

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

A/N: Hard truths are had...

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Angelica sleeps far too soundly given the circumstances she finds herself in. But how can she not? The accommodations she and Olivia labored under previously are like night and day with these ones. Of course, her noble status had meant the Merchant Captain had offered them his own quarters without hesitation, but even then... those weren't as good as these quarters aboard a literal Sky Pirate's vessel.

The rocking and swaying caused by the wind had made it extremely difficult to asleep on their previous airship, and the food had been of middling fare at best. They certainly hadn't had access to actual toilets or baths, that was for sure.

And yet, even though they were prisoners of Captain Leon, they had all of that here. Good food and drink, a warm bath, and a bed that honestly measured up to her own bed back home, while even putting the bed in her private rooms back at the Academy to shame.

All of that, combined with everything that had happened that day as well as the fact that Olivia held her to her bosom as she drifted off and... it was honestly the best sleep Angelica had in months if not years.

Alas, all good things come to an end and when she hears Olivia's voice calling out to her, Angelica begins to wake up.

"My Lady... it's morning now... and I have news..."

Slowly blinking awake, Angelica looks to see Olivia no longer laying with her, but instead seated on the side of the bed next to her. Nestled in a pile of pillows and swaddled in warm blankets, Angelica has never felt cozier... and she can't

remember the last time she was this well rested. It takes a moment for Olivia's words to properly process as a result, prompting a blink when they finally do.

"Ah... news?"

Smiling softly, Olivia nods.

"Captain Leon has seen fit to invite us to breakfast. I think we should accept, Angie."

The mention of the Sky Pirate who held them prisoner has Angelica waking up faster. Reluctantly, she pulls herself out of the comfort of the pillows and sits up in bed, brow furrowing as she concentrates more on what Olivia is saying.

"That man... what does he want from us?"

Was he just trying to butter them up? Or maybe soften them up, more like. Perhaps he was the kind of villain who enjoyed lulling women into a false sense of security before striking. Only, Olivia shakes her head at Angelica's words, reaching up to brush a lock of hair out of Angelica's eyes.

"I don't know that he necessarily wants anything from us. Maybe we should just go into this with open minds... maybe he's not quite the brigand he seems at first glance?"

Angelica stares at Olivia for a long moment, not quite believing it. But to be fair, she can believe that Olivia might believe it. The commoner has always been rather... innocent. And at times, she's also been painfully naïve. Angelica has done her best to shield Olivia and protect that innocence, but now that they're in this situation, she wonders if maybe she's done the other woman a disservice of sorts.

"... Very well. Let's get ready for breakfast then."

If Leon Bartfort was already sinking his claws into Olivia, then Angelica would have to do everything in her power to get between them and make sure he didn't manage to do anything untoward to her friend!

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Half an hour later, they're escorted into a dining hall by one of their guards. An actual dining hall that has Angelica staring, bewildered. It feels more like she's back home on her family's estate, rather than in the sky on an airship. It doesn't make sense... all of this is far too nice for a Sky Pirate.

Captain Leon sits at the head of the table of course, a table with a veritable feast of food stuffs set out on it. Making eye contact, he beckons them both forward. The only chairs at the table are on either side of him and Angelica grimaces at being forced to sit opposite of Olivia, rather than right next to her.

But Olivia doesn't raise any protest over it, taking her own seat without hesitation before giving Angelica an encouraging look she doesn't quite understand. What is the other woman meaning for her to do here?

"Good morning, Lady Redgrave. Did you sleep well?"

Angelica sits up, back as straight as she can get it, hands sat primly in her lap as she perches on the edge of her chair. Lips pursing together, she considers how to respond to the pirate's question for all of a moment before finally letting out a breath.

"The accommodations were... acceptable."

Leon just smirks, as though he sees right through her. Then again, maybe he does. If those were the accommodations he gave to prisoners, what were his own quarters like? How good did he have it on this impossible ship with all of its wonders and creature comforts?

"I'm glad to hear it. Please dig in... you'll have to serve yourself, I'm afraid, everyone is equal at a pirate's breakfast table."

Olivia jolts and begins to rise at his words, but Leon shoots her a look that has her sitting back down. Angelica blinks at the interaction, her brow furrowing. She... she was fine serving her own food. She didn't *need* a servant to place it in front of her.

Feeling a little galvanized by how offended he's left her, Angelica reaches forward and begins piling the best looking dishes onto her plate. Seeing this, Olivia hesitantly does the same... and finally, the Sky Pirate in their midst begins to as well, an amused smirk on his face.

Soon enough, they all have plenty of food on their plates and once he's done, Leon in particular doesn't waste any time digging in. Angelica watches him carefully for a moment before starting to eat as well, with Olivia following suit.

They're about five bites in before Leon suddenly speaks up again though, having swallowed his latest bite.

"So Lady Redgrave. How can I help you?"

She nearly chokes at the sudden question, caught off guard completely by the abrupt offer of aid. Of course... he's not serious, probably. This has to be some sort of jest. She refuses to rise to the bait though, carefully swallowing her latest bite, dabbing her mouth with a napkin, and narrowing her eyes at him in turn.

"I'm not sure what you mean."

Tilting his head to the side, the Pirate Captain jabs a fork in her direction.

"Rather simple, isn't it? You're in a very bad spot at the moment. You lost your engagement to the Crown Prince, you've been sent away from home in disgrace... frankly, I'm surprised you didn't wind up married to some old man more than twice your age out in the countryside."

Angelica flinches at that... because the option had been presented to her. She'd just refused it, something she was only able to do because she'd just barely

managed to scrape by and graduate from the Academy even as her entire life was falling to pieces around her.

If everything that had happened between her, Prince Julius, and that bitch of a Viscount's daughter had happened earlier for instance, Angelica would have had far fewer choices. She would have been nothing and nobody, her status as an Earl's daughter warring with her status as the disgraced villainess who couldn't even manage to hold onto a single Prince.

They couldn't expel her when she'd already graduated from the Academy. They couldn't take any of her accomplishments away from her. By the time the dust had settled, Angelica was an adult woman... and so she'd had options besides simply being married off to some nobleman twice her age out in Holfort's rural lands.

"My father gave me a choice. I picked the one that presented the best opportunities, both for me and Olivia."

Leon arches a brow at that, spearing a golden fried potato on his fork and bringing it to his mouth. He stares at her while he chews, leaving Angelica to fight against the urge to squirm under his gaze. Finally, he swallows.

"And that choice was?"

Angelica scowls a little bit. Who was he to demand answers from her? Ah right... he was her captor. Her and Olivia's captor, as a matter of fact. Glancing over at the other blonde, Angelica is a little surprised to see Olivia smiling at her and giving her an encouraging nod, as if to say 'we can trust him'. They most certainly could not... and yet, what was the point in hiding anything anymore?

"... As you said before, my father could have offered my hand in marriage to a variety of... lesser suitors. Even if I was disgraced by the Crown Prince setting me aside, I still held value as my father's daughter. However, I would not have been happy playing wife to some man much older than me. So my father offered me something else instead... a position of leadership in our family's furthest flung holdings."

Confusion spreads across the Sky Pirate's face at that. When he doesn't immediately respond, Angelica feels compelled to elaborate a bit more.

"I have not been entirely disowned or disinherited, no matter how much certain forces might have wanted me to be. I call this an exile because that's what it is... but my father has still tried his best to do right by me. That's why I've been charged with taking over the handling of Port Paix on the island of Tortuga."

Strangely enough, this causes Leon to go stock still, her words rendering him speechless as he pauses with his fork halfway to his mouth, another bite of food perched precariously on it. He stares at her in disbelief, prompting Angelica to stare back defiantly. She didn't care whether he believed her or not... it was the truth!

Slowly, the Pirate Captain puts his fork down and gives her his full, undivided attention. That's a bit more unnerving truth be told... he's very intense when he focuses like this.

"Repeat that, please."

Angelica scowls... but he'd said 'please' and given everything else, she was swiftly running out of reasons to be impolite. Even if they were technically his captives, he was treating them more like honored guests. So, with a slight huff to show her displeasure, Angelica does as she's told.

"My father has given me a writ of authority over the Isle of Tortuga and Port Paix, its singular settlement. I am to take over the handling of the port and return it to its glory days, since rumors of mismanagement and constant reports of piracy have brought tax revenue from the island down to almost nothing."

Leon's mouth opens and closes a few times, mouthing the words 'rumors of mismanagement' and 'constant reports of piracy' silently to himself. His brow furrows and he looks downright incredulous as he continues to stare at her. Angelica starts to squirm just a bit under his gaze... she can't help it, the way he's looking at her so intensely makes her feel strange.

“... Is there a reason your father might want you dead? Or is he just incompetent?”

Angelica blinks, that strange feeling washed away in an instant and replaced by utter indignation as she scowls furiously.

“E-Excuse me?! How dare you! My father loves me with all his heart! And he is in no way incompetent. He’s doing the best he can in a world that has gone mad, a world where the Crown Prince and all four of his friends have decided to take complete leave of their senses and parade around with that... with that harlot of a woman, Marie Fou Lafan!”

She realizes only after the fact that Leon probably doesn’t know anything about Marie, so she probably looks strange, suddenly launching into a tirade about the other woman. Even still, her father is stretched unbelievably thin, so it’s not fair to question his competence at a time like this!

Though to her surprise... Leon just slowly nods.

“I suppose that would do it. He’s got too much on his plate. Still, to send his own daughter off without any resources...”

Angelica squawks again.

“I-I had resources! The men that you killed and the ship that YOU destroyed! They were Redgrave Men one and all!”

“They were paid off to kill you and Olivia and dump your bodies at some point along the way.”

Leon’s matter-of-fact response deflates Angelica’s indignation... because as much as she wants to deny it, she can’t. But...

“It’s irrelevant though, because a single airship wouldn’t have been enough to help you assert yourself as leader of Tortuga. You wouldn’t have lasted a day

there, even if you had arrived safe and sound. Not unless the denizens decided they wanted to play a game with you and string you along for a week or two before bringing things to a violent, vicious close.”

What? What was he even talking about? Gritting her teeth, Angelica’s hands curl into fists as she glares at the Sky Pirate.

“Speak plainly, Captain. What are you saying, exactly?”

Leon looks her right in the eye and Angelica tenses up, almost as if she can sense the bad news he’s about to deliver... and somehow, she just knows whatever he’s about to say will be the truth.

“Lady Redgrave, the Isle of Tortuga is a Pirate Haven. Port Paix has not answered to your family in years, if it ever truly did. It is a den of scum and villainy, filled with men and women who would sooner slit your throat and spit on your corpse rather than bend the knee and submit to your ‘writ of authority’.”

What.

“You were walking straight into a death trap, darling.”

His piece said, Leon Bartfort returns to eating his breakfast, even as Angelica and Olivia both sit there in shock, matching looks of horror and dismay on their faces.

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