effect on my female aspect. I just seem to be not so fertile if it took this long for you to hit home with the number of times you have plowed me like a virgin field."

"Fertile enough. Oh gods, you're only sixteen! Your body!"

"My body will be fine. Women are having babies younger than I. I'll be fine. I'm shocked and not prepared but oh I am happy. I'm having a baby!" Yuri cried and his joy manifested itself by his throwing his arms around Sascha's neck. Sascha returned the laughter and picked Yuri up to swing him around the room.

"A boy? You said a boy?"

"Aye Daa. Your son."

"I want to crow like an idiot. Here I thought I'd be scared and I'd never be ready to face being a Daa. Now? I can hardly bloody wait."

"I know. It was quite a shock to feel it happen. Ilya said it was like trumpets blaring and it is. I feel him alive and glowing all over my senses. I can't bear to think what might have happened last night, had they..."

"Stop Yuri, let's not think of that. He's ours and damn it I want to celebrate! Not think of what ifs."

"Aye." Yuri agreed they'd drop the matter. Yes, had the men raped him they might have indeed impregnated Yuri in his receptive state. But it hadn't happened, nothing more than a passing grope of a breast and abated intent since Sascha had arrived and intervened. Sascha was right; this was a joyous event to be celebrated. They were having their first child and as the morning meal bell rang, Yuri went to the closet and pulled out a lovely summer dress and slipped it on.

"Would you like to make the announcement or shall I?" Sascha said getting dressed himself.

"You Daa. You know I get embarrassed if I have everyone's eyes on me. I'll nary be able to talk!" Yuri laughed running a brush through his hair and braiding it loosely over his shoulder.

Sascha nodded and then went over to the mirror hanging on the wall of their cabin. "But first, let's do tell our parents first. SHOW ME SERGEI!" Sascha said in the mirror and he caught his father mid bite over his morning toast.

"Good morning son! What do you need? Everything all right?" Sergei said back into the mirror on his cabin wall where Sascha's image stood looking out of it. Yuri coming up beside him and Sergei smiled.

"Everything's fine Daa."

"Good. Good morning to you Beautiful, I say you have settled into that aspect nicely. Lovely thing to see first thing in the morning."

"Thank you Daa." Yuri smiled with a blush as Anya came in with Petra chattering then paused when they saw Sergei talking to the mirror.

"Sascha! Yuri! How wonderful. Everything all right?" Anya asked and Sascha smiled.

"Just fine, and I am glad you're all there. I have news."

"Spit it out son."

"Just thought you'd like to be the first to know, Yuri and I, we're having a son."

"WHAT!?" Three voices answered in shock.

"You heard me. We're having a baby."

"HOW? I thought you two were going to wait!" Petra said sinking into a chair, Yuri was so young. But technically older than she when she'd had Ilya.

Yuri explained about the Maiden's Breath and how it just appeared his female aspect would have difficulty conceiving. This might very well be the only child they had, it might not be, they weren't going to take the chance and just revel in the joy of their son.

"Well that is good news. I'll spread the word!" Sergei grinned. Another grandbaby to spoil rotten on the way. Andre had already supplied him with two granddaughters; this was the third and his first grandson. Sergei had a gleam in his eye.

"Alright Daa. Good journey!"

"Good journey!"

From there Sascha and Yuri made their way to the galley, where Sascha climbed up on a table and called for attention.

"I am bursting with news. Everyone, Yuri and I are expecting! Our first son!" Sascha beamed and the room erupted with congratulatory cheers. Yuri blushed as expected but beamed with joy as he received hugs and kisses and Oksana was practically giddy, she herself about four months pregnant.

"Playmates!"

"Aye! And I'm already making baby clothes in my head!" Yuri laughed, his sewing companion looked drunk. They both loved to sit and chat over needles and tea.

"Oh aye. I bought some beautiful fabric while here for it. I'll have to take you back to that shop. Softest wool I ever felt."

"I think I've been there already, but I do want to go back now before we leave."

Sascha grinned. "Then we'd better go, we leave later. Coming too Oksana?"

"Oh Aye, let me find me husband and his purse." Oksana grinned and soon both couples were back at the old man's fabric stall, picking him clean of fabric for the future babies. Laughing and gay with the joys of the morning.

In the tavern across from the shop six men sat scowling. "So that is the Wizard who nearly killed you?" the Seventh and obviously the leader asked.

"Aye Captain."

"Would have served you right for attempting to take a Wizard's wife. How many times have I told you idiots to know your prey first?" The debonair and dapper gentleman Captain warned his crew. Watching the tall, broad, young and handsome raven-haired and blue-eyed Wizard with the Red Sailed ship embroidered on the back of his vest standing outside a fabric stall, talking to an equally tall man, with medium brown long hair braided down his back, a colorful bandana wrapped around his head and a first-mates knot on his shoulder as they appeared to be waiting for whomever was inside. They were laughing about something, both holding mugs of ale and obviously good friends as well as Captain and his first-mate.

"You are very lucky you lived at all. Did you not notice a red-sail in the harbor?" The gentleman continued.

"Aye captain, but."

"No buts. Red-sails are too risky and I've told you a dozen or more times if they are in port you behave, I do not want one of those bastards looking my way and breathing down my neck is that perfectly understood?"

"Aye Captain Sir."

Suddenly two women came out and the gentleman sat bolt upright as they came into view. "By my eyes. What a beauty. Tell me you did not lay a hand on her! If you did I'll kill you myself. She's magnificent."

The men looked sheepish. The gentlemen did not look pleased. "Did you not notice the healing bag on her back? Do I not make it clear healers are ALWAYS off limits to you? Healers are worth their weight in fresh water and more! Never for the likes of you scurvy dogs!" the Gentleman looked livid.

"Aye Captain."

"Get out of my sight, I'll deal with you later." His voice was low and furious, his men left. He sat there looking at the most beautiful woman he'd ever laid eyes on walk into the sun light.

"More brilliant than the sun itself." He was enthralled, what he wouldn't give for that sort of healer on his ship and in his bed. He watched enviously as she walked up beside the young Wizard and he bent to kiss her cheek. He made it obvious in his body language he was highly possessive of his wife, and the gentleman couldn't blame him. She inspired envy and were she his, he'd not tolerate so much as a covetous glance without running the bastard through. How dare his men accost her ultimate perfection! She was a treasure. A Healer and Surpassingly Ravishing on the eyes.

The wizard husband may not have killed those who violated her honor; the gentlemen however would feed those bastards to the sharks himself. There were women and then there were goddesses. Undines of the waves. Enchantresses of men's souls. The Gentleman watched with burning jealousy, he wanted her, loved her at first glance. She'd haunt his dreams for the rest of his life. He stood and walked out and bowed low to her and her Wizard.

"Forgive me my lady. I come to beg forgiveness for my men. I am Captain Edvard Kazamirov, and I will see to it personally they pay for their behavior with their lives."

Yuri stopped stunned and Sascha stepped forward in front of Yuri. "You run with Pirates, Wizard Kazamirov."

"Are we not All Pirates Captain in this world in one way or another? We survive as best we can, and I promise you they will pay for their crimes. I do not tolerate such behavior, especially on something so precious as the most fair healer, your wife. My Lady, madam healer, and most angelic lady of the sea. Please accept my most sincere apologies I vow to you, your honor will be avenged."

"I was not hurt. T-thank you Captain for your words." Yuri's soft voice trembled, music to Edvard's ears. Demure as well as Divine.

"Ah, but I cause you undue duress. Forgive me, I will darken your morning no longer." Edvard bowed deeply. Sascha glowered at him, Andrik looked ready to draw his sword. Oksana looked distrustful and Yuri's gaze was shyly turned away, only a gentle profile against the arm of her husband. Edvard would do anything to possess her. But he withdrew for now.

"I don't trust him." Andrik growled and Sascha nodded, livid.

"I will keep my eye on him. I sense duality."

"Aye. In many forms, he is hard to read. All he said was true, but his motives not at all as they seem. He is muddied and shielded. His emotions not readable. He is a strong wizard." Yuri shivered. "Let's go."

"Aye love. Right now." Sascha said as he and Andrik shouldered bolts of fabric and they left to set sail.

Series Title: Following Tides II
Chapter Number: Three
"Tomas"
Author: D. Sanders

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Yuri's back ached and no position was comfortable as he tossed and turned waking up his husband as he tried in vain to get comfortable. "Love?" Sascha's tired voice asked sitting up rubbing his eyes.

"I'm sorry I woke you up. You're son is standing on my spine tonight."

"How come it's always MY son when you're hurting and YOUR son when he's being a fluttery angel in your middle? Hummmm?" Sascha grinned; Yuri just smiled in return looking tired.

"I have to blame his antics on one of us. Which of us is more assertive?" Yuri countered and Sascha laughed.

"You're right. I take the blame." Sascha said leaning over to shake a finger at Yuri's greatly distended stomach, at eight months pregnant he looked like he was carrying triplets on his small frame. "Alright Tomas, let your Mam sleep or as soon as you're old enough Daa is going to turn you over his knee." Sascha spoke to his son and Yuri chuckled.

"Idle threat Daa. I don't think he's listening. Gee I wonder who he gets his stubborn streak from?" Yuri grinned. Unlike Ilya, Yuri had decided since he never intended to ever have his aspect switched back, he and Sascha decided quite early on in the pregnancy Yuri wanted to be called "mam" instead of "DaaDaa" like Ilya. Yuri embraced his new aspect, he felt more comfortable in a woman's skin and preferred to be referred to as one. No one outside the red-sail circle even knew he had ever been male. And even inside the circle they had taken to referring to him as a woman, because he desired it and so they honored his choices.

"Again I take the blame." Sascha said laying a hand on Yuri's middle to feel the movement. "He's dropped. You're carrying much lower now."

"Aye. It's going to be very soon. The next few days I think. My back is killing me, he's sitting constantly on my sciatic nerve now, he has dropped into position, and I am small, he's just run out of room in me."

"It's not too early is it?"

"Not really, I'm due in a couple of weeks anyway. Those few weeks aren't dangerous and it's not uncommon for the first to be early, especially when you're built like I am."

"I wish we had another healer closer. I don't like you giving birth alone."

"Oksana and Vondra are here. They both have babes and have helped birthing before. I won't be alone. Oksana did alright did she not?"

"You were there to help her."

"And to help myself. Sascha love I do have SOME control over my condition. I will be fine, you worry too much."

"I can't help it. I love you and I worry."

"Thank you love." Yuri leaned over to kiss Sascha and then sat up and batted huge green eyes at him.

"You want something, I know that look." Sascha quirked an eyebrow, waiting for yet another revolting request.

"Would you mind? I'd really like some Grapefruit juice and I have a craving for those pickled beets Vondra made."

"Ah gods Yuri! That's the most disgusting combination yet!"

"Blame your son."

Sascha was already up and pulling on his robe. "I'll be back in a minute."

"Thank you love."

"I'd say 'you're welcome' but I am not going to watch you eat any of it. Van was right, it's positively revolting the choice of foods pregnant women stick in their gobs!" Sascha grumbled heading out to raid the galley at two in the morning.

Yuri just smiled and tried readjusting the pillow behind his back, trying in vain to get comfortable. He had finally fallen asleep by the time Sascha returned, and rather than wake him, Sascha set the food on the table, it would keep, and he crawled back in bed carefully and went back to sleep himself.

~*~*~*

Sascha was sitting behind his beloved supporting Yuri's back, letting Yuri crush his hand. Sascha was positive his index finger would never work again, the blood had been cut off from it long ago and he could no longer feel the digit as Yuri squeezed it to the breaking point with every contraction. Yuri was exhausted, he'd long since used up all his healing strength to assuage the pain. It had been thirty-two hours since the first contraction and still no sign of the baby.

"Yuri? Are you sure it's alright?" Oksana asked worried.

"Aye. He's still fine, just stubborn." Yuri panted, monitoring himself while trying to push in time with each contraction. "Here comes another!" Yuri sobbed pushing, every muscle on fire with pain and effort. His birth canal was small and the baby large. But finally after what seemed a lifetime, Vondra squealed.

"There's the head! That's it Yuri one more hard push and we'll have him!" Vondra had the towels ready and Oksana was helping by pushing down on Yuri's stomach. The baby came out wailing and Vondra quickly cut the cord and wrapped him up, laying him immediately on Yuri's breast as he sobbed and kissed his son with joy while Vondra helped with the afterbirth.

Sascha was crying too as he wrapped his arms around Yuri and his son, looking over Yuri's shoulder and stroking dark hair on a red and angry, but beautiful face. "He's so small." Sascha's hand was practically larger than the babe.

"He's actually big for a newborn. He takes after his Daa." Yuri chuckled through tears, checking for ten toes and ten fingers and inspecting his son with a healer's eyes. He was perfect! Yuri smiled kissing his son's brow as the babe began nursing. Yuri wept again, the sensation of giving life to this tiny person and sustaining him with his body was incredible. Even Ilya said he liked being a woman during this stage of his children's lives. Yuri was high as a kite in euphoria, the past thirty-two hours of pain totally forgotten as he cradled his son. "He looks like you."

"Aye." Sascha's voice was choked up; a lump had lodged itself in his throat as he ran a finger over his son's arm caressing the softest skin he'd ever felt. "Hello Tomas." He breathed leaning over to kiss the top of his head then turning to kiss Yuri. "I love you. Thank you for giving me the world beloved."

"Thank you for giving him to me love." Yuri replied right back resting his head on Sascha's broad shoulder and growing wearier by the moment.

"Here, let me mind Tomas a while now Yuri dear. He's bonded enough for the moment, you need to sleep." Oksana said taking the babe and resting him on her shoulder. "We'll just be in the other room, we won't go far." She winked cooing at the baby. Her own asleep in Tomas' bassinet currently. Oksana rocked the newborn as she settled in the next room, Vondra cleaning up and coming out to join her, leaning over to look at the tiny boy.

"Sascha all over that one."

"Aye. But you know that family, their genes are strong."

"Aye, but Yuri put her own two cents in. He has her eyes." And he did. Tomas may have looked like Sascha in all other aspects but one. He had large green eyes.

~*~*~*

Sascha watched Yuri from where he sat at the table working over his charts. Yuri was feeding their son, rocking him in a special rocking chair that Sascha had spelled so it wouldn't slide about the cabin but still rock if it was being used. Sascha couldn't help but smile, the scene was serene, Yuri was wearing a long white nightgown with a large open laced neck that was currently open to expose her breast. Tomas was playing with the laces as he nursed. Yuri's long hair was unbound and had just finished drying from her bath. She looked fresh and clean and she hummed softly to her babe as she fed him. Her small bare feet poking out from the bottom of her nightgown as she rocked the chair with her toes. When Tomas had been fed, she draped a towel over her shoulder and patted his back until he gave a hearty burp. Sascha chuckled. "Good one son."

"Aye, from his toes that one." Yuri chuckled as she settled the baby back in her arms and continued to rock until he fell asleep. She gently carried him over to the crib beside their bed and lay him on his back to sleep. At just two weeks old, Yuri and Sascha both wanted him close at hand to care for and Yuri yawned as she came over to sit on her husband's lap.

"Why don't you get some sleep too beloved? He'll have you up in a few hours."

"Aye. He eats like there's no tomorrow he does. He's definitely your son, you have a hollow leg too." Yuri teased and Sascha smiled.

"Aye, he gets that from my side of the family, you won't hear me deny it. And I sadly have not the means to feed him. Go on love, in bed with you dearest."

"Come tuck me in?"

"Aye." Sascha followed Yuri to bed and lay beside her, running soft fingers up and down her arms, she loved that, it relaxed her and before long she was sleeping. Sascha moved to peer into the crib, his son was sound asleep too, his little cheeks nursing a phantom nipple. "Your mam is right, Even dreaming about food." Sascha chuckled to himself as he went back to work on his charts. They'd port in Safe Harbor Isle in a few days; they'd have the next four months to enjoy their son on the Isle.

If Sascha could tear him away from his parents who were itching to get their hands on him.

~*~*~*

Sascha carried his son down the gangplank and sure enough his mother immediately relieved him of his tiny burden the minute he set foot on the pier.

"Gimme! Ohhhhhh don't you look just like your Daa did! Hello Tomas, I'm your Gran." She cooed kissing every inch of his face.

"Hello to you too Mam. What am I chum?"

"Cheeky boy." She grinned kissing her son as he bent over to hug her. Yuri materializing behind her husband full of bright smiles.

"Yuri love!" Anya kissed Yuri's cheek beaming brightly. "You look wonderful!"

"I feel wonderful. I recovered quickly." She replied, looking content and beautiful as always.

"I hear he gave you grief during. Thirty-two hours. Mercy! Longest I was in labor was with Sascha. Twenty-hours of him just sitting there, refusing to budge."

Yuri laughed. "So he tells me. Like father like son no?"

"Aye."

"Where's me Grandson!?" Sergei rushed the pier and cackled with delight as he stole the baby from his wife and gave him a complete inspection. "S'truth. Sascha all over. What a brute. He's got your eyes Yuri love."

"Aye. It's all he got from me I daresay." Yuri laughed as Sascha hooked his arms around Yuri's soldiers as Petra pelted across the pier to repeat the immediate absconding of an infant to gush over. Ilya, dandling a nearly two year old Kostya on his hip, a four year old Vasily on Van's, the six year old Oren, the nine year old Evgeni and the eleven year old Twins, Danica and Danil strolling up the pier a little more sedately. Ilya was pregnant again.

"Do you ever stop breeding?" Sergei asked his brother as they stopped.

"Eventually." He grinned and Ilya scowled.

"I promised you seven sons, that's ALL you get out of me. Period. No ifs and or buts."

"I am so glad I was the first and not the seventh son. Ilya, you have my regards for putting up with the curse of the seventh of a seventh."

"I pity your mother. She had nine. I am stopping at eight, this is my LAST pregnancy."

"Current head count is six."

"It's twins again." Van grinned like a smug bastard.

"S'truth!" Sergei's eyes widened like saucers.

"Tell me about it." Ilya rolled his eyes and then turned to his brother/sister. "You had a time of it I hear. How are you feeling love?"

"Fine. Long time in coming, but no worse for the wear." Yuri smiled as Petra showed Van and Ilya the baby since their hands were full of their own.

"God, it was yesterday you were that small." Van said to Sascha smiling.

"So it seems. Here comes Grandaa and Gran." Sascha said as more of the family came rushing over to view the newest member of the horde. Tomas was passed around hand to hand to hand.

Yuri settled under her husband's arm. She loved coming home to the Isle. It was the best of times when they all reunited; love filled the Isle to overflowing.

~*~*~*

Yuri sat on a blanket on the beach, Tomas on his stomach cooing and gurgling at a fold in the brightly patterned blanket as Sascha joined them with a basket of food and chilled pomegranate juice. Sascha just swelled with affection as they enjoyed a peaceful picnic in the clean open air of the Isle. Tomas at three months was a chubby and adorable baby, his green eyes bright and alert as he began cooing in earnest at his father. Sascha smiled even brighter as he set his son in his crossed legs and let him play and chew on his large fingers. Yuri leaned against his side with a sigh and watched father and son bond. "He just lights up when you get anywhere near him." Yuri said resting her head on her husband's shoulder.

"He knows his Daa. Don't you Tomas?" Sascha asked as the baby chewed on his finger.

"I am so happy. I just can't get over how much he's growing. He's already fifteen pounds. He's a little eating machine."

"Aye. Mam says I was too."

"You still are." Yuri teased poking her husband's middle. He had filled out a lot in the past two years. Not heavy, but packed with stocky muscle like his father and grandfather. He'd always be a naturally large male specimen and his son would follow eventually in his footsteps. Broad as a barn, strong as an Ox, and soft as a bear.

"Aye." Sascha admitted the truth as he drank in the warmth of feeling. His wife at his side and his son in his lap. His family was his whole world, he'd cherish them always for making him this obscenely happy.

~*~*~*

Months flew by and before Sascha could blink he was watching Yuri holding Tomas' hands as he tested his legs and tottered across the cabin to his daa. Almost a year old already, Yuri weaning him from her breast a few months ago since he'd cut his first tooth at seven months and it was painful to nurse him anymore. He reached Sascha and grinned, four tiny teeth in a round face.

"Gods you're a cute little cuss." Sascha picked Tomas up and bounced him on his knee as Yuri handed him a toy that immediately went into his mouth. "And slobbery."

"Aye. Cutting teeth like there is no tomorrow." Yuri said sinking into a chair to pour them both cups of tea over their breakfast in their cabin.

"He's growing so fast. A year already."

"Aye. Time flies Daa."

"DAADAADAADAA" Tomas said and both parents' eyes went wide.

"Did he just say Daa?"

"AYE!" Yuri squealed. "Say it again baby. Who's is that?" Yuri pointed at Sascha.

"DAADAADAAAAAAA" Tomas beamed and Sascha looked drunk.

"Aye, son. Aye. And who's that? Can you say Mam?" Sascha asked pointing at Yuri.

"Mmmmmumumummmmm" He sounded more like he was eating a good meal, but close enough.

Both parents laughed and had the baby talking all morning. His first words.

~*~*~*~

Tomas was wailing and Yuri looked harried. He was just refusing to sleep tonight. "Mum, Mum, Mmmmmmmmy" he screamed in frustrated baby rage and Yuri as much as she wanted to give in, couldn't. He had to learn that bedtime was bedtime. He was testing wills. He didn't like his new nursery, he wanted in with his parents.

"Yuri?" Sascha was rubbing a temple.

"We can't give in love. It's a battle tonight. He'll learn, he's got to sleep on his own or you and I will never have peace. He's eighteen months old, he'll live. He just doesn't like it."

"Aye. What a set of lungs."

"Aye." Yuri collapsed beside her husband; it was going to be a long night.

~*~*~*~

They'd reached Nanta Island and Yuri was walking along the paths of her birthplace, Tomas on her hip. She showed the almost two year old the tall canes of sugar and bought him one to chew as she had done at his age. Sascha was talking with the new owners of these fields, restocking stores of "The Golden Sun" and the warm autumn sun shone on fields ready for harvest.

Yuri was drinking in the sights of fond memories when she felt warm and drowsy. She sat down, she felt almost faint and no sooner had she sat, she fell into a deep sleep.

"What about the child sir?"

"Leave it. Hurry." Edvard Kazamirov said as his men bundled up the sleeping healer and quickly carried her off. Edvard's spell had affected the child too and he lay sleeping in the tall cane. Edvard waved his hand to lessen the spell, he would not kill her child, he would wake and wail and the father was not far. In a few hours the child would waken if they didn't find him first. Edvard would have to make all haste; he wanted to be well away from here before one Sascha Sergeivich realized his wife was gone.

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Series Title: Following Tides II
Chapter Number: Four
"Darkness in Stone"
Author: D. Sanders

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Sascha frantically searched the fields, calling out in fear. A baby wailed in the tall cane and Sergei found his son alone in near hysteria sobbing as Sascha scooped him up in his arms. "Tomas!" Sascha sobbed clutching his son to his breast. "Yuri! YURI! YUUUURIIIII!" Sascha was just as frantic, he couldn't sense Yuri anywhere, it was like she had simply vanished.

"Sascha! We can't find her anywhere!" Oksana sobbed and then cried harder in relief when she saw Sergei had found his son.

Andrik came pelting back. "HURRY! Ship cast off about three hours ago. "The Tempest." Locals noted they carried a body on board!"

"Kazamirov!" Sascha gasped in horror running with his son back to "the Golden Sun." The long boats seemed to take forever to reach the ship. Oksana took a wailing Tomas from Sascha as he scrambled up to the observatory to his bowl. Andrik barked orders to get the ship ready to sail immediately. Sascha met darkness in his bowl as he scryed for Yuri. The bastard had her shielded. "Please, oh please give me a direction. Show me "the Tempest!" Sascha begged his bowl, only storm clouds could he see. He turned to the mirror on his wall.

"Show me SERGEI! ALEXANDRE! VANGEL! ANDRE! NOW!"

All faces turned at once to the desperate summons. "Son?" Sergei asked seeing wide-eyed panic.

"Scry! Find me the ship "The Tempest"! He's blocked me! HE HAS YURI!" Sascha sobbed his whole chest feeling torn open. The men vanished from the mirrors only to reappear up in their observatories.

"Nothing! I see only storm clouds! Come on Show me!" Andre said first.

"Same here! It's a cloaking spell. Illuminate shadow! Show me beyond the veil!" Vangel demanded, trying to cut through the spell. There, a glimmer. "EAST! Damn it he sensed me! Go east Sascha. I'm coming too, I'm three days east of you, I'll try and cut him off and keep cracking at the spell."

Sascha stuck his head out of the window and bellowed. "DUE EAST ALL SPEED!" The winds ripped into the sails as Sascha called them up in a fury.

"AH gods!" Sascha sobbed going back to his bowl and finding infuriating darkness in stone. "Show me Yuri! Please!"

"What happened son?" Sergei asked bent over his own bowl.

"I don't know. We were on Nanta. Yuri and Tomas were in the cane. Not five hundred feet away from me. Then just gone! He left Tomas, a sleep spell on him. Which means Yuri is with him and asleep. He didn't block our bond until he was away! Oh gods he must have been planning this!" Sascha sobbed. "I'll murder you Kazamirov!" Sascha was in a rage.

"Sascha! FOCUS! You'll do her no good in a state!" Van ordered, the most powerful of the family wizards until his son Alexi came of age. His own seventh son.

"He's right Sascha, don't lose your head! We know the bond between you and Yuri will distort you. Don't cave in to it; Yuri will need your strength! She'll suffer when she can't feel your bond too and she's not as strong as you. For your lives stay focused!" Sergei pleaded and Sascha nodded, swallowing the bile in his throat.

"Empty. I've never felt so empty." Sascha said softly, a hole in his chest where Yuri's light had always sat since he was six years old.

"We know. We're all coming. We'll get her back!" Andre said to his beloved brother as they worked until they passed out trying to lift the veil of darkness shrouding Yuri.

~*~*~*~

Yuri awoke and flew into a panic. "Sascha! Sascha!" the hole in her chest a gaping wound. She couldn't feel her husband's soul inside anymore; he was utterly gone in her senses! "Tomas! Tomas!" Yuri stumbled out of bed, a rich cabin that was not her own lifting and rising on the waves. A male voice dripped from the shadows.

"Please, my beloved lady, calm yourself."

Yuri whipped around and shrank back in fear. "My Son! My Husband! Where am I?" She demanded and Kazamirov swept forward pinning her against the wall.

"Home my love. I will pamper you for the rest of your beautiful days. You shall have more sons. I left your first with his father. I would nary kill flesh of your flesh."

"No! Oh gods no! You can't! Sascha!" Yuri screamed, clutching her shirt at her breast, the pain intense. "I can't feel him! What have you done?"

"You will live, the pain will fade, I have just blocked the connection."

"You can't! We'll die! We're soul bound! Yuri was frantically trying to get away from Edvard who held her fast.

"Nay, I have spelled the bond. You will no longer feel it, but it will not kill you my love."

"Stop it! Stop it! Oh gods please I beg you, let me go!"

"Nay. Loved you from the moment I laid eyes on you. I will be a good husband to you. I will not beat you if you do as I say. None of my men will dare touch you."

"You're mad! I am bonded to Sascha!"

"And he is not here and will not find you. Come love, you are tired you should rest." Edvard tried steering her to the bed and she fled to the other side of the room trying to flee and the door was stuck fast.

"Don't touch me!"

"I said do as I say! Do not make me angry!" Edvard gripped Yuri's arm and dragged her back to the bed and threw her in it. Edvard moved to begin undressing and Yuri screamed, trying to scramble away again and only to once more be restrained.

"Enough of this. I will have you willing or unwilling." Edvard crushed his mouth against Yuri's, swallowing her anguished sobs. His hands ripping off her blouse and skirts as she struggled. He was almost as large as Sascha and Yuri had not the strength to fight against his superior size and power, but she tried, she'd never go willingly, never.

He slapped her hard enough to stun her. "See what you make me do woman? Cease this now!" Edvard demanded pinning her hands above her head with one hand and running down her body intimately with the other. "Perfection. And what is this? Aspect spell? You are not a woman naturally. Healer male, transgender."

"Let me go."

"Nay. I see I will have the joys of a male aspect too. I do so enjoy them both. Tell me, do you prefer being loved as a female or a male?"

"LET ME GO!"

"Female. You wear this aspect permanently by choice. I will love you for now as a female, I will respect your choices beloved."

Yuri sobbed as Edvard stripped her and tied her hands above her head against the headboard to stop her struggling. His hands touching places only Sascha had ever known. Yuri was too devastated in spirit to fight any longer and she whimpered and sobbed as Edvard entered her.

"Divine. My golden goddess. Do I please you beloved?" He asked dripping kisses across her breasts as he took her, his manhood burning her as he took her spirit and raped it as he was doing her body. His words a sickening contrasts to his actions as he thrust into her forcibly. Yuri sobbed ragged as Edvard shuddered in his pleasure.

"Ah beloved, you are indeed perfection. Tight as a virgin." Edvard dripped as he rolled off her, patting her belly. "My sons from now on, you belong to me."

Yuri wanted to die. He untied her and she curled up into a weeping fetal position in pain all over. He stroked her hair like a lover whispering words of devotion. She willed with her whole being to change, she'd never carry his children, she'd rather be male again forever than to let her body give life to that monster's children. But she was not a wizard and only a wizard could change her aspect. So she did what she could and she wept harder with the knowledge that she might never be able to undo what she was about to do. She focused her gift on her womb, severing her ovaries, sealing the tubes from her womb. Cutting off her eggs, fusing the tubes shut. Making herself barren on purpose, praying with her whole being for rescue, "Sascha." She whispered into pillows as she fainted from terror and exhaustion.

~*~*~*

For weeks, Edvard paraded her around his men like a prized possession, only the few women on board giving her looks of pity. Yuri was pale as a ghost; she never spoke anything other than the names of her husband and son. A haunted woman, a broken woman. Edvard would dress her in splendor, and she'd glide around on his arm like a wraith. At night they'd hear her sobbing as Edvard took her. She was in hell and Sascha and Tomas were gone.

Sascha did not fair much better, He was gaunt with bags under his eyes from sleep deprivation, his bed empty, he couldn't bear to sleep in it without Yuri. He spent most of his time scrying, desperately seeking her, "the Crimson Lady", "The Lark", "The Nightwind" and "the Handmaiden" in formation as they scoured the seas. A fleet of red-sails in search of Yuri. The only thing sustaining Sascha was Tomas. He clutched his son desperately, he cried at night for his mam most. Both of them aching with Yuri's loss down to their very souls, Sascha a shell of a broken man.

"I got you! YOU BASTARD!" Van crowed, at last breaking the veil after weeks of futile efforts. He called his mirror. "EVERYONE, DUE NORTH, THREE DAYS I GOT HIM!"

The winds howled as five ships raced to the rescue.

"CAPTAIN! FIVE RED-SAILS OFF TO PORT!" the lookout cried and Yuri was on deck and her stupor lifted as she raced to the edge.

"SASCHA! SASCHA!" She sobbed seeing the ship named after her racing at top speed toward "the Tempest."

Edvard grabbed her and raced to his cabin, locking her inside then back on deck. "All hands, to arms!" Edvard called out calling up a fog to hide them.

"Oh no you don't!" Sascha spat, dissipating the fog in his fury. It was five angry wizards against one; Sascha would destroy and murder one Edvard Kazamirov today.

It was chaos, five ships boxed in "the Tempest" and men fought as Sascha swung over to face down its Captain. He was ablaze with rage. "WHERE IS MY WIFE KAZAMIROV?" Sascha shouted as he cornered the wizard, under attack from four others. Sascha raised his hand and in his hatred, tore apart matter from the weakened wizard.

Sascha raced into the hull, killing anyone who tried to stop him. "YURI! YURI!" once Kazamirov was dead, their bond had been restored and he felt Yuri's frantic need.

"SASCHA!" Yuri screamed and the door splintered and Sascha raced inside crushing Yuri in his arms, kissing her face, her hair, clinging to her in desperation before scooping her up and rushing back to "the Golden Sun."

Yuri was shaking as Sascha laid her in their bed, her face lost in sorrow. "Sascha! He..."

"He's dead beloved. I killed him."

"He..."

"I know beloved. I know." Sascha held her against his chest, his heart bleeding. His wife used and soul scarred. "I'm so sorry Love. Forgive me, I should have been able to protect you, I failed you." He sobbed, blaming himself.

"No Sascha, please love no. You could not have known. Oh Sascha, I... I had to."

"Had to what?"

"He wanted sons, I Destroyed my womb. Forgive me. Oh please I didn't know what else to do!" Yuri wept in soul numbing grief.

"Beloved. We have Tomas. We have each other. Please dearest, I understand." Sascha wrapped Yuri's mind with his power and took the memory of her ordeal from her mind, he saw it all, what she'd done to survive and prevent, what he'd done to her, Sascha viewed the memories with sobs, his beloved was shattered inside.

Just then Sonja, Ilya and Anya arrived. Two healers and one mental healer coming to heal the emotional torture as best they could. While Anya was not a complete healer of physical and mental means, like Sonja and Ilya, she was imminently stronger where emotions and mental behavioral patterns were concerned. Because what she lacked in physical she made up for in the psyche. Those were her talents.

Before Sascha could bark at them to get out, Ilya held up his hands and his power flooded over them and they sank into immediate sleep.

Ilya took his brother and held him in his arms weeping. "Ah gods, what he's done to you?" Ilya saw it all, just as Sascha had seen. "Sonja, help me. She's sealed her womb in panic. Help me try to restore it. She's so strong, she's hard to undo."

"Aye. Ah gods, Angel what you've been through. But smart, we don't give you enough credit for your inner strength." Sonja stroked Yuri's hair; feeding Ilya power as he tried to heal her self imposed sterilization.

Anya worked on her son. "He's lost. The grief is worse now than it was."

"Because he only suspected before. He knows the truth now, he's had to have seen what he did to her." Ilya was furious; Edvard's words of love while forcing her night after night to endure his perverse pleasure in his bed were beyond cruel. His twisted desire and coveting of her beauty had made Yuri hate herself and her face. It was not her fault and it would take a very long time to make her believe it.

"He's heartsick, he feels like he failed her. Ah gods, soul bonds do not deserve the distortion of their love. Neither of them are to blame!" Anya wept as Alexandre, Sergei, Vangel and Andre came.

"Can we help?" Van asked and Ilya shook his head where he rocked his brother.

"Nay, just pray we can lesson their sorrows. Soul bonds are very hard to handle. What one feels the other augments and vice versa. They will spiral out of control unless we turn it around immediately. Just keep Tomas occupied, he doesn't understand why he can't see his Mam or Daa." Ilya said and Van nodded, if there was one thing he knew, it was children, he did have eight of his own, so he went to get the baby and take him over to play with his own for now.

Sergei sighed and collapsed in a chair. "Twenty men, he killed twenty men without batting an eye. The wizard is covering the deck."

"Aye. And you would have too for you wife." Alexandre said looking at his. "I'd have done the same in his shoes. I did once."

"That was a long time ago Alex."

"Aye. But I still carry it with me, as he will do. As she will."

"Daa? Mam?"

"It was before you were born dear. Just before I bonded to your father, I was fourteen and he had just proposed to me. Like Yuri, I was taken. I know what she's going through."

"Aye. As I know what Sascha is going through, I killed every last one of them, tore them all apart. We're men like any other, we anger and fear like any man. Our powers make us dangerous and are a cross to bear and a burden on our souls."

"I never knew." Sergei said and Sonja smiled at her son.

"We never told you. Life can be cruel." Sonja sighed as Ilya's glow began to fade.

"I did the best I could. One side partially open. If she ever can get pregnant again, it will be difficult. It's possible, but highly unlikely now." Ilya felt devastated. Yuri so loved being a mother.

"There is hope though, before there was none."

"Not much. It would be a miracle." Ilya laid his brother down and kissed her brow. "Love, you did only what you could, I'd give anything to remove this memory for you."

"So do it."

"We can't. We can only lesson the emotional attachment to it; we can't take it away entirely. She'll not relive it, she will see it rationally now and not have the gutting ache, but she will never forget. Only time will heal the rest. The raw edges of the wounds are healed, but they go very deep." Ilya said going to change her clothes. "Burn these. They aren't hers, but what he forced her to wear." He said tossing the richly brocade dress away and pulling out one of the light nightgowns Yuri had made for herself and dressing her in it before covering her up.

Sascha's slept deeply as Anya leaned back and laid him beside his wife with the help of his father. "He'll only feed off her now. Like they used to, They'll have pain, we can't stop that, but they'll be able to move forward now. We're only three days away from Safe Harbor Isle. We should port early. They'll need time to themselves. I say spell them to sleep until we reach port. They need rest, they're both weary to the bone."

"I agree. Daa can you spell them both to do nothing more than sleep and eat?"

"I can do that. Have food brought in, they'll wake only long enough to eat and even then it will be like sleepwalking for them. I'll make it last four days, which will give us time to port and get them settled in their cabin on the beach. Let them awake in surroundings they love." Alexandre said casting the spell.

"I'll tell Andrik the course." Sergei said leaving. Ilya followed him.

"I'll keep Tomas until we get there. He can terrorize his cousins for the journey. What's one more eh? It's not like I ever get to sleep anymore anyway. Sonja how did you do it?"

"They leave home eventually." She smiled pulling out a blanket. "I'm going to stay here and watch over them. Anya?"

"Me too, I can't in good conscience leave."

"Right, then see you in three days." Ilya said heading back to his ship while Anya and Sonja settled into their silent Vigil.

Series Title: Following Tides II
Chapter Number: Five
"Healing"
Author: D. Sanders

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Sascha awoke confused, he vaguely remembered sleepwalking the past few days. He felt the lingering traces of a spell lifting and he blinked the fog away realizing he was back home on Safe Harbor Isle, in his and Yuri's big comfy bed with the windows thrown open and the smell of honeysuckle and jasmine wafting in the windows. It was just about mid-morning and he heard a seagull call in the distance, the sounds of the waves washing up on shore and the tinkle of the seashell wind chime Yuri had made during their last visit gaily welcomed the morning.

Yuri was still sleeping beside him, and Sascha pulled her into his arms, drank deeply of her fresh scent. The soap she made out of peaches still lingering in her hair, her dark skin on crisp white sheets and framed in her white night shift looked as rich as tea as light long eyelashes kissed her cheeks. "Yuri." Sascha breathed, shuddering as he wrapped around her, his love for her so strong it was suffocating him. He blessed his family for bringing them here, getting them to a place of safety and giving them the rest they both had so desperately needed. The rage and blame was gone, now it was the ache that came after sorrow, the lingering sadness that would purge itself in time. They were whole, they had one another again and that was all that mattered. He had her back and he'd not lose her again.

Yuri's eyes fluttered open to see big blue eyes gazing at her. "Sascha!" She cried her arms reaching up to embrace him, her face pressing into his chest as she cried.

"It's over beloved. All over." He reassured, stroking her back softly, calming her.

"Tomas! Where's Tomas?"

"Think love, they've had us spelled. We're on the Isle; he's more than safe. I hear Ilya and the kids on the beach, will you be all right long enough for me to go out and check?"

"Aye." Yuri sniffled leaning back. Sascha kissed her brow as he stood. Clad only in loose cotton pants. His strong chest bare and his muscular arms shoving sleep tangled hair out of his eyes as he stood. Yuri shivered. "You've lost weight beloved."

"Aye." Sascha smiled back at her as he reached the door. Ilya was indeed just down the beach, the children playing in the surf. One dark haired toddler catching sight of Sascha standing in the doorway of the small bungalow.

"DAA! DAA!" The child came racing over and Sascha squatted to scoop him up in his arms. Hugging him fiercely, Ilya just waved and carried on, scolding his own toddler, again, for trying to wander off too far.

Sascha turned and took the child inside. He immediately demanded to be let down when he saw who was also inside. "MUMMY!" He burst into tears as did Yuri as he scrambled up onto the bed and launched himself at her.

"Oh baby, sweetheart, please don't cry. Mummy is alright. Tomas love it's okay." Yuri cried kissing his two year old face joyfully, holding him tightly to her breast as he joyfully embraced her. Sascha sat in bed with them, his arms around them both.

"See, Tomas? Daa promised he'd bring mummy home didn't he?"

"Aye." Tomas croaked and Sascha laid his large hand on his son's hair and kissing Yuri's temple. Yuri sank into his arms, Tomas cradled in hers.

"No more tears. We're together again." Sascha reassured and Tomas' tears stopped almost as soon as they'd begun and he sat up on Yuri's legs smiling. "Mummy! Look." He showed her a shell he'd been clutching in his hand the whole time.

"Oh, how pretty." Yuri indulged, it was broken, covered in sand, and it stank of its former occupant.

"Shell!"

"Aye. Can Daa see it?" Sascha asked and he was handed the shell which he quickly set aside before the toddler got sand in their bed and he stood. "Think you can take care of mummy while Daa finds her some breakfast?"

The tot nodded emphatically and Yuri smiled into the hair at the back of his head. Her eyes peering at Sascha amused. Oh but it was good to see life in her eyes, Sascha fell into them and leaned over to kiss the top of her head.

"Me! Daa ME!" Tomas puckered up comically.

Sascha chuckled "Oh Bad Daa. Forgive." He said as he kissed his son.

"Mummy turn!" The toddler directed and Yuri laughed and kissed and tickled him. Sascha was smiling as he wandered outside in search of food which was sure to be nearby. Their cabin was only a few minutes walk from the main longhouse and communal community kitchens. He came back loaded with fruit, juice, breads, cheeses and cold meats. Yuri was playing patty-cake with Tomas as Sascha returned and they made a picnic in bed as a family.

Tomas adding greatly to the healing process. One couldn't stay sad with his bright cheerful face and attitude infecting them. He was thrilled to have his parents back and that's all that mattered to him. His mummy was the center of his universe, and his Daa was the one who chased away scary things, everything was right again in his world.

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That evening they tucked their son into a little cot in the living room, tomorrow Sascha would shift around some lumber and expand their little raised bungalow around, adding a room for Tomas. Tonight he was too exhausted to care where he slept and so were his parents who had spent that day showering him with attention.

Sascha was reading him a story and somewhere in the middle of the sea battle with the dreaded sea-serpent who had stolen the pirate's treasure Tomas had fallen asleep and Sascha tucked the book away as Yuri secured the blanket around him and blew out the lights in the living room while Sascha made sure the mosquito netting around the bed was draped over the sleeping toddler. Once they made sure he was settled and protected they walked back to their room and shut the door.

The sadness took them again as they readied for bed themselves. Yuri trembling as she changed into her nightgown. Hugging her bare arms over her chest, Sascha enfolded her in his arms. She shivered.

"Just let me hold you, that's all I ask beloved." Sascha whispered and Yuri nodded against his chest.

They lay in the darkness silently, just taking comfort being next to each other. It would be a long time before Yuri would be able to be more intimate again. Sascha would wait for an eternity if needed. She lay beside him, her head against his shoulder as she absently traced fingers across the thatch of black hair between Sascha's pectoral muscles. He wasn't a hairy man, but he did sport a thick thatch of it squarely in the center of his chest, and Yuri had always remarked how soft it felt. She was unconsciously running her fingers through it as they lay there in the darkness; she was taking comfort in familiarity.

"Ilya healed me a little. I can feel it." She said breaking the silence.

"I thought he did. I vaguely remember conversations while we slept. Love I don't care if we have anymore children. I just care about you and Tomas. Honestly love."

"I know. I just wish now I hadn't."

"Love, please. We cannot dwell on what ifs; it will kill us if we do. I wish I had gone with you, I wish I had the foresight to check who else was ported. So many things I could have done differently and not a damn thing I can do to go back and change things. Nor you beloved. If we dwell on it we will never move forward."

"Aye. I know. But still..."

"No buts beloved. If we can't have anymore children together and you want more, we can adopt. Simple as that. There are plenty of children who would be blessed having you as their mother."

Sascha felt a tear trickle down his chest and his arm around her back tightened. "I love you Sascha."

"I love you too Beloved." Sascha kissed her brow tenderly where she used his chest as a pillow. She fell asleep in his arms.

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Having ported two months early, it was only the five ships and the locals. Safe harbor Isle seemed almost empty in comparison to the hustle of thousands of people when all ships were in port. The following day, while Van, Sergei, Alexandre and Sascha messed about with expanding the bungalow. Yuri, Ilya, Anya, Sonja and Petra played with the children on the beach.

Sonja and Yuri wandering off hand in hand in deep conversation.

"Love, the best way to heal is to let go. Believe me I know." Sonja began, relating a story of her own.

"I was born far south of here. It was so cold most of the year, huge Icebergs drifted by almost daily. We wore sealskin coats eighty-percent of the time and baths? Water was so cold and the air so cold it was courting illness to get wet. What Alex saw in me then I have no idea. But he

was on his maiden voyage, all cocky fifteen year old that he was and like a graceless idiot, fell ass over tip into the water slipping on ice. Cracking his thick skull open in the process and falling into the sea and almost drowning, I and my mother tended him. One can get hypothermia almost instantly falling into those waters." She began as they strolled the shoreline.

"But he was handsome. Sascha looks exactly like his Grandaa at the same age. He woke up after a day or so, looked me right in the eye and proposed right then and there. I thought his brain addled. Who'd want a skinny nobody like me? But our magic had mingled while I tended him and he'd fallen in love with my gifts it turned out. I told him to piss off, that he was mentally off his rocker and a host of other things. That clinched it for him; he loved me for me then. He always did like a good argument." Sonja chuckled at the old memory.

"I refused for a good week or more, but he's relentless and I really wasn't putting my heart in my denials. He was quite charming and persuasive. What girl in her right mind refuses a handsome lad bribing her with cherries and peaches and a host of other exotic fruits and things she's never heard of let alone seen? Not to mention the same girl's mother practically lacing the bed with rose petals in approval. I caved and accepted I did love him too." Here Sonja sighed, she was getting to her ordeal.

"It was my bonding day. Alex was on board "the Handmaiden" and mother was scrubbing me within an inch of my life. I was dressed in white fur and I hardly recognized myself by the time she'd finished preparing me. I felt pretty for the first time in my life and I had a horrible case of the jitters and I decided I needed fresh air before I climbed into that long boat to go get bonded to a practical stranger. That walk cost me greatly. The next thing I knew I was in a sack and being scuttled off by pirates. Alex was so busy below decks preparing, no one noticed the ship leave. They killed my mother and it wasn't until Alex came to get me worried when I didn't show up for our wedding he found her dead and me gone. He was furious." They settled on a rock, Sonja rubbing the pad of her thumb lightly against the back of Yuri's hand.

"I was taken and passed from man to man to man for three days. I had been a virgin, my first experience with a man tainted beyond all belief and I was a shell of my former self in just three days time. Alex found me naked and battered in a storage room. Freezing, bleeding and lost. I didn't know what happened until much later. I was out of my mind, literally. It took months of Alex caring for me before I came around again, could even bear for him to look at me. Let alone touch me. I found out during this time Alex had killed them all, right down to the last sailor. He had never killed before and a hundred men became lost to the sea that day for what they did to me. He was tormented with his actions. He hurt just as much as I did. We overcame our grief together, we had to, we loved each other too much to allow the other to suffer. We bonded about a year later when we reached this Isle. Sergei was born the following year and we never looked back. So you see Yuri love, you can move on and the sooner you go back to what you had, the sooner you find joy again. Loving Alex all these years was and is my joy. The way he held me, loved me, held his children, and pampered me my whole life. Almost sixty years now. And I love him more today than I did then. Joy is in the loving, in the everyday things. He's not bad looking for being almost seventy-five either."

Yuri chuckled and leaned over to hugged Sonja. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be love. Some men are pigs, some women cruel as the year is long. It's when you find the good ones you hold on tight and love them for all they're worth. Just as Sascha loves you and you love him. I saw you two bond that day on Nanta and I've watched your love grow over the years. It warms my heart to see and my heart aches for you both having to face what Alex and I did all those years ago. But you're both strong and your love will see you through this."

"Thank you Gran."

"Anytime Dearest. Now shall we go back before they miss us? I could do with playing with my Great-Grandbabies before I get to old to keep up." Sonja's eyes twinkled. Still a handsome woman herself at seventy-four. She was aging remarkably well and looked not a day over fifty, her once jet-black hair now peppered heavily with purest white.

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Sascha watched Yuri and Tomas making sand castles in the wet sand, both of them drying in the sun from paying in the surf. Yuri's already dark skin, several shades darker now from exposure to brilliant summer rays and sporting about in crystal clear waters. She loved to swim and was teaching Tomas to appreciate the water as much as his mother did. She was wearing shorts and a halter and nothing else. Her smooth limbs open to the air. Tomas was in nothing but his nappies as he buried his own legs in sand. Sascha got up from their porch to go join the play.

"Where are my son's feet? Mummy where did his feet go?"

"Here Daa!" Tomas grinned pulling his legs out of the sand and wriggling his toes and Sascha mocked shock.

"MAGIC!" He cried and Tomas laughed. Yuri smiled and shaded her eyes to look up at her husband. Wearing hardly more than his son as he flopped into the sand and let Tomas begin burying his legs in sand.

"I was beginning to wonder when you'd join us Daa. You're getting lazy." Yuri teased and Sascha winked.

"I like the new porch swing."

"So I noticed." Yuri chuckled dusting sand off her arms and moving to sit beside Sascha, her head on his shoulder. "I love this beach. We had dolphins this morning. Tomas loved them."

"I missed that, damn."

"You were helping unload this morning. Everyone's here now, it's lovely being all together again."

"Aye. Did you see Danil and Danica on those flat boards? How those two can stand and ride waves is fascinating."

"I know, Tomas wanted to try it too, he was up to his waist before I snatched him. Little stinker is fast."

"Goodness gracious. And here we were excited when he learned to walk!" Sascha laughed and Yuri smiled up at him.

"S'truth. From Standing to running overnight. I want to learn how to do that first before he tries it, it looks dangerous."

"If Ilya can stand letting them do it with as overly protective as he is, I'm sure its safe enough mam."

"True. He complains a lot, but all empty words, his kids are everything to him. But I do think we've seen the last of his female aspect. He's serious, Van is getting no more children out of Ilya." Yuri chuckled and Sascha noted that the sadness was gone when Yuri mentioned children. She was healing.

"Aye. I can't imagine eight when just one wears me out." Sascha replied watching his son pile the sand on, Sascha was stuck fast.

"Amen! Oh Tomas that's enough honey, You've buried Daa." Yuri chuckled freeing her husband's legs. "I'm going back in the water, who's coming with mummy?"

"ME!" Tomas chortled and both parents took his hands, swinging him between them as they went swimming, Tomas clinging to his Father's back as Sascha swam them around for a while and then Tomas dog paddling between them as he learned to swim on his own.

He was out like a light for his afternoon nap as his parents washed the salt of the sea off and settled down on the swing outside with sparkling grape juice and cheese. Enjoying watching Danil and Danica and their cousins out cavorting on their surfboards again, Ilya looking about to piss himself with anxiety as he monitored them. Van joining in the fun a little later and wiping out more times than he succeed. His eldest children heckling their father much to Ilya's sadistic delight as he watched his husband, a powerful wizard who controlled hurricanes and lightening lose the battle of wood and water sports.

"Oh, I have to try now!" Yuri was up and heading to the water again. Sascha stayed on the swing and enjoyed the show. Yuri wasn't too bad. She succeed a few times, laughing as she paddled out and rode the waves back in about half the time, the other half chasing down a board that she'd fallen off of. The children at least encouraged her and saved the teasing jeers for their father's benefit.

"Just whose side are you monsters on?" Val hollered taking seaweed out of his hair.

"Aunt Yuri's!" They all caroled in unison.

Van rolled his eyes at Sascha who laughed. Poor Van, he got no respect.

Ilya was choking up a lung in laughter, sitting with Sascha on the swing now in the shade watching the play-by-play action, the littlest children sleeping with Tomas inside.

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That night, Yuri happily got ready for bed, humming to herself as she folded back the covers and blew out the candles. The moon was full and it's light flooded into the window. Sascha checked on Tomas, fast asleep and he shut the door and walked over to his wife, wrapping his arms about her. "You looked like you had fun today."

"I did. It's all in balance, once you get the hang of it and stop over compensating it's fairly easy. Van just over balances, he's top heavy, leans out too far and splash." Yuri chuckled hugging her husband's hips. "You never braved it I see?"

"Mercy no. I'm even more top heavy than Van. I'd much rather cheer from the sidelines." Sascha grinned leaning over to kiss his wife. She responded nicely.

"Mmmm. You had mint." She purred and Sascha grinned.

"Toothpaste."

"Still nice." Yuri sighed still in good spirits. "Come kiss me some more?" She asked crawling into bed.

"Beloved you never have to ask for those." He replied crawling into bed with her and kissing her soundly. The spark had returned and she responded like she used too from his kisses.

They loved again for the first time since the incident that night. It had been almost three months, but at last they were moving forward and regaining some of what they'd lost. Sascha trailed kisses up her stomach after they'd make love and he drank in her beauty like a starving man at a banquet. He'd missed this more than he'd ever let her know.

"You are so wonderful Sascha."

"I was just thinking the same thing Beloved." Sascha replied kissing her again with his joy at seeing her whole again. They nestled together in the darkness, the sorrow just a memory as they loved and moved on with their lives.

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Series Title: Following Tides II
Chapter Number: Six
"Epilogue"
Author: D. Sanders

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Tomas stood on the deck of his ship "the Handmaiden" inheriting it when his Great-Grandfather had retired to the Isle unwillingly at eighty-eight years old. Sonja insisted and he did as his wife ordered. Tomas had been it's Captain now for four years, and at almost twenty years old he was a handsome man indeed. Not quite as broad as his father, his mother had a little influence on his build beyond giving him her eyes and her love of the water and surfing. He was looking forward to seeing his parents again as Safe Harbor Isle came into view. Being an only child, he had received his parents' undivided attention growing up, and his mother had a hard time letting go when he'd turned fifteen.

Now however she and his father had a new little one to care for. Not of their own, Yuri had never been able to conceive again after the incident no one talked about, Tomas only knew vaguely what had happened and had learned that from Ilya discreetly when he was about thirteen and was wondering why he had no other siblings when that family was famous for spawning broods of offspring, Ilya gently told him the barest truths to stop him inadvertently hurting his mother's feelings. Tomas never told his mother he knew, he loved her too much to let her know he knew... she hadn't wanted him to know.

The new babe had been a rescue off a ship demolished by a storm. Only seventeen people of a crew of fifty had survived, and the child's mother had been in labor when they'd pulled her on board "the Golden Sun". She was so dehydrated and weak she hadn't survived even with Yuri frantically trying to save her and the baby.

The child had no surviving family and the only other survivors of the ship insisted Yuri was the best replacement mother the child could have so Yuri had kept the girl as her own to raise. Tomas was looking forward to meeting his six-month old little sister. He'd only ever seen her in the mirror when his mother and father hailed him with the news. His mother, always the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen, even if she was technically a boy. Tomas knew that much about his mother's true aspect, she looked radiant as she held the baby in her slender arms. He had never known his 'mum' as a male, just like he had never known his Uncle Ilya's female aspect, but according to his father even in male form, Yuri had been breathtaking. They had married very young, and were still quite young enough to chase after another baby even with a full-grown son of their own.

Tomas was in a wistful mood as he thought about his parents. Soul-bound to one another since early childhood, He was envious in a good way. Not that he hadn't experimented with lovers of his own, Male or Female, he got that from his father. Gender was irrelevant, the person on the inside is what Tomas was attracted to and he'd had half a dozen conquests or so. Fun-loving, no strings attached mutual interest. Nothing he'd call even remotely love. Affection or lust nothing more substantial. He wasn't in a hurry to settle down, he'd know when he met 'the one' eventually. Until then he was enjoying life as Tomas Saschavich, Wizard Captain of "the Handmaiden" and sometimes amateur bard. He was a fair hand on the mandolin and had a rich tenor when he sang. He plucked about in his free time, winning men and women to his bed with the turn of a ballad or two. His father called him a Randy Cur and his mother would roll her eyes, look pointedly at her husband and cough "ahem" politely. Sascha would at least look apologetic. Like Father like son apparently.

"The Golden Sun" was already in port when "the Handmaiden" made her moorings and his parents were waiting for him on the pier as he raced down the plank to greet them. His father was holding the baby so Yuri could throw herself into her sons arms the minute he touched deck. Tomas kissed her soundly and twirled her around before setting her back down. "Still the most beautiful woman in the world to me, mummy."

Yuri laughed. "Goodness, you haven't called me 'mummy' in ages." She laughed taking the baby so Sascha could squeeze the life out of his son.

"You just made her night, Good boy." Sascha laughed as he let his son go to hold him at arms length for inspection. "Almost as Tall as Daa now."

"I think this is it Daa. Not changed in a couple of years at least, I got some of Mum in me too you know." Tomas winked a huge green eye at his mother before leaning over to look at the baby. "Hullo bright eyes. Can big-brother have a look at you?" Yuri handed the baby to her brother and he smiled down at her. "Better brush up on stunning spells Daa. She's gonna be a looker."

"Aye. No worries, any boy daft enough to woo her too quickly or insincerely will have to face me."

"Oh for gods sakes. You both are horrible. We have a few YEARS yet before Tatiana's even old enough. S'truth!" Yuri rolled her eyes taking the baby back in her arms.

"You know what they say Mum. Daa's little girls and all and Mummy's boys. Who was it cried for days when I turned fifteen?"

"That's different." Yuri protested and Sascha laughed.

"He's got you there love. He was the biggest Mummy's boy of all."

"Still am." Tomas kissed his mothers head, laying an arm about her shoulders proprietarily.

Yuri glowed. "Son, you're earning points tonight!" Sascha laughed as they headed back to the Isle happily as a family reunited.

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Four months flew by and Tomas was up in his observatory scrying. Snow and Ice met him and a spinning compass pointing due north and an Isle he'd never seen came into view. "What on earth?" He was confused and pulled out his charts and maps. There was nothing charted in that direction from Safe Harbor so he asked for the course again just to double check. And once again the same images came.

"Oh ho! Interesting..." He jotted notes on a map and took them to his father.

"There's nothing there on any maps."

"I know, but I checked it twice in my bowl Daa. Same course both times and it was definitely an Island. Looks like I'm off on an adventure."

"Take extra stores, that water is full of Icebergs and not a supply Island for six weeks hard sailing in any direction."

"I'm going to, already stocking extras. I'm going to take Elena as Healer this tour of duty. She's from cold climes and we work well together. I don't want to take a journey like this without a good experienced healer. I'm also taking Igor; he's the best mapmaker we have. We'll at least chart a new Island if nothing else."

"Aye, good thinking. When you off?"

"Stocking now, three days I think, four if we drag our feet, five if mum tries to tie me down." Tomas winked at his father who chuckled.

"Your Mum loves you. She still sees her baby boy."

"Like you don't daa?"

"I never said that." Sascha winked folding up the map. "But I can't deny you're a good captain. Call us if you need us."

"Absolutely. Good night Daa."

"Night son."

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Four Days later "the Handmaiden" set course and sailed north with two extra passengers. Alexandre and Sonja.

Tomas worried for their health, they were both over ninety even if they didn't look it yet. They both had strong blood and adventurous spirits and Wizards and Healers did live a long time naturally. Magic extended normal life spans by a good fifty years or more in most cases. Great-Great-Great Grandfather Anastas had lived to almost one-hundred and eighty before he'd passed. So at the least Alexandre and Sonja had about twenty or thirty years left in them if they retired properly. Which they weren't about to do it seemed. "We're not in the grave yet boy!" Alexandre grumbled. Sonja just smiled.

"You're going into cold climes. I like Elena lived in very cold waters; I want to be here just in case she needs a hand. Cold has it's own dangers. Extra power to keep the ship warm will come in handy with your Grandaa at the very least. He's not so old he can't produce heat, he is full of hot air."

"Woman, I'll give you hot air!"

Tomas laughed. They were still ornery, that was for certain and extra help might not be a bad thing after all. Besides, Alexandre hated retirement with a passion. He was still a formidable Wizard and he just had to have one last time on the sea. Once a sailor, always a sailor. Retiring to a landlocked life never sat well when the sea was in your blood. Tomas was going to let him have it. He even vacated his cabin for them, and they balked adamantly.

"This is YOUR ship now son. Your Gran and I just need a bed; I don't need room to keep charts and maps anymore. I am no longer this ship's Captain. You are. Keep your rooms, next door is fine, Sergei's old bedroom is more than sufficient." Alexandre and Sonja insisted and refused to budge. Tomas just did as told as they sailed north into the unknown on an adventure that beckoned them ever northward.

The image in the bowl never changed. Tomas would watch it for hours, anticipating. He knew. Deep down he knew he was going to have the adventure of a lifetime.

Something was there that he was meant to find.

And find it he would.

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END of Part II
To be Continued...