

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

A/N: Leon finds out what his brother has been up to.

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As a general rule of thumb, Leon did not like his visits to his family to be too close together. There was a certain degree of safety in anonymity. His mother, father, and younger siblings all lived under different names, keeping to themselves and generally just keeping their heads down.

But every time Leon visited them, he risked someone else noticing that he was gone and wondering where he was going. Or even worse, following him straight to their home. Now admittedly that last bit was unlikely given he had Luxion providing overwatch, but Leon tried not to be *too* arrogant. There was always a bigger fish, even if he had yet to meet one in this new life.

And yet, his father had used the proper channels to let Leon know that they needed to meet again as soon as possible, and if it was an emergency it couldn't be helped. On top of that, Luxion had alerted Leon to the fact that Nicks had arrived back in Port Paix without his Captain and rumor had it that he was the new Captain of the airship he'd arrived in now.

Now, there was a possibility that Nicks had freaked out when he'd found out that Tortuga had a brand new Pirate Queen and was seemingly under new management. However, Leon had told his father all about what was going on, so he should have calmed Nicks down when they finally spoke.

For their father to call Leon back to their humble abode anyways... something else was happening. And so as Leon steps foot inside of his family's home again, he's prepared himself for just about anything, or so he thinks.

"Leon!"

However, the extremely gorgeous blonde beauty with extremely icy eyes standing next to Nicks is a bit out of Leon's expectations. He blinks owlshly at the sight of what is clearly a noblewoman, even as she stares at him for a long moment before looking to Nicks.

"You did not say your brother was the Devil's Smile."

Nicks blinks, glancing between the blonde and Leon even as Leon arches a brow.

"I mean... we are both pirates, so it stood to reason my brother was also a pirate... but I guess I never did fully introduce myself, did I? Its Nicks Bartfort, to be specific. And this is my brother, Leon Bartfort."

The blonde's eyes dart over to their father and mother as well, but neither says anything. And fortunately, Leon's younger siblings are not present for this... meeting. Sighing, Leon steps forward and sketches a quick bow.

"It would seem my reputation precedes me. Apologies if I've pilfered your family's wealth once upon a time."

The blonde's eyes flash and her nostrils flare.

"You do not even know who I am, do you? I am Dorothea Fou Roseblade... and you have indeed stolen from us... on numerous occasions."

Leon shrugs, grinning roguishly.

"The name does ring a bell... but you must understand milady, I am a Sky Pirate. For you, the times I came upon your ships and liberated their goods were grievous wounds one and all. For me... it was a Tuesday."

Was he being needlessly antagonistic just for the sake of throwing out references that nobody else would get? Maybe a little bit. But Leon can't help himself. Ice Queens like this woman in front of him, no matter how beautiful, had

never been Leon's speed anyways. They just rubbed him the wrong way, so he tended to rub them the wrong way right back.

Seeing Dorothea getting angrier, his brother immediately acts, however.

"Leon, please. Lady Roseblade has been through a lot recently... and her sister is still in grave danger."

Leon blinks, even as Nicks moves forward, clasping him by the shoulder and leaning in close to whisper in his ear.

"What the hell happened, brother? Why do we suddenly have a new Pirate Queen?"

Leon snorts in amusement. Nicks is actually trying to sound angry on his behalf... perhaps with Dorothea present, their father hadn't had a chance to fully explain the situation to him. In the end, he just gives Nicks a crooked smirk.

"I got bored. Besides, this way is better. Might even give us a thin veneer of legitimacy... our new Queen is a Holfort Noblewoman herself, after all."

Nicks blinks at that, his brow furrowing in consternation.

"You got bored? Leon, you-!"

But Leon brushes his brother off at that point. He doesn't need another lecture from his family members about responsibility and duty. Not when in reality, both Nicks and Balcus had an intrinsic laziness to them as well. It was a family trait really, though they all did their best to fight against it in their own way.

Still, as fun as bringing all of the Sky Pirates in line and making the code and becoming Pirate King had been, actually governing simply hadn't been Leon's cup of tea. So he'd fucked off.

For now...

“What exactly happened? Why are you here on Tortuga, Lady Roseblade?”

Dorothea glances to his brother, but when Nicks doesn't speak, she explains. Leon listens as the noblewoman tells the story from her perspective, of how her airship had been waylaid by Nicks' and how Nicks' Captain had apparently made a deal with the Winged Sharks to capture and sell her off to them.

Not ransom... but outright selling her. Like she was just a piece of product to be moved around. Leon's jaw clenches at hearing this, while Nicks quietly retrieves the letters they'd found in his old Captain's quarters and hands them over.

Dorothea continues on to explain how her sister has likely been attacked and possibly taken in the same way according to the allusions in those letters... causing Leon to slowly nod as he looks up from them.

“Yes, that does sound right. After all, the Winged Sharks are being backed by your rivals... and it would seem said rivals have decided to no longer put up with your existence.”

Dorothea freezes at that, blinking in surprise.

“What? What rivals?”

Leon smiles thinly. He'd done his research, after all. Or rather, had Luxion do his research. Same thing, really.

“House Offrey.”

The noblewoman's eyes bulge in shock... and anger.

“That's not... House Offrey has long been a nuisance and a disgrace to the nobility, but not even they would stoop so low... would they?”

Leon just scoffs.

“You act as though most of the nobility in your kingdom wouldn’t stoop so low if they had half the chance, Roseblade.”

Dorothea bristles, but Leon overrides her.

“The Holfort Kingdom is corrupt as all hell and filled with similarly black-hearted nobles. However, in this case... House Offrey is certainly worse than most. The Winged Sharks have had their backing for quite some time... and seem to think that they can get away with breaking the Pirate Code and engaging in the skin trade because of it.”

The blonde looks like she has much more to say to all of that... but to her credit, she marshals herself well, forcing down her anger and swallowing her pride. In turn, she focuses back on what really matters to her... her sister. Leon finds his respect for Dorothea Roseblade increasing just a smidge.

“... But they *have* broken your code, yes? Your Pirate Queen and Lords will have to respond, right? I demand an audience with your leader. I would have my grievances heard.”

Leon arches a brow at that, only for his brother’s squirming out of the corner of his eye to draw his attention. Grimacing, Nicks shrugs.

“I did... sort of promise her she’d be able to present her case.”

Nicks shoots a glance at Dorothea then, a glance that Dorothea returns... with an altogether blatant softening of her otherwise icy gaze. It’s in that moment that Leon realizes something... even if they don’t realize it yet, his brother and this noblewoman... are definitely developing feelings for each other if they haven’t already.

Sighing, Leon shakes his head.

“I can get you a meeting with the new Pirate Queen. After all, I am her Chief Enforcer now. It’ll be up to you to convince her to help, however.”

Especially since he'd just convinced Angelica a couple weeks ago to bunker down and focus on the Isle of Tortuga first and foremost. She'd been doing pretty well so far, but the work was far from done. Sending him gallivanting off to save Lady Roseblade's sister now might be the sort of heroics one heard about in stories, but Leon was no hero... and he was sure Angelica knew that.

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"This is terrible! We have to do something!"

Or maybe not. Leon resists the urge to facepalm as Angelica doesn't even bother with a pretense of mulling things over. They're in her private office now, with him, Olivia, Nicks, and Dorothea all present.

Suffice to say, Dorothea and Angelica had been very surprised to see one another, very much recognizing each other... but rather than dwelling on it, Dorothea had immediately launched into explaining exactly what was going on and why she was there.

Both Olivia and Angelica had looked increasingly stricken as Dorothea told her story and explained that her sister, Deirdre Fou Roseblade, was almost certainly in the hands of the Winged Sharks by now. But Leon had hoped Angelica would at least manage to look at the situation objectively when the story finally came to an end.

Instead, they'd gotten... this. Even Dorothea looks a little surprised by Angelica's words, before latching onto them with both hands.

"Then I can count on your support, Lady Redgrave?"

An obvious test... one that Angelica completely fails to pick up on.

"Of course you can!"

She doesn't even try to correct Dorothea about her proper title... but then to be fair, Leon knew full well that Angelica considered the title of Pirate Queen to be

more of a necessary evil than anything else. Hell, he couldn't really complain either when he'd treated the thing like a weight around his neck he was eager to get rid of. He still needed to be the voice of reason here, however.

"Who will you send to retrieve Dorothea's sister, my Queen?"

Angelica blinks as she looks at him for a long moment.

"Ah... w-well... you, of course."

Leon arches a brow at that, even as Dorothea frowns. He can tell what the blonde Ice Queen is thinking... she's wondering if there's anyone else, because she doesn't want to have to rely on someone like him. She at least has the good sense to hold her tongue though, even as Leon slowly shakes his head.

"If you send me away to deal with the Winged Sharks, its likely that the Pirate Lords will try and strike while I'm gone. Your rule is too new to be completely stable yet."

Angelica flushes, squirming a bit in her chair as she considers his words. Finally...

"How much longer until you think such a thing will no longer be a concern?"

It's a good question... but also a rather hard question to answer. When it came to pirates, there was almost never such a thing as real stability. Leon's absence, for instance, had almost immediately led to some people breaking the code he'd established, albeit no one nearly as blatantly as the Winged Sharks.

The only reason the Council of Pirate Lords had continued to operate without him was because they all liked having fancy fake noble titles and pretending at being more important then they really were. And of course, an absentee Pirate King was a lot easier for them all to swallow than an incredibly proactive Pirate Queen.

All in all... the answer to her question might be 'never'. But if Leon had to be incredibly optimistic about things...

"Months longer, at the very least."

Angelica's face drops while Dorothea hisses.

"My sister won't have months! And if the Winged Sharks are truly backed by House Offrey, my House might not have much longer either! This is a full out assault on House Roseblade... it needs to be nipped in the bud immediately!"

Leon levels a simple look at Dorothea Fou Roseblade. Ignoring his brother's infatuation with the woman, ignoring her sob story... he just stares at her.

"I don't quite see how that's our problem. The Winged Sharks will be dealt with in time... but there's no point in destroying them only to let something worse rise in their place."

And then, even with his harsh words, Leon looks to Angelica and arches a brow.

"I will, of course, abide by your will. If you wish to send me against the Winged Sharks after all... then I'll go. I just wish to make sure you know the dangers inherent in such a decision."

Even if Angelica does let her bleeding heart get the better of her here, Leon will set up some contingencies before he goes so that when the Pirate Lords inevitably turn on her and try to kill her (or worse), he can have a small, automated force sneak her and Olivia and his family out of Port Paix and onward to safety.

It might be a good learning lesson for her about what doing the right thing can sometimes cost you, even.

However, before Angelica can make her choice, Olivia suddenly speaks up.

"What if... w-what if you only went for the purposes of retrieving Lady Deirdre?"

All eyes turn towards the maid, who blushes at the sudden attention. But when nobody tells her off for speaking out of turn, Olivia elaborates.

“Rather than taking all of your forces to destroy the Winged Sharks and leaving Tortuga defenseless... why not take just a small force to infiltrate and free Lady Deirdre of wherever she’s been taken? That way Tortuga remains fortified and you can continue preparing for the eventual war with the Winged Sharks properly.”

When everyone continues to stare at her, Olivia blushes and fiddles with her skirts, looking down at the floor.

“It’s just... L-Lady Deirdre was nice to me back at the Academy. Not that we interacted m-much, but she never looked down on me at least...”

It’s a decent plan; Leon has to admit. Of course, it’s entirely built upon Olivia’s complete faith in him. At some point she’d decided that he was invincible. Not just because he had a technologically advanced airship, but because he, Leon ‘Devil’s Smile’ Bartfort, was just that good.

It was nice to have someone believe in him that heavily... and admittedly, Leon is pretty sure he could pull off what she’s talking about.

... But he’s not going to advocate for it. He’s not a damn hero. Instead, Leon stays quiet and looks to Angelica, waiting to see what she will decide here, now that the stakes are so much more... personal.

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