The ocean had always reminded me of the sky.

Both were vast, ancient domains that we could never hope to control, and each time we entered them, we placed our lives in the hands of something that could crush us.

Something about that thrilled me.

I stood at the bow of the *Aizel* dressed in my flying leathers and a thick green cloak the ship's captain, Samra, had reluctantly lent me. Salt air nipped at my face, the wind running long fingers through my curls and lifting them to dance like ribbons.

A shadow rippled across the water ahead of the ship. I lifted a hand, feeling the brush of feathers a moment before Resyries landed on the railing before me. Wings outstretched against the wind, the crow balanced effortlessly, the gossamer shine of his dark feathers blending into the blue predawn light. The connection between us thrummed with quiet contentment, something neither of us had had much of in recent days.

After our flight from Illucia, we'd headed to the Ambriel Islands but had decided to skirt around them rather than make land, since the islands were likely full of Illucian soldiers searching for us. Their queen was not going to let me escape so easily. Not when I was the only one who could hatch the crow eggs she'd stolen from Rhodaire. Not to mention I was technically still betrothed to her son.

I winced at the thought of Ericen. Unexpectedly, we'd become friends during my time in Illucia. The fingerless leather gloves I wore each day had been a present from him, a symbol of strength when I'd needed it most. But the prince was loyal to his kingdom. Loyal to his mother.

"I have to let him go, Res," I said into the wind. So why couldn't I?