

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Finding consensus...

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As she sits there, back ramrod straight and Leon Bartfort's words echoing through her head, Angelica Redgrave stares at nothing at all. The Isle of Tortuga... Port Paix... a pirate haven? It couldn't be true, could it?

Frustration wells up within her chest and unshed tears prick at the corners of her eyes. But before the first tear can fall...

"... Lady Angelica?"

Olivia's voice cuts through her stupor, bringing her back to the present and forcing her out of her own thoughts. This prompts an instant reaction from Angelica, who slams her palm down on the table hard enough to make a loud noise.

SMACK!

"Y-You're lying! My father would not send me to my death! You're making this up!"

She regrets her outburst immediately of course. Not the part where she defends her father, she'll never regret that... but calling their 'host' a liar and hitting his table... that she regrets, if only because she fears it will destroy the veneer of civility Leon has had until now.

Only... he barely even reacts. The Sky Pirate simply arches a brow at her and keeps eating, making Angelica flush in both embarrassment and anger. He's treating her like a petulant brat throwing a tantrum!

"M-Maybe... maybe your father didn't know, Lady Angelica!"

And then of course there's Olivia, ever the mediator, ever the one to try and find a middle ground... even if it comes at her own expense. Angelica shudders in her seat, shaking a little until she grabs the edge of the table in a bid to anchor herself.

"But that... t-that would be worse, d-don't you see? That would mean he sent me to my death without even t-trying to properly verify the situation..."

Finally, swallowing his latest morsel, Leon pipes up again, jabbing a fork in Angelica's direction once more.

"He already did that, didn't he? Sent you with that crew I plucked you both from... and he had no idea that they'd been paid off by another party entirely to 'fail' to get you to your final destination."

Angelica's eyes widen as she realizes Leon is right. No matter how much she hates it, no matter how much she wants to deny it... that part is undeniably true. The Merchant Captain had made his intentions towards her and Olivia clear before... before Leon had killed him and his entire crew.

And if her father failed on that front... then yes, it's entirely too plausible he would have failed on this front as well. Angelica slumps back in her seat as a wave of exhaustion washes over her along with acceptance. Leon is telling the truth about Tortuga... which means she and Olivia never stood a chance.

It's not fair. She did everything right. Everything asked of her, everything expected of her. She didn't ask to be born a Duke's daughter. She didn't ask to be betrothed to the Crown Prince either. But she'd done her duty all the same, endeavoring to be the best fiancé to Prince Julius that she possibly could be.

She'd done everything for him, everything for her father, everything for her family. And what had she gotten in return? Nothing. Despite her greatest efforts, she'd still been exiled to the outer edges of the Kingdom, to Redgrave territory that apparently wasn't even Redgrave controlled anymore. She'd been sentenced to death for no good reason!

The only one to show her even a lick of kindness in these past few years, outside of Olivia herself, was a fucking Pirate Captain of all people!

“Well... I-I mean... at least we were lucky enough to run into you, Captain Leon!”

Olivia’s words penetrate through the haze falling over Angelica’s mind at around the same time that thought about Leon’s ‘kindness’ is running through her head. She blinks as she processes them, staring at Olivia from across the dining table. Her friend and maidservant smiles at her encouragingly and then nods towards Leon, making Angelica blink blankly for a moment before realizing what the other girl is getting at.

That... that couldn’t possibly work, could it? Unless...

“Captain Leon.”

The Sky Pirate pauses, next bite of food halfway to his mouth, and looks up at her curiously. Angelica straightens up again, pulling herself out of her slump and doing her level best to regain at least a modicum of poise and dignity as she folds her hands in her lap and looks Leon Bartfort in the eye.

“Olivia is correct. You are the only stroke of good fortune we’ve had so far on this journey. Without you, the both of us would be headed to our deaths... or worse.”

Leon tilts his head to the side, acknowledging the point but remaining quiet. He does make a slight noise of surprise when she bows in her seat, lowering her head almost to the table itself.

“From the bottom of my heart... thank you.”

Part of her still rankles at doing this. Part of her still feels a little horrified at all of the men Leon killed. Even if they had nothing but black intentions for her and Olivia, Angelica is finding it hard not to mourn them at least a little.

But the larger part is the pragmatist. Angelica wouldn't have made it this far if she were some hopeless romantic or a simpering, whimpering maiden who couldn't see the forest for the trees. In the end... in the end, Leon Bartfort is her only hope.

"Mm... sure, you're welcome."

Raising her head, Angelica smiles grimly.

"And now I must ask for more of your aid."

Leon's brow arches at that, prompting Angelica to look around them.

"You have what must be the most advanced airship I've ever seen. Not to mention your impressive fighting force of golems."

Leon slowly puts down his fork, watching her carefully. Angelica's smile grows a bit more.

"I would ask you to enter my employ... and help me take the Isle of Tortuga in truth. Assist me in making sure House Redgrave regains control of Port Paix and help me restore my family's authority to the island. In exchange, I will shower you with all of the accolades and wealth I possibly can. More than that... I will write you a letter of marque, authorizing you as a Privateer to House Redgrave. You will have legitimacy under our banner."

Admittedly, even as she speaks she knows how ridiculous it sounds. Leon already has everything he could want. He doesn't need legitimacy, not when his ship and golems are both as powerful as they are. More than that, she's asking him to throw himself into a battle against who knows how many pirates and their own airships. Sure, he might be enough to overwhelm any merchant ship he decides to waylay, but could he fight an entire army? An entire fleet? Probably not.

And yet, Angelica has to try. She has to ask. Because... because Leon is really the only option at this point.

Still, she does expect him to say 'no' at first. And she's already planning ways to turn that 'no' into a 'yes'. Perhaps she can sneak away later when Olivia is busy or asleep and offer him the use of her body in exchange for-

"Fuck."

Angelica blinks as Leon looks between her and Olivia. She looks to Olivia as well to see the blonde commoner is exercising every bit of her infamous forlorn gaze, her big blue eyes bigger and bluer than ever and directed at Leon to devastating effect.

With a groan, the supposedly terrifying Sky Pirate is now the one who slumps back in his seat... and throws a bit of a tantrum himself, smacking the arm of his chair again and again.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck!"

The outburst has Angelica blinking in confusion... until Leon runs a hand over his face and sighs.

"Fine. I'm in."

Wait, what? Just... j-just like that? Angelica can't help but be a little baffled... and yet, she also feels her heart start to soar, even as Leon jabs a finger at her.

"You ARE granting me that letter of marque though, just so we're clear. And at least half of everything we plunder from the rest of the pirates while we're clearing out Port Paix."

Ah... that was far more akin to the selfishness she would expect from a Sky Pirate. Also now that he's bringing up more concrete rewards, Angelica can't help but narrow her eyes a little.

“... We will need much of that plunder if we’re to turn the Isle of Tortuga into a respectable port for House Redgrave afterwards. I can’t say for certain that you may have half, not if it would cripple my ability to revitalize the port.”

Leon just arches a brow at her, making Angelica flush a little. After all... they both know that he has her over a barrel here. She can try to argue, she can try to debate... but in the end, if she wants to make this work, she’ll have to give him whatever he wants.

But to his credit, Leon doesn’t point that out. After a moment, he even flashes her a grin and inclines his head.

“Let’s discuss details, your ladyship.”

Flushing a bit more at his cavalier tone and carefree attitude, Angelica huffs, fighting her own urge to smile an actual smile that isn’t grim or fatalistic. She shouldn’t be letting herself feel such hope. And yet...

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They spend the rest of the day together and Angelica has to admit, Leon Bartfort isn’t quite the monster she first thought him to be. He’s certainly a killer, a man with blood on his hands... but perhaps she’d judged him too harshly all the same.

Planning things out when it comes to Tortuga takes up most of the time, followed by deciding the exact details of how Leon will be rewarded. It’s an awful lot of work, probably the most work Angelica has done since she graduated from the Academy... and yet, it’s very rewarding. Finally, she sees a future worth fighting for. Finally, she sees a light in the distance through all of the darkness and shadow.

Still, by the time she lays her head down to rest alongside Olivia later that night, Angelica is exhausted and ready to sleep. Leon has told them that they are now allowed to travel the ship as they want, but to still be careful. He doesn’t want them falling overboard or anything like that, and they’ll still be watched if they

enter any dangerous areas, but they're no longer his prisoners at least. No, they're now officially 'honored guests'.

You would think all of this would make it easier for Angelica to sleep. She'd slept like a baby the night before after all, and now her heart was even lighter as she saw a path forward past all of the heartbreak and heartache she'd suffered so far.

And yet... just as she's falling asleep, she finds herself waking up again just in time to see the door closing behind her maidservant. It takes Angelica a long moment to recognize what she just saw... Olivia was already all the way through the door when her eyes opened, so all she really heard was the soft click as it closed shut.

But still, looking around the room... Olivia's absence is jarring and makes it obvious what happened. But... where would Olivia be going at a time like this after the day they'd just had?

Furrowing her brow, Angelica hesitates for only a moment more before rising from the bed and following. By the time she leaves though, Olivia is nowhere to be seen. There's only one golem outside of their door at this point and Angelica stares at it for a moment as it stares back at her. Finally, after biting her lower lip for a moment, she breaks the silence.

"Which... which way did she go?"

To her surprise but also relief, the golem raises a hand and points. Angelica follows the direction, making her way down the hall and through the expansive airship. Luckily, it's not hard to follow Olivia... there aren't many twists and turns. Eventually, Angelica gets close enough to hear voices... Olivia and Leon's specifically. She arrives outside of an open doorway with no golems in sight and her breath hitches as she listens in on what they're talking about.

"Seriously? I already agreed to help, didn't I? And I said before you didn't have to do this. So why are you back here, Olivia?"

“B-Because... I want to do this. And now you should know I mean it... Captain, you’ve offered my lady her first glimpse of hope in years, purely out of the kindness of your heart.”

“... If you keep offering a starving man a steak, he’s going to eventually consume it ravenously, you know that right?”

“Mm... maybe the steak wants to be consumed.”

The strange conversation is enough for Angelica to gather the courage to peek in on the two of them. Her eyes widen at what she sees though. Olivia is... stripping naked right then and there in front of the Sky Pirate. And Captain Leon is watching, his jaw clenched but his eyes roaming over Olivia’s figure as she reveals more and more.

This was... what was Olivia thinking?! But no... she’d already said as much hadn’t she? Except, Angelica didn’t really think Olivia was such a wanton woman. Meaning that... this was all just an effort by her servant and friend to help Angelica in the only way she thought she could.

Sure, Captain Leon had already agreed to help and for a tidy sum at that, but Olivia clearly thought he would be more inclined to further assist them, perhaps for less of a reward... if he was sleeping with one of them. And of the two of them, Olivia probably thought it was f-fine if she gave up her virtue... especially if it was for her Mistress’ cause.

Angelica’s face is burning hot and definitely bright red as she watches Olivia slip her shift off of her body and step out of it, her entire form exposed now. Leon hasn’t stopped her or offered any further protest of her actions. And the way he’s looking at her as she steps towards him is like... like a predator sizing up his prey.

She only has a moment to decide what she’s going to do before things get heated and it’s too late. Angelica finds herself torn. On the one hand, a proper lady would never watch this sort of thing take place. On the other hand,

maidservant was making a huge sacrifice for her... the least she could do was observe to make sure Leon didn't go too far.

On the third, far more ephemeral hand... should she step in? Olivia is her best friend. It should... if anyone is going to sacrifice their virtue to get Captain Leon firmly on their side... it should be Angelica, shouldn't it?

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A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!