

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

A/N: Advising the Queen!

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Leon sighs and crosses his arms over his chest.

“Very well. There are two main paths you can commit to. Anything else would be a half-measure and I would not recommend it.”

Angelica straightens up and Olivia blinks, both of them caught off guard by his sudden turn to the serious even as they lean forward a tad too eagerly. They really shouldn’t be taking his word as the gospel or anything like that. But... he understood that he was the best they had.

“Either you use me to solidify your rule over Tortuga and shore up your defenses here in case of an eventual attack... or you send me out in a preemptive strike against your enemies before they can properly muster to assault the island.”

Angelica’s brow furrows and she frowns at that.

“Who even are my enemies? You mentioned the... Winged Sharks back at the meeting, right? Pirates who refused to follow your rules about slavery and didn’t show up because they feared retribution?”

Leon inclines his head.

“Indeed. The Winged Sharks fell in line with the rest of the pirates when I initially took over, but afterwards they sought to... undermine my rule after I took my leave of absence. Namely, they found noble backing and have been using it to grow bigger and bigger. The fact that they’ve so publicly involved themselves in the skin trade again means they think they’re going to be able to take me on... even though the idea is laughable.”

That causes Angelica to arch a brow.

“You’re that confident, are you?”

Leon just gives her a ‘look’ at that.

“You’ve seen what I’m working with, Angelica. I don’t care how much noble backing they get or what sort of fleet they end up mustering... I can handle them.”

That wasn’t arrogance or overconfidence speaking either. He and Luxion were prepared for that sort of battle. That said...

“Of course, if you’re looking for proper advice from me, then I would suggest keeping me here close at hand and using me to shore up your hold on Tortuga first and foremost.”

Olivia is the one who speaks up then, looking confused.

“But wouldn’t it be better to send you after the Winged Sharks immediately? If they’re really involved in slavery, then they need to be stopped as soon as possible!”

Ah... it’s easy to forget how sweet and innocent and naïve Olivia is to the world, especially with how lewd of a woman she’s turned out to be in bed. But fortunately Angelica is a lot less naïve.

“My control over Tortuga isn’t strong enough to send Leon away.”

Olivia looks startled by this, while Leon just nods, smiling slightly in grim satisfaction. Angelica gets it, as she shows by elaborating for her maidservant’s benefit.

“While we forced the Pirate Lords at the meeting to bend the knee and accept me as Pirate Queen, we can’t exactly trust their vows or anything like that. I’m not really a Queen and they’re not really my nobility. Might makes right here...

and if they sense weakness, they'll immediately come for me. Weakness such as sending Leon away mere days after taking charge."

Leon's smile grows a bit. She understands perfectly. Olivia makes a small 'oh' face of understanding, even as she clutches at her skirts nervously. The blonde commoner clearly doesn't like the idea of still being in danger.

Angelica, meanwhile, has a sharpness to her now as she gets down to business.

"Captain Leon, how many of those golems can you deploy at one time?"

Leon arches a brow.

"Hundreds."

Technically thousands, but even if he liked Angelica and Olivia, even if he'd conspired to make Angelica into the Pirate Queen... he still had to hold something back for himself. Otherwise he'd really start to sound domesticated. Angelica is satisfied regardless, nodding decisively.

"Good. I would like you to do so... spread out as many of your golems across Fort Paix as you possibly can without diminishing the combat capability of your airship. I will be enacting stricter rules on the Fort going forward, rules that will help us fall in line with the rest of Redgrave Territory. As soon as my father gets my letter, he will likely begin sending merchant ships this way again... and I want to ensure when they arrive, they find nothing to concern themselves with."

Leon grins and inclines his head.

"It will be done."

Angelica hesitates for a moment, looking down at the papers on her desk. Finally though...

"Dismissed."

Leon turns and leaves her to it, plenty of automatons guarding her office and the building, leaving her and Olivia more than protected as he goes about following her commands. Of course, it's not like Leon himself has to do much in that regard. Luxion does the lion's share of the work, handling things with inhuman efficiency just like always. Though of course, he does have words for Leon.

"I am currently monitoring the vitals of both of your concubines. I should know soon enough whether your efforts have borne fruit or not."

Leon looks to Luxion with slight disgust.

"First of all, they're not my concubines. If anything, I would be Angelica's considering I made her Queen. Secondly... that's a little invasive, Luxion."

But the AI wasn't budging.

"The resurgence of the Old Human genetics you carry is of utmost importance regarding the long term survival of the world. The rampant lack of intelligence and general idiocy among New Humans will eventually lead to complete societal collapse."

See, the thing was... Leon knew Luxion was full of shit. The AI hated New Humans with a burning passion and would not care one bit if every New Human Society collapsed. He was just trying to appeal to Leon's desire to keep things running relatively smoothly so he could continue to have fun being a pirate.

Leon knew what Luxion was doing. Luxion knew that Leon knew what Luxion was doing. In the end though... Leon just huffs and shakes his head.

"Just get the automatons out on the streets. Angelica wants a show of force ahead of her upcoming edicts."

"Very well."

With that settled, Leon... goes and changes. When he finally emerges from a hidden backdoor in a back alley behind the manse, he's wearing a cloak on top of a disguise so that nobody will recognize him. Of course, on top of that he has Luxion 'watching' along as well, and only once he's sure he's not being followed does he begin making his way through the Fort.

Angelica had never asked how Leon seemed to know everything that was going on with the Pirate Lords and the Isle of Tortuga despite all but abandoning the place for years. To be fair, even if she had asked... Leon isn't sure he would have told her the truth. Again, for all that he'd come to like Angelica and Olivia... there were some things he didn't share with *anyone*.

Making his way through the winding paths of Fort Paix, Leon eventually arrives at his destination unseen. As he does so, he looks left and then right... not because he's looking for anyone specific, but because he's eyeing the defenses in the area to make sure they're still functional.

A drunkard leans against a wall a bit away to his left... but as the head tilts back, Leon sees the inhuman eye of an automaton staring back at him, flashing with Luxion's telltale red for a moment. After a moment, the automaton 'drunkenly' rises to its feet and proceeds to stumble away, acting its role perfectly.

Meanwhile, to his right there's some very old looking crates that haven't been touched in years. Or so they seem. Within, Leon knows there's a defensive platform ready to pop up and deal with any attackers coming down the main path towards the building.

Seeing that everything is in order, Leon steps forward and knocks on the door in front of him in a very particular pattern. Then, he waits.

He doesn't have to wait long, to be fair. The door opens after just a handful of moments and the eyes of his mother, Luce Bartfort, light up as she grabs him by the hands and pulls him inside. Neither his cloak nor his disguise stop her from recognizing him on sight, though to be fair the special knock they'd come up with together probably also helped.

As soon as the door is closed behind him, his mother embraces him warmly, hugging him close.

“Leon! We’d heard you were back in town but weren’t sure when you were going to be able to visit!”

From behind her, a masculine voice belonging to an older man rings out.

“I told her to be patient and that you would come when you could come.”

Pulling back, Luce looks back to her husband, Balcus Bartfort, Leon’s father, and huffs.

“Yes, well... it’s been years. I think I’m allowed to be a little impatient!”

Leon smiles softly at the banter between his parents, even as feet stampede down the stairs to usher in the arrival of his younger siblings.

“Leon!”

“Big brother!”

Colin and Finley Bartfort both come rushing down the stairs together. They’ve both gotten older since the last time Leon saw them. Finley is a full grown young woman now in fact, while Colin is in his late teens. They both still act like children though, even as they rush forward and demand his attention.

Leon is happy to give it to them all the same... he’s happy to spend time with his family no matter what.

There were lots of stories that swirled around Captain Leon ‘Devil’s Smile’ Bartfort back in the Kingdom of Holfort, he was well aware. But the best kept secret he’d ever managed to pull off was extracting his family. As far as anyone else knew, there’d been an attack on Bartfort Lands. Not attributed to Leon himself of course, but still, it had left no survivors.

In truth, he and his father had been in contact ahead of that 'attack' and in the end, Leon had finally convinced Balcus Fou Bartfort to abandon everything and take his family to go on a life on the run. One might consider that to be an impossibility... but it honestly wasn't as hard as some might think.

In the end, everything could be laid at the feet of Leon's step-mother Zola, and the corrupt failed system of governance that birthed her. The Bartfort Household had not always been nobility. In fact, they had been forced to accept the title of Baron only in Balcus' generation.

The end result was that even though Balcus and Luce were already married and loved each other very much, Balcus was forced to take a second wife, marrying a noblewoman to go along with his newly appointed title. That noblewoman was Zola.

Leon wouldn't spend too much time dwelling on how ridiculous the whole situation was. Suffice to say, Zola was a leech, the woman constantly draining their family of resources and ultimately trying her best to beggar them.

But frankly, what had ultimately caused Balcus to take Leon up on his offer to fake their deaths and disappear had been Zola's attempts to marry Colin off after Leon absconded and became a pirate, despite Colin being much younger than Leon himself was when she tried to do the same thing.

All in all, it had almost been an unqualified success. However, Leon technically had four siblings, not just two...

When Colin and Finley finally both settle down, Leon looks to his father with a raised brow.

"Have you heard from Nicks recently?"

Balcus nods, his face betraying no tension that could mean bad news.

"Yes, he's doing well for himself. He's made First Mate, apparently."

Huh, good for him. Truth be told, Leon might have preferred that his family all remained incognito and hidden in Fort Paix forever... but he couldn't control them entirely. Especially not his older brother. And while his father and mother were happy to just treat this as a bit of a 'retirement', Nicks was different. He'd wanted to branch out.

Unfortunately, Leon couldn't keep as close of an eye on Nicks as he could the rest of his family. He did his best anyways, but ultimately if anything happened, Leon would be forced to avenge his older brother rather than save him.

His older sister on the other hand.

"And Jenna? Any word from her?"

Balcus grimaces harder at that question, before slowly shaking his head. Jenna... Jenna was a bit of a touchy subject. Namely because she'd been left behind when the 'attack' happened. To be fair, this wasn't entirely their fault... in the end, it was mostly Jenna's choice in fact.

Leon's older sister was spoiled growing up. This had led her to developing a condescending, haughty, arrogant attitude. The sort of attitude that matched up quite well with Zola and her two children. And while Leon knew that neither Zola nor her children would ever respect any of the rest of them, Jenna included... that didn't stop Jenna from chasing the approval of what she considered to be a 'real noblewoman'.

He was partially to blame as well for that. His turn towards piracy had supposedly driven Jenna further into Zola's clutches. And ultimately, when the time came... Jenna had been in the Capital while everyone else had been on Bartfort Lands. So when Leon had come for them, she'd been left behind with Zola and the other 'Bartforts' who remained in Holfort to decry his piracy and what not.

What they were all doing now, especially without the regular stipends that Balcus was forced to send Zola in order to finance her life in the Capital, Leon didn't know. He didn't know how Jenna was doing either. And sure, maybe he

should check on her one of these days, but apparently she'd gotten mean and cruel on top of being arrogant, vain, and haughty. So much so that she'd even snapped Finley out of her own still-developing spoiled attitude with how she'd treated both her younger sister and Colin.

It wasn't perfect. Leon had only been able to save most of his family, and even now he couldn't protect all of them. But... at least his mother and father in this new life, both of whom had treated him quite well, were safe and sound. At least his younger siblings would get a chance to decide what to do with themselves rather than having decisions made for them. And at least Nicks was out there somewhere getting to make a name for himself, for better or worse.

Letting out a contented sigh, Leon pulls his father into another hug, causing the older man to stiffen for a moment before relaxing and returning the embrace.

"It's good to see you again, father."

"... And you, Leon. I just hope you know what you're doing."

Heh. Leon doesn't bother reassuring his father on that front. They both know the answer, after all.

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