

THE STRIDER AND THE REGULUS – *Excerpt*

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Swift let the pressure off the mainsail.

The wind evaporated like an escaped dove. The relieved sail fluttered as Swift pried the oar from the stow and eased the ship around.

He tightened the sail again and aimed for the *Regulus*' port.

The wind responded true, and his sailing in was a promenade, his brothers watching, his father's mouth held open in a smile.

Even Edric looked a bit proud, though he seemed to be trying to mask it, glancing down as he was.

Though the *Strider* kept true to her course, moving east, the wind felt like a different species that what Swift had been working. It took all his attentiveness to each gust to keep the telltales in check.

But he did it.

And reaching the big ship's hull, letting the *Strider*'s sail fall, Swift felt ready to dissipate into the sky with the unfettered wind.

Justus, following him around the ship to portside, was clapping.

Edric backed up from the rail and ducked beneath the sails to the stern, where he stayed.

Caius and Trystan threw down ropes.

Swift caught them and tied them to the *Strider*'s gunwale, then dropped onto her bench.

The stint on the *Strider* had been exhilarating, but he was aching and grateful it was over. He'd just have to manage one sail, probably, while they all worked the *Regulus* together to sail north to the cove.

Justus leaned over the rail. "Brilliant work, Lad. You should be proud."

Swift's smile could not be checked. "Can we sail north now? We've got plenty of light."

Justus, though smiling brightly, was shaking his head. "There are lessons still unfinished for you here. Climb up, and Caius will put you on the jib."

Swift's smile left him as he watched his father disappear.

"Climb on," Caius called down.

Swift peeked around the hull of the big ship to glimpse his cove.

Its blue waves had grown even bluer with the sun, tending west.

Every rise of every wave looked like a beckoning hand.

"Swift?" Caius called down, one eyebrow raised.

"But—the treasure," said Swift, low enough that Justus might not hear.

Caius leaned on the rail. "Your best shot at treasure hunting involves cooperating."

"We're so close." Swift finished knotting the *Strider* to the *Regulus*. "I know how to sail, now. It's time we go after it."

Caius glanced over his shoulder, then lowered his voice. "Some true practice at sailing is part of going after your treasure, right?"

Swift shrugged. "Yeah, but—"

"Many things, which you might pursue, are complicated like this," said Caius. "The path isn't always direct. Often, it involves a lot of work you might not've expected."

Swift climbed onto the netting on the flank of the *Regulus*.

“Not everything you want will be right there in front of you,” Caius kept on. “Not everything will be just a quick sail away. There’s a lot of sweat involved. And to be good at it, you actually must love it.”

Swift paused in his climb and watched Caius.

“Treating it like a passing interest, or expecting success immediately isn’t going to cut it.” Caius straightened. “You have to learn to love the struggle itself, not just the win. You have to get really, really good at standing back up after you’ve been punched down.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Swift.

Caius reached down his hand. “Treasure hunting.”

Swift climbed to the top of the ropes and let Caius guide him over the rail.