

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

A/N: Nicks has a long week.

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They dispose of Blackbeard's body by tossing him overboard. The same with those who would have gladly followed him down the path he was taking. Technically Nicks is the Captain now, and therefore the Captain's quarters are his... but of course, given the circumstances, he leaves them to Dorothea.

However, he also doesn't return to the quarters he had been afforded as First Mate either. Instead, Nicks lets his new First Mate take those for the night, while he himself stays outside of the doors of the Captain's Quarters.

He doesn't stand guard, he's not that disciplined... but he's also become quite the light sleeper by necessity while on this airship. As such, even though he dozes most of the night away on a chair outside of Lady Dorothea's rooms, Nicks is confident that he'll wake up at even the slightest hint of a disturbance.

And indeed, when he finally does get pulled from his light slumber, it's to the barest sound of one of the doors being opened. Nicks' eyes immediately snap open even as the morning sun washes across his body. His hand goes to the cutlass at his belt, but there's nobody there.

Or rather, there's nobody outside of the Captain's Quarters trying to sneak in past him. Instead, after searching for a moment only to find the area bereft of any men, Nicks looks and sees an icy blue eye through the crack in the door as Lady Dorothea Fou Roseblade regards him silently for a moment.

“... Have you been out here all night long?”

Nicks rises from his seat so he can properly straighten up before sketching a quick bow to the noblewoman.

“Milady. Not quite... there was still plenty to take care of, even once we had removed the... trash from your quarters. Once that was dealt with, I came here. I hope you slept well enough, given the circumstances.”

There’s a pause at that as Dorothea seems to regard him. Finally...

“I am hungry. Procure food for the two of us and then join me. We will eat together.”

Nicks blinks at the self-assured, domineering tone. Hah, she certainly settled in fast, didn’t she? To be fair, even in her darkest moments, Dorothea Fou Roseblade hadn’t shown much in the way of fear. Still, for her to command him on his own ship... well, that was something else.

Initially, Nicks almost denies her. He’ll be happy to get her some food, but he has plenty he needs to be doing. The duties of a First Mate are never done after all and- but then it hits him... he’s not the First Mate anymore. He’s the Captain now. His most loyal man, his new First Mate, is probably already up and working given the time of day it is and the fact that nothing is on fire quite yet. It’s actually expected of Nicks to take a step back and let his First Mate do all the work... hell, it would probably get him more respect with the remaining crew if they knew he was dining with their noble passenger in the Captain’s Quarters, rather than ceding them to her in their entirety.

Letting out an explosive sigh, Nicks inclines his head.

“As you wish, milady.”

Getting some breakfast for the two of them sent up from the galley is simple enough and soon Nicks is entering the Captain’s Quarters and settling two large plates on the table where Blackbeard had always taken his meals. Even as the man’s First Mate, Nicks had only ever dined with him maybe a handful of times.

Now... now, seeing Dorothea take the seat opposite of Blackbeard’s far more ostentatious chair, Nicks has no real choice but to sit there himself, feeling rather strange as he does so. He’ll have to sell the damn thing once they get to

Tortuga... he wants something simpler. Less grandiose. It feels like it's going to swallow him whole! Either that or he'll get fat and lazy just like Blackbeard did and grow into it. Neither are outcomes Nicks particularly wants to happen.

"Last night you mentioned a Pirate King. And Pirate Lords. You also mentioned a Pirate Code. I have heard many stories of Sky Pirates in my day... but I have never heard anything about any of this. Explain."

Nicks huffs a little, starting to be slightly amused by how demanding Dorothea is. She's certainly not a woman used to taking 'no' for an answer, that much he can tell. Still, he'd already broken the masquerade a bit by saying such things in front of her the day before. And now he's taking her right to Tortuga, which as far as he knows, nobody in the so-called 'civilized' world knows for what it really is. Tortuga is not just a Pirate Haven; it's the center of Sky Pirate Power in the known world.

"You wouldn't have heard about such things, milady. For one, it is rather... taboo to talk about our King or our Lords or even to a lesser extent the code... in the presence of those who aren't like us."

Dorothea narrows her eyes at that.

"And yet you've done so anyways. Do you not fear that you will be punished?"

Nicks shakes his head. He's not going to tell her that his younger brother is the Pirate King or anything like that. Nobody knows and Nicks will do his best to keep it that way for as long as he can. Still...

"I'm hoping to slide under the radar, because even if I'm committing a social faux pas here by taking you to Tortuga, it's in the name of reporting an actual crime... a full blown breaking of our code."

"... Slavery. That is against your code?"

Nicks nods, even as he chews and swallows a quick bite of breakfast. He's honestly famished, but this conversation is going back and forth so rapidly that

he's having a hard time getting anything in his mouth when words keep having to spill out of it.

Dorothea, meanwhile, huffs.

"You have quite a lot of your kind breaking your code then. I have never once heard this idea that Sky Pirates refrain from practicing slavery. Selling the crew along with the cargo... *that* is the more common outcome of any pirate attack."

Nicks arches a brow at that.

"Oh? You know a lot about Sky Pirates and how we operate, do you milady?"

For the first time, he sees a slight crack in the noblewoman's armor. Her face colors ever so slightly as she flushes, her jaw clenching.

"I have heard the stories."

Nicks shakes his head.

"You shouldn't believe everything you hear, Lady Dorothea."

"... By that same logic, should I not trust a word that comes from your mouth?"

Hah. Is it wrong to say Nicks rather likes Dorothea Fou Roseblade? She has a sharp tongue and an even sharper wit. Not to mention she's a woman who knows enough about blades to know where to stick one. Hm. Her dress is still ripped in a couple of places... he wishes he could offer her other clothing, but alas, they aren't exactly equipped for feminine company here on the ship. They won't be able to supply her with a new dress until Tortuga.

In the end, all she's really lacking at this point is context. So he gives it to her.

"The real reason you haven't heard anything about our King or Lords, or even the code... is that all are rather new. The very concepts are only a few years old, in fact. Because of the taboo, rumors haven't really had a chance to circulate..."

and because of bad eggs like the Winged Sharks, you lot in your castles and cities have yet to really notice a decline in the amount of slaves being taken in Sky Pirate raids.”

Nicks shrugs.

“Plus, ransoms don’t count. If you’re just ransoming someone back to their family, that’s not engaging in slavery. I doubt you lot differentiate between the two though.”

Dorothea falls silent after that for a time. Nicks takes the opportunity to shovel more food into his mouth, fueling up for not just the day ahead, but the journey ahead. Returning to Tortuga would take about a week... and a week on a ship that he’d just forcefully and violently taken would already be stressful enough without the extremely beautiful noblewoman staying in the Captain’s Quarters.

Nicks would be pleasantly surprised if they got through the entire week without at least one desperate, blackhearted man making another attempt on Dorothea’s virtue. Not that he would let anything succeed, but then that was precisely why he needed to be as ready as possible.

“... If these Winged Sharks you say have my sister are such ‘bad eggs’, then why have your Pirate King and Pirate Lords not dealt with them already? Do they even have the strength to do so?”

That brings a grimace to Nicks’ face. Obviously, he doesn’t want to get into the politics of the situation with Dorothea. Especially not the part where his brother Leon had basically made himself Pirate King, made a bunch of faux Lords, set up a code... and then fucked off from Tortuga for years afterwards.

In fact, the only reason Nicks was confident that he could get Dorothea an audience with the Pirate King was because of their familial connection. Nicks himself didn’t have a way to contact Leon, but he knew his father and mother definitely did, and that would be what they needed.

Telling Dorothea that the Pirate Lords were basically a bunch of bickering, egotistical children in adult bodies without their King to tell them what for... seemed like a bad idea. So Nicks prevaricates a little bit instead.

“They’ve kept their heads down and toed the line. There was no evidence of their actions... until now. With the letters Blackbeard was too foolish to destroy, we’ll have all the proof we need to put a black mark on the Winged Sharks. I assure you, once the King and Lords find out about this, they’re going to band together to make an example of these miscreants. They have to, otherwise their authority is meaningless.”

Dorothea considers these words for a moment before slowly nodding. Nicks gives her his best reassuring smile.

“It’ll be alright, Lady Dorothea. We’ll find out what happened to your sister and get her back if need be. I promise.”

To his mild surprise, Dorothea looks caught off guard for a moment, once again showing a flash of something vulnerable under her icy surface. It’s only for a moment though, and then she’s right back to regarding him like he’s an ant.

Still, as Nicks leaves the Captain’s Quarters behind a bit later, assigning one of his other trusted men to guard the doors and help Dorothea with anything she needs while he goes and checks up on the rest of the ship... he does so with a pep in his step and a smile on his face. It had been an excellent morning meal... and he could only hope everything else went well over the next several days too.

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In the end, there is another mutiny attempt in the week it takes them to get to Tortuga. Nothing too serious though, thankfully. Just a disgruntled sailor trying to rope his closest confidantes into things... but as it turns out, his closest confidantes rather liked having their heads attached to their bodies and their necks unbroken. And so both of them had come to Nicks and his First Mate at different points to expose the plan.

With the would-be mutineer dealt with, the rest of the trip turns out to be smooth sailing. Nobody makes an attempt at getting into the Captain's Quarters to get to Dorothea, and she in turn is smart enough to stay within them for the duration of the journey, staying well out of sight and keeping herself a distant memory for the crew of flea-bitten sky pirates.

Of course, she also demands that he take every meal with her, which Nicks does with only passing reluctance. She's good company once he gets used to her icy exterior and condescending noble attitude. Heh, sometimes he almost wants to mention he was a former noble himself, just to see her reaction... but he refrains.

Regardless, as they pull into port at Tortuga, Nicks doesn't quite feel relief... but he does feel anticipation. He knows, after all, that his brother is unlikely to actually be on the island. It's far more likely that he'll have to get his parents to sneak a message to Leon first and foremost.

In the meantime, keeping Dorothea hidden will probably be difficult to say the least, especially if she decides to be difficult. Even still, they've made it to their destination if nothing else. So now it's time to-

"Ahoy there! Gonna need an accounting of your ship's manifest!"

Nicks is pulled out of his thoughts just as he's making his way onto the dock, only to be stopped by some busybody. Normally, he'd tell them to fuck off... after all, this is Tortuga. Nobody fucking asks what's on the ships coming in and out. That's just asking to be shanked.

However, in this case... the busybody isn't alone. No, they're surrounded by half a dozen of Leon's golems, the inhuman things he always used to crew his ship. Each was much stronger than a human man, and much tougher too, so of course Nicks is a little wary. But he's also a little excited, because if the golems are here... isn't Leon as well?

At the same time...

“An accounting of the manifest? Since when is that a thing?”

The busybody looks up from a large open tome they're holding by the spin and narrows his eyes at Nicks.

“Been a while since you've been back to Tortuga, has it? Haven't received word recently?”

Nicks just shrugs to both questions. The answer is yes and no of course, but he's not just going to give this bureaucrat such answers outright. Still, the busybody straightens up and looks at him rather imperiously.

“The accounting of every ship that comes into Tortuga and docks at Port Paix is ‘a thing’ ever since we gained our new Pirate Queen. Queen Angelica's decrees are designed to bring Port Paix up to *her* standards.”

A... a new Pirate Queen? What the fuck had happened to Leon?!

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