

Human and Stars

Chapter 1

“Would you hurry up with that? We haven’t got all night!”

“Hey these are heavy and not that easy to move. You could try to be a little bit nicer about it.”

“Corshawl I don't have time to argue with you about being nice. We're in a hurry, the storm is going to be upon us any minute!” I exclaim to my lieutenant who thinks we have all the time in the world to tie down the cargo as well as to scold me on my tone.

“This is the last one” he rasps. “What else needs to be done?”

“Hurry and help Nixon with tying down the cannons. We can't afford to lose those!” I exclaim. With that he's off with rope in hand.

“Status report!” I holler. The wind is really starting to pick up and it's starting to rain. Just great! Why didn't we stay in port? We should have stayed.

“All sails are secure! The storm is about ready to take us!” Giggs my navigator calls.

“Is everything tightened that can be?”

“Yes, Corshawl and Nixon are working on the last cannon.” Shibba answers. I can barely hear him over the wind. Thunder is then heard. Just in time, everything is either tied down or tightly fastened.

My hands are on the wheel of the ship as I watch enormous waves begin to beat themselves against the boat. The crew desperately clings to whatever they can grab hold of. Rain and the ice-cold wind combine to make a sheet of needles that begin to stab at my face. Turning with all my might, I go against the wind so that we don’t get blown into the jagged rocks that poke themselves out of the choppy water. It’s as though the sky wishes to drown us and smash the ship into oblivion. No rain cloud is going to put an end to Star that easily.

It's getting harder to turn the wheel. My feet are starting to slip out from underneath me.

Trying to hold your stand with seawater sloshing everywhere and the boat getting jerked side to side proves to be a difficult challenge. I think this is the worst storm that I've ever been in.

My hands clasp the wheel as hard as they can when all of a sudden a loud popping sound is heard that turns into a huge bang. Shouts come from those below.

“What was that?!” No response, the storm is much too noisy for anyone to answer. Bet you anything that it was one of the masses. More waves wash across the ship. I cling to the wheel not wanting to be swept overboard. Now I can feel my arm being tugged at. I look over to the side, it’s Corshawl and he’s bleeding. “What was that cracking noise?”

“It was one of the masses.” He replies as loud as he can. I knew it blast it! That was one repair that I didn't want to do. Suddenly I lose my grip and get swept off my feet. Hitting the water at full speed, I smack into it face first. Uh-oh! At first, I flail around trying to make sense which way is up. When I have my sense of direction figured out, I swim upwards. I finally break the water's surface choking and sputtering as I do then quickly glance around before getting swept back under.

The water is calmer underneath. Opening my eyes, I scan around. The ship isn't that far off. I can still see the Star's haul. I then spot something else; my lieutenant unconsciously sinking into the ocean's dark depths. I quickly swim towards him and get a hold of his waist. My eyes are starting to sting from the saltiness of the sea and I'm quickly losing oxygen. I become weaker

and more tired with every stroke. The surface seems to be getting further and further away. In a desperate attempt, I shoot my arm forward causing my hand to smack into a large board. Groan...It's from the Star and the board is large. Blast it! Using the board as an aid, I pull my head out of the water along with Corshawl's. I then stretch his arms across making sure that he stays there.

Do I still have my whistle on me or did it get lost? I wearily pat my chest down for it. With some relief I find it still tightly fastened about my neck. Putting it to my lips, I blow as hard as I can making a high pitch sound. I do this three more times. Not sure if anyone can hear it. The wind's howling is trying to out sound my whistle. With my last attempt to reach my crew done, I stretch my upper half on the floating board just like I did my companion. All I can hear is the thunder and the needle like rain. The sky lights up again. My lieutenant still hasn't roused. My eyes dazedly look around. I can't see anything. Once more do I give my distress call hoping that the ship is still in range to hear it. I continue to wait as everything around me goes black.....

Chapter 2

"Captain...?" Hmm.mmm..I'm being shaken...What a weird movement when floating out on the sea. "Captain, can you hear me?" Hmm....I'm hearing things now...I wonder how far I drifted...

"Little Miss, please say something." I wonder who is talking to me...

"Captain! Snap out of it." My body is suddenly jerked upward, my eyes [snap](#) open, and whatever was on me just fell off. Also, my ears pick up a sloshing sound. My feet are in a bucket of hot water. I try to focus my eyes on whatever is talking to me, but with my vision blurry, I can't quite make out what I'm seeing. It appears to be orange and green.

"Come on Kuron, say something. You're starting to scare me." My vision is still blurry, but I can make out who it is.

"Corshawl..."

"You gonna be okay?" he asks. When I don't answer, Corshawl begins to lightly slap my face.

"Hey! Don't go back to sleep. Your temperature needs to be taken."

"Corshawl, it's alright if she sleeps." I hear my navigator say.

"No it's not." I don't know why my lieutenant is making a fuss about keeping me awake. My body wants to sleep. "I know exactly how to getdeerto come to." I can feel myself being dragged. Lord knows what he's up to. My feet bounce up and down as they touch each of the stairs' steps. Why is he taking me up on the deck? "Hey look" I'm then shaken. At first it doesn't do me any good, but within a moment or two my vision becomes crystal clear causing my eyesight to view the destruction around me. I'm stricken speechless. "Wha-wha-what?"

"I don't think it's a good idea for you to be sleeping right now." says my lieutenant. He's right, I can't; not with the Star in tatters. I straighten myself as best as I can then begin to really examine the damage.

"Get us to the nearest port. We need to make repairs." Blowing my whistle, I signal my crew upward. "The Star needs to be mended. I also want a status report on our cargo. If we lost pieces of our ship, I'm going to assume we lost pieces of our cargo as well. Giggs where's the nearest port?" My question causes him to pull out a compass all the while studying over a sea chart.

"It looks to be Swanson is going to be our best bet which appears to be fifteen leagues from here. There is also Codnamer, but I do not recommend using their ports." he says still having his eyes on the map. I nod taking in his advice.

"Alright, go ahead and set a course for Swanson. The wind seems to be somewhat fair. We should reach our destination around dusk. Am I right about that Giggs?" I want to be sure. Even a captain isn't sure about everything. Ooooh, I feel really dizzy.

"It all depends on how this wind keeps up Little Miss. If it picks up, we'll be there sooner. If it chooses to falter, we'll be there around nightfall." Great, more time wasted at the ports. Now don't get me wrong, there are plenty of good and rare items to purchase there. It's just finding a place to stay for a few nights which we'll have to do due to the severe damage to the Star. It still floats, but not with the same speed. Some of the sails are torn, one mast is toppled over, and I have yet to find out about the cargo. With the Inns around there, they're usually crowded and I don't much like staying at the pubs. There's always some drunks wondering around and causing trouble. No I don't need that right now. Unfortunately, if that's all there is then it's what I'll take. Putting my hand on my head, I hold out an arm to balance myself before asking "How are we doing as far as the cargo? In other words how much of it did we lose?" Sir John, youngest of the Three Gunns brings forth a small book which is used to keep track of our purchases and how much was purchased as well as price. His fingers are between a couple of pages. My body does not want to stay still.

"We're missing two barrels of gunpowder, three crates of apples,..." I listen becoming more and more worried as the list grows longer. It's not that we're completely run dry I'm thinking. It's the cost of which we're going to have to replace it. "...and our entire supply of drinking water is gone." I'm giving him a wide-eyed look.

"We don't have anything aboard that's drinkable? Not even in the galley?" Sir John shakes his head. I'm starting to get light headed.

"No, the only thing I can think of is mashing up the rest of the apples we do have to form some sort of a juice. I think we have enough for that." That's not a bad idea, but I don't like the fact of us not having anything to quench our thirst with.

"Shibba" I call.

"What is it Captain?" he says making his way towards us.

"Would you be able to turn the apples into a liquid? Our entire water supply went overboard." I say. A worried expression comes over his face.

"Have you tried to scavenge what we can? The lost cargo may still be floating around." I didn't think of that. I walk over the side of the Star and peer over. Ah! I don't want to fall off again. I let my body lean against the side and prop myself up against so I can still see downward without toppling over. Nothing is to be seen here except for the sea foam. There's not even a piece of our cargo. This is only one side of the ship though. The other sides should be checked.

"Gimp, Sly, and Corshaw! Go to the other sides of the ship and see if you can spot any of our lost cargo. Anything we can save would be a plus!" exclaim I. That would be less money out of our pockets. Ugh, I really need to lie down.

"Trying to save the gunpowder and the water would be a waste if seawater got in the barrels." Sir John remarks.

"I know that. I think recovering the fruit wouldn't be a good thing either." I add causing Shibba to shake his head.

“Not quite, the fruit would just have to be really well washed. Though if any of it got smashed then it would be pointless. I'll to get work on mashing those apples.” And with that, my cook disappears below. The wind seems to be picking back up a little bit. It's not the strength where I need it to be, but it'll have to do.

“Captain, I can't see anything on my side” calls out the second oldest of the Three Gunns.

“There's nothing here either.” his older brother says. Perfect...I stand here for a little bit longer before Corshawl responds.

“I see something, but we have another problem.” he says at last. What else is wrong? “I spotted one of our barrels.”

“And? The problem?” I question somewhat anxiously. Do we have a hole in the side or near the bottom of the Star that's taking in water? My lieutenant sighs as he replies.

“Our lifeboat is gone. We have no way of reaching it unless we turn the entire ship around.”

“What?!” I thought everything was tied down; especially the life boat. Blast it! As if losing an effective portion of our cargo wasn't bad enough. Not only do I have to replace that, but now I have to replace the lifeboat as well. The one we had would have fitted our entire crew; all eight of us.

“I highly doubt that survived the storm.” comments Sir John. “If we find the right carpenter, we should be able to get a sturdy one at a low cost.”

“That may be, but I don't think we'll find one big enough to hold all of us at a low cost. I wonder if it would be better to get two smaller ones this time. They're much easier to tie down as well as get in the water.” Corshawl says in response. Would it be better? If one got destroyed and one left, there would be no room for extra passengers.

“We'll just have to see what we find. For now, my main focus is getting back to the standard condition where we once were. Although, I'm not so sure I agree with two small life boats instead of one big one. The bigger ones are sturdier not to mention stronger in wood.” I manage to say. Why am I so exhausted? Last night wasn't too bad. Of course, it could be from nearly drowning myself while at the same time rescuing my lieutenant.

“What about the barrel? Should we still try to get it?” questions Sir John.

“No leave it. It's not worth going off course for one lousy barrel that could be soaked all the way through.” I reply.

“Kuron, are you alright?” I'm then asked. My dizziness has forced me to sit down. My vision is starting to blur again. “You're still tired from the storm? I thought you would have recovered from that by now. I did.” Corshawl says smiling. I give him a lousy kick aiming for the bottom part of his leg. “What was that?”

“Don't give me grief boy.” I grumble while raising a stern eyebrow at him. “While you were passed out last night, I'm the one who saved both of our lives and signaled for help.” This causes my companion to laugh.

“Doesn't sound all that difficult to me.” he says. I shoot up getting ready to throw a punch at him when my vision blackens. And instead of my hitting Corshawl with my fist, I hit the deck with my face.

“Oofh!” That didn't help...more pain. Laughter can now be heard. Corshawl along with Sir John are having a jolly old time with this. They don't appear to be the only ones. I lift up my head slightly to find my navigator, gunman, and the other two of the Three Gunns laughing as well.

“You're all getting keelhauled.” grumble I helplessly. Then carefully is my body lifted up.

“Take the Captain to the quarters to rest.” Commands my lieutenant causing me to protest
“Hey, who said anything about you giving orders?”

“The lieutenant is allowed to take over when the captain is unable to lead.” he replies while Sir John and Sly who have just walked over, put me in their arms. Giving my companion a dirty look, I snap

“I can lead this ship and its crew just fine thank you.” Corshawl only gazes at me. With no more said, I'm escorted downstairs to my cabin and laid gently on my bed. “Wake me when we reach Swanson!” I manage to bark out before my door is closed. Hmph! No response. Well, I might as well try to sleep. It'll be a little while before we get there or longer depending how the wind holds up. Closing my eyes, my body relaxes while the dizziness in my head decreases. That's somewhat better.

Chapter 3

I lay wide-awake in my quarters. My body wants to sleep, but my mind is wide awake. It's much too occupied with the damage done to the Star. What an embarrassing blow. Never under Captain Marshall's command had the Rising Star taken such a blow to it. I should have made us stay in port. A costly mistake I won't ever make again. How humiliating it's going to be sailing into Swanson in this condition. I know everyone will try to get remains of the vessel in the best condition possible, but still. I roll over on my side; ugh...this doesn't help at all. At least, I'm not falling on my face. How can I sleep knowing that my ship is in shreds and we're going to just waltz in Swanson looking like this? Well at least everyone is okay and we're still afloat. I'm actually surprised how little damage the Star took compared to what I've heard as well as seen from results of other vessels getting caught in storms. Tossing my body onto its other side, I catch my reflection in the mirror.

I'm not much to look at honestly. Just my normal blue Captain's uniform with a red wine sash tied around my forehead. Well my overcoat isn't on at the moment being the fact that it was removed from me along with my boots. Shibba must of washed it then set it to dry somewhere. With my long reddish bangs hangs in my face with the rest of my dark brown hair rests behind them. The discoloration of the front part of my head is from an accident that happened when I was really little according to what Giggs told me. Of course, I don't remember exactly what was said, but it had something to do with Gunpowder igniting on my head somehow. I don't mind. I kind of like the color. Skin is a little sun scorched; I'm not much of a sun tanner. All that does is change the pigments of your exposed skin to a darker skin tone. I have no desire to be discolored or look like I've been roasted.

My round face has a small round nose that sits in the middle of it plus my big brown eyes which I don't find very large compared to others. Usually, when the comments are given, it usually pertains how they're a bit large for my face, but I don't think so. Also I have this weird mark on my arm. Not sure why it's there but I keep it covered up. I was told that it was a birthmark, but it doesn't appear that way to me. It's on my left elbow and has this bad habit of bleeding every once in a while. I used to have issues with it when I was younger where my elbow used to bleed a lot. It doesn't bleed as much now. The other irritating features of my physicality are that my cheeks are always a shade of red or pink. It's not that I'm embarrassed or shy about anything. I

was told it could be from the seawater always hitting my face. The ocean has salt in it and salt dries out things so it could be a possibility. Still it makes me appear that I'm ashamed of something.

Now seeing how I haven't introduced myself yet I should do that now. I'm Kuron, captain of the Rising Star and successor of Edward Marshall, former captain of the Rising Star. That's how I was taught how to introduce myself to other officers of under the authority of King Falomen who is the current ruler of Uphoria. It's quite a mouthful if you ask me, but it's the way things have to be. It's disrespectful if I don't introduce myself that way. Anyway, with the formality out of the way, I basically run the order of the ship. Not quite the same way as Captain Marshall did, but I do the best I can, seeing how I was one of the youngest on the ship and I'm still learning how to operate things which I can do for the most part. However; once in a while something comes up that leaves me scratching my head. My lieutenant Corshawl, is about the same age as me so in a way you could say the vessel was handed over to the kids at that time. I did receive order for it at the age of sixteen which wasn't by choice. For our beloved captain had been taken long before his relieve ever came around due to a sudden illness. And seeing how I came to know him, I'd figure he would have captained the Star well into old age. It just never appeared to me that he would ever retire.

As for the crew; starting off with the oldest of the bunch, Shibba, Nixon, and Giggs. These three were already with Captain Marshall long before I was taken aboard. That is a memory I know very little about nor can I exactly remember what my leader spoke to me of it. I'm not going to talk about it right now. Anyway, Giggs, Shibba, and Nixon helped Captain Marshall raise me and Corshawl along with the Three Gunns. Giggs was my main caretaker while Shibba looked over Corshawl and Nixon trying to straighten out Gimp, Sly, and Sir John. That's not to say that it stayed that way. No, the five of us were usually bunched together when Corshawl and I began our teen years. I remember Shibba used to tell my lieutenant and I stories right before bed with the help of his little flute. It has somewhat of a high pitch, but when it's played just right the melodies that come from it are really pleasant to listen to. He used that to lull us to sleep with those melodies. You can always here him playing it when he's not busy in the galley.

Shibba is our cook and has been for a rather long time. His food is always good. It's hard not to go in the galley to swipe a bit of whatever he's making. Not a habit have I managed to break from being small. He didn't notice for a while that I was doing so until I got greedy one day and consumed half of what he was preparing. My cook learned to keep lids on the pots from then on and his gloves he used to remove them so his hands didn't get scorched. I was irritated with him when I couldn't find the blasted things. Everywhere I would look; drawers, cabinets, behind his spices...I learned later that he kept the gloves in his apron which he always has on unless he's doing something on the deck. Shibba had figured that I wasn't desperate enough to try and swipe food by lifting hot pot lids with bare skin, but I was. My hands hurt for two weeks straight making it hard to grasp anything. I learned that day not to touch the hot pots bare-handed.

Now for Giggs: my former caretaker and navigator of the ship. Alright, he's still in a way my caretaker. He along with Shibba still keeps a look out for myself as well as my lieutenant. We get into the thick of things sometimes with having no way out so they provide one for us. Of course, it's not always asked for, but they do it anyway. Not that I'm complaining, just curious as to how some situations could have played out if left in the hands of my lieutenant and I. It's

just sometimes their way out isn't always a way out. For example: there have been a couple of times when we've ended up in the wrong part of the sea. Giggs is not bad at navigation. He's actually quite good and we've gotten many advantages because of his skill. However; when he gets tired the wrong sea chart is used. This of course has only happened, a total of three times. The first time it did I couldn't help, but laugh. My mentor, of course, did not see anything amusing about us being lost. Poor Giggs, never had I seen him so embarrassed. The old captain did not ring him for it, but it did set our rendezvous with a commodore of Folyianna two days in delay which is never good in a captain's case much less the crew of that delayed ship.

Nixon, my gunman of the ship or better put as my cannon man, keeps the cannons on the Star in good order as well as well ready. The Three Gunns help him out with this. Those four are the most knowledgeable of the rest when it comes to weapons in regards to gunfire. There's actually no one else that I would trust the ship's firearms to.

The Three Gunns speaking of which, are siblings of three with Gimp being the oldest. Their story as far as I know doesn't really have that much to tell really. When I was at the age of six, they were brought aboard by Captain Marshall who intended to straighten them out. I do remember that it was hell for a while seeing how Gimp, Sly, and Sir John were thieves. Also, the two eldest had a drinking problem and their addiction led them to sneaking rum aboard the Star. It did take a bit of time for the Three Gunns to come around; especially Gimp and Sly. Well, Gimp for the most part. Anyway, Captain Marshall led them to where their group name became one that could be respected and not cursed as it usually was due to their reputation. Then there's Sinny, no you haven't seen him yet. As a matter of speaking, I haven't seen him since before the storm! I forgot to do roll call to make sure everyone was still on the ship. How could I forget such a thing?! Quickly do I reach up and yank a small cord that connected to a system of bells. Now, the way this works is that rope or some sort of cord and weaved through out the ship and the ends of them are all attached to a bell. Each room has at least one cord and one bell. This lets us call on each other when need be or something happens. I have at least 10 to twelve of these cords and bells in my room. Each being string from every room on this ship. I can call anyone and they can call me. Oh what am I doing? I'll explain the bells in a minute! I yank down on another cord to signal another bell. Both of the cords I ring somewhat violently. These two I have in my hands are for signaling the bells in the galley and my cabin boy's room. Suddenly, there's a knock at my door.

"Be quick and enter." I say. The door opens quickly to reveal Shibba.

"Captain, what's wrong?" he asks worriedly.

"Where's Sinny? I never did roll call for the ship after the storm!" I say trying to hide my worry. How neglectful of me. If Captain Marshall was still around, I'd be getting scolded very severely for this.

"He's with Giggs and is alright; just a bit worn out though." I'm told. My worry fades away leaving behind my guilt "Shall I send for him?"

"Please do" I reply. My door is then made shut again. Sigh, still so much to learn. It was a nightmare for a while with me trying to run the ship at the age of sixteen. Ah, I need to finish the explanation of the bells first before I go on about that. Now I was in the middle of just explaining how the crew can call on me and I on them when need be. To continue with that, out of various cords in my room, there's a large one that sits at the end of the line. Now this one is

to signal anyone on the deck. The cord is larger due to the reason of it being attached to a much larger bell. I also have a large bell attached to my room to signal me in case of emergencies. With this bell system there's isn't a spot on the ship that isn't within my reach so to speak. Knock..knock... That must be Sinny.

"You can come in." I say causing him to pop his head in.

"You wanted to see me Captain?"

"Yes, how are you feeling? Did you suffer any severe injuries during the storm?" My questions cause him to give me a funny look, but I think he knows what I'm getting at. I forgot him again.

He's just so quiet that you never can tell when he's in and out of the room. I can't at least.

Sinny's my cabin boy. No, I don't have him dress me like other cabin boys help their captains. In this case it would be inappropriate and very awkward with us being of different genders.

Instead, I have him help everyone around the ship with the daily tasks that needs to be done.

He even helps me with the paperwork along with figuring out the total costs of things. Now,

these aren't the actual duties of a cabin boy as far as I've heard. Ah, so what. Sinny's an incredibly bright lad for his age, fifteen years going on sixteen. He's not that far behind me and

Corshawl who are twenty. Also, you can usually find him with Sir John who had offered the membership of a Gunn, but Gimp would have none of it.

"I'm fine Captain. I was in the shrouds the whole time until you and the lieutenant were put back on board." Hmm...this is just embarrassing.

"Well I'm relieved to find that you're well. I don't know what came over me after the storm." I say. Now I am ashamed. I can feel my cheeks burning up. My cabin boy gazes at me for a moment before saying anything, Yes, I made a mistake and this is my way of an apology though it's not a very good one.

"Is there anything else you need?" he finally asks. I shake my head.

"No, you can return to your task, thank you." The hardest thing about leading a crew or some other type of group is admitting you did something wrong. Other words can be used I guess, but none of them can really described what I did. With one last sigh, I look towards the window in my room. It looks like it's mid-day. Lunch should be soon. Swanson should be in reach shortly although it doesn't appear that the wind is blowing very much from what can I tell by the waves flopping into each other.

Have I introduced Corshawl yet? No, I don't think I have. Well as far as what I've told you from introducing the others, Corshawl is my lieutenant. He's also the closest friend I have. That's not hard to figure out since we pretty much grew up together along with both being raised on this ship. However; I was brought aboard as an infant while Corshawl was joined to us at the age of six. Still, we managed to become friends...that is after a long term of us bickering to say the least.

My lieutenant, for a time was my archival. When we first met, I had told him excitedly that someday I was going to lead the ship just like Captain Marshall. In return I got laughed at. For some reason, he found it funny. I did try to let it slide and I don't remember what quite set me off about him laughing at the idea. Anyway, I do remember that just before I attacked Corshawl for his mouth, I was doing sword drills with the captain. During the practice, I got tossed onto the floor causing my body to go into an awkward position. This had caused Corshawl to laugh all the more and I think he said something too. Anyway, I jumped up in his direction thus creating

a tussle. The fight wasn't pretty. Both of us ended up with blood on our clothes and a very strong dislike for one another. After that day, we started to get punished frequently for our continuous bickering. I ended up with tending to the galley as punishment. Corshawl would end up swabbing. They kept up separate while we carried out our punishments, but those still did not have any affect. Our bickering became so much that went as far as pranks and shenanigans. I would get galley duty from Captain Marshall for a week and Corshawl would come in and dirty all the dishes that I had just cleaned. Chasing him out, I would always trip over dirty pots and pans that he had thrown everywhere. To make sure he got his just desserts, I would raid his room of his clothes and stick them in the crow's nest. It was funny to go and see him hunt for them, especially since he had just woken up; walking around in his little white trousers while glaring at me the whole time. He then would do something to get me back and I would hide his clothes again in the highest spot possible that I could reach at the same time being able to get back down. This lasted for about a couple weeks. Unknown to us, everyone knew of our charades except Captain Marshall. To this day, I'm not sure why no one reported us. So on the final day of that week I did my usual prank, only to discover later that I didn't leave him with anything to wear except for his blanket. I did not stick around to watch that. I did however; lock myself in my room, stuffed my face in my pillow, and nearly laughed myself to death. I almost made my stomach heave from laughing so hard for so long. It wasn't in my system to stop. When Captain Marshall saw Corshawl...let's just say the old captain got a hold of him and wasn't too pleased about it. At least, that's what I heard from Shibba after emerging from my quarters for breakfast. I really couldn't eat my meal in fear that Corshawl gotten the whip. The fear itself caused guilt to swell up enough inside of me. I do remember breaking down into tears and Giggs telling me that it was my conscious reminding me of what I did. After that, I confessed to Captain Marshall what I did causing Corshawl to do the same. In return, he gave my lieutenant galley duty and me swabbing the ship from top to bottom. Corshawl came in and began to help me after he was done with his task which I found strange at that time. It was then after we became friends, but that doesn't mean that our new friendship stopped us from getting into trouble.

Oh, we got into more trouble as our new friendship grew and to think of the worst that ever came of our relationship was being chased by a set of royal guards. The Captain told us to stay on the ship, but did we listen? No. Instead of doing that; we thought it best to entertain ourselves by messing with a couple of palace guards by dropping sacks of flour on them. There the two of us sat on a high ledge with our load fastened to our shoulders then getting ourselves in position; very carefully did we aim our powdery bombs at the unaware targets below. 3...2...1...whump! The flour went everywhere. Me and my lieutenant sat there laughing as guards were picking themselves off the floor. Our laughter was much too loud for it had caught their attention sending their eyes on our spot. Just by seeing their covered faces, the sight nearly had us tumble off the roof. We were in Uphoria at that time. Captain Marshall really didn't know until they caught us and interrupted his meeting with the king as well with a few officers. I do have to say that moment of my life was the scariest seeing how Captain Marshall was glaring at us. We both thought that it was the end of our lives right then and there. And what had made the experience even worse, is that they knew exactly who to drag us to which offered no escape route whatsoever. That terrifying moment made me feel as though I was a

sail less ship with a big target on my hull proclaiming for someone to shoot me. I think some other things happened before the two of us were dragged to our leader, but I don't exactly remember. I think I laughed at the head guard that caught us. Not sure though. All I really do remember is that Corshawl kept telling to me to shut my mouth before I got us both flogged. Well I think that's enough for now. You'll find out more about everyone soon enough plus there's too much for me to tell.

Yes, we're rather small for a crew. There being in total only nine of us. Not much of one people say, but that my friend isn't true. The quality of a crew doesn't depend on its size but on the members themselves....I think at least. Each and every one of them has proved their loyalty over and over again. Besides, I find things I bit more organized along with enjoyable when commanding a small crew. It's much better than having to worry about fifty or even two-hundred. I like my small, but durable crew thanks. And when it comes to the mates themselves aboard the ship, if anyone of them dies, they're easily replaced unlike here. I prefer it that way. On those larger ships, some of the officers send their men out to clear obstacle that would get the officers killed. It's downright cruel if you ask me. That's why I stick to my small ship. I actually value the people I lose and thank goodness that I haven't lost a single one of them yet. Jingle...Jingle...Jingle...

My head turns around at the sound of one of the bells. This one is signaling me from the galley meaning that lunch is ready. Come to think of it, none of us got any breakfast thanks to the mess we landed in. Slowly do I get myself up, open my door, and walk to the galley to join my crew for something to eat.

Chapter 4

We've reached our destination at last. The sun is still out, but the hours grow late. Summer is still upon us and will be so for a while longer. I like this season for its warmth along with there being more hours of daylight. Please don't let it be too late to do repairs on the Star. I don't want to stay here longer than we have to. With my hands on the wheel, I bring the Star into port.

"Drop the anchor and set out the ramp!" I shout. Hopefully we can get a start on the repairs. Oh I forgot my overcoat in the galley. I need to get it before I disembark. Once the ship's position is made heavy, I begin to make my way towards the stairs when Sly calls my name.

"Kuron!" Turning, I discover the disturbed expression on his face.

"What is it?" I ask. What is with the look?

"It's a docking master and he's asking to see you" he replies. It looks as though he's trying not to laugh. I slightly raise an eyebrow at him before making my way to the ramp.

"Are you the head of this vessel?" I'm questioned once I come into view of a tall lanky man. What was Sly laughing at? This causes me to nod. "You?" he asks looking quite puzzled

"Yes, I'm Captain Kuron and this here is the Rising Star." I reply

"Uh, it's one shilling per person to dock" he replies while opening the book in his hands.

"Very well. Sly, you and Gimp are up for guard." I say.

"Again? How come we're always stuck with watching the ship while the rest of you go off to enjoy the town?" he grumbles with his irritation very much shown.

"For starters, we're here for repairs and to restock. Second, I just gave you an order. Finally, I don't need another riot caused by you and your brother."

"They started it, not us. I tried to break it up, not get involved!" The second oldest of the Three Gunns is glaring at me right now.

"All of you guys were intoxicated and I don't care who started it. I had to pay the bartender for the damage caused to his pub not to mention pay the guards off to let you two alone." I had to almost bail Gimp and Sly out of jail due to a fight in one of the local pubs during one of our stops. It was a rather nasty situation that had very much become heated over something being overpriced or someone complaining about the food. I don't exactly remember. My coin purse was thirty percent lighter after it had been resolved. Anyway, Nixon and Giggs had the fun pleasure of escorting Gimp back to the ship. He was too intoxicated to think straight and kept trying to swing at everyone. His younger brother, thankfully, was sober to make the trip back on his own. Captain Marshall did do his best to drive alcohol away from Gimp. He did for the most part, but not all the way. There is an occasion or two where the eldest of the Gunns does displays no sense of self control thus creating unwanted results.

"Did you notice during that whole thing how I wasn't intoxicated? I had two and it takes more to get me drunk, a lot more. You know that of course or should." snaps Sly. "Argh, I knew that you would hold that fight against us still." He adds while crossing his arms. I straighten myself out and cross my arms as well. I look up into my crew member's face. I'm shorter than he, but that doesn't mean I can't be as intimidating. Of course, having to look up at someone doesn't really scream much less say intimidation.

"Look here" I say sternly. "I know you weren't drunk and I'm not holding the fight against you, but Gimp. I'm asking you to stay with him and the best place for that is on the ship." That's if he didn't sneak anything aboard that he wasn't supposed to. "Gimp is still out of it and you're the only one who can deal with him when he is so just stay with the ship." My explanation causes him to sigh. It does amaze me though how he was able to function during the storm. I'm further surprised that we didn't end up looking for him.

"Aye Captain" says the Gunn at last. Then adjusting his hat, I watch as Sly makes his way to the other side away from the ramp.

"How many sir?" a voice suddenly asks. It's the lanky man again. He must have been standing there the entire time. I walk down the ramp. Sigh, I still need to get my coat. Ah the heck with it. The temperature is nice enough without it. Corshawl is already handling repairs while Sir John handles restocking our cargo. I do hope that it doesn't cost us too much.

"Excuse me; I do have other ships to tend to."

"I'm sorry, my crew consists of niiAAAHHH!" My entire body stiffens at the sight of this man's face. I wasn't able to see it before. Now I kind of wish that I hadn't. The face of this man is as though has been smashed into very small sized pieces and mistakenly put back together in the wrong way with stitches. I wonder how often children approach him. "Ni-ni-nine" I stammer.

"What are the names?" he asks plainly. Apparently this docking master gets my reaction a lot. It's hard to keep from staring.

"I'm Kuron, the other nine are..." After I finish giving him our names, I hand him ten gold coins.

“Very good” he says pocketing his pay. “Welcome to Swanson Captain Kuron. I do hope you enjoy your stay.” With the official greeting given, I watch as the docking master walks away still having the book in his hands opened...how bizarre. My eyes are still wide. I shake my head lightly then make my way over to Corshawl.

“How many days will it take to fix the mass?” I hear him ask while getting in reach.

“Due to the damage of to the mass itself, I'd estimate two to three days. The downside of the mass that connects into the ship itself has been shredded. There's no way to just pop it back on. We need to reshape the bottom in order to put it back in there.”

“So that means that the mass will be shorter than it was before?” I ask after hearing the explanation. This causes my lieutenant to turn around.

“Just by a few feet, the shorter height won't affect things that much. You're ship will get around just fine.” The carpenter says. Just fine...? Just fine isn't reassuring.

“How much is it going to be to have this repair done?”

“He said it was around three hundred.” Corshawl answers. That's not too bad, but considering the other repairs we have to make, three hundred is really cutting into our funds.

“Plus the patching up of your sails and lining.” adds the carpenter.

“We're sitting at around a thousand, maybe a little bit more.” I throw a glance at my lieutenant. He's not happy with the cost either. I don't even want to think on how much replacing the cargo is going to be.

“There's no way you can lower it?” my question causes an irate gaze to come over the face of the carpenter. What?

“What is with you sailors?” his voice raises it's volume. “Always asking for cheaper prices. You think it's free where we get the lumber? I assure you the stuff don't come cheap. My price stands! Don't like it, take your vessel elsewhere!” he snaps. We both stand here now quiet trying to decide as to what we should do. It's not that we're going to be out of money entirely once everything is restocked and repaired, it's just that we're getting dangerously close. I'm trying to save as much as I can, but there's no way around it.

“Very well then.” say I. “We'll give a thousand for the repairs, but you'll receive pay after the job is done. I'm not paying you before.” At this the carpenter smiles and replies.

“Glad to hear and just to make sure you keep your word, I'll write up the agreement.”

“We need to get our hands on more money and soon.” Corshawl says worriedly once the carpenter leaves.

“I know. Unfortunately, I haven't received anything from the king requesting our services. Right now, we're just sailing. Maybe we'll come across something while at sea.” I comment. My lieutenant only nods. A few minutes later, the carpenter comes back bringing another man with him who carries a small tray with a bottle of ink, a quill, and the written up agreement.

“I just need you to sign before we start.” he says with a grin. Both Corshawl and I quickly scan over the terms and conditions. One line in particular catches our eyes....it being so that if agreed amount is not paid in full, the vessel on which the repairs are done is in ownership of the Swanson Harbor until the sum is paid...

“What are you trying to pull here? You know you can't take over a branded ship.” Corshawl says sternly. “On whose authority are you allowed to make these agreements?” If any ship is branded under the king, no one is allowed to take over them unless instructed by the king himself or that's how it's supposed to go.

“You want your ship fixed; you'll put your signature on that paper. I could care less about who's under whom. I want to get paid for the job.”

“Who's trying to swindle who here?” Corshawl doesn't look too happy about it. I'm a little irked, but in a way I understand.

“I might as well Corshawl, we don't need to worry about the amount for now.” I'm just focused on getting the ship fixed. Taking the quill in my hand, I give it a few dabs in the ink and then scrawl out my name below the carpenter's.

“Thank you. We can now get started.” My companion and I both watch as he begins to shout orders to the men nearby. They begin to move about gathering tools in their hands among other things.

“You shouldn't have signed that Kuron. Now he's got your signature to wave over our heads.” grumbles my lieutenant.

“Relax; we got the money to cover it. Besides even if we didn't, you think I'll let the carpenter take over the ship just for a thousand?” My question doesn't change his mood. I then decide to change the subject. “Take Giggs and Shibba with you and go find us a decent Inn to stay for at few days. I have to stay here to make sure things are going to get taken care of.”

“Right, I'll come back once we find one. I'll check on the status of the cargo too. Hopefully, it's not as much.” I only nod. Hmmm, only a few hours of work will be done on the Star today. Nightfall will come soon.

Chapter 5

There aren't a lot of choices here when it comes to finding a place to stay. There's so many pubs around here that have too many psychos running around.

“Do any of these places look remotely decent to either one of you?” I say to my two mates with me. I'm having second thoughts about sleeping on the ship while repairs are being done. It's usually not the best idea to do so during repairs.

“Not sure I want to stay a few nights in this area. The people are somewhat sketchy to me.” Shibba replies awkwardly.

“We can't be too picky. It's only going to be for a few days. As long as we're allowed to bring our firearms inside with us, we'll be fine.” comments Giggs. That is true. It would be really great if we're allowed otherwise we're going to have to sneak them in. I'm not staying at a place like this unarmed. Of course, me personally, I prefer my hands. Now I can shoot, but I have difficulty fidgeting with the flint lock on my pistol due to my hands being so darn big. Kuron can handle pistols a lot more easily than I can, but I'm still a good shot. However; when I do have to fight with some sort of weapon, it's usually with my sword or a pike. I can use those a lot better and have a lot more affect with them.

While walking a little further; my nose begins to wrinkle. This place smells a little bit funny. The food, heated metal, animals, plus God only knows what else makes for a funky perfume. There are officers everywhere, plus little kids. Argh! My foot catches on to something causing me to fall. I catch myself just in time and look around to see what it was. What the? Stupid birds, I just tripped over a darn chicken. A small flock of them begin to draw closer as I get back on my feet. I go to take another step when I fall again. One of the hens shrieks sending the others in a mad scurry. This time I get up and stomp at them.

“Shoo!” I yell. Man, I hate these things. I watch as the navigator and cook begin to shoo them away as well. Why in the world are these things even following us? Looking off to the side I notice that one of them refuses to move so to make sure it does, I begin to run towards it kicking up clouds of dirt as I do. “Go on, get!”

“Be careful Corshawl. Those things are mean once you tick’em off.” Giggs warns. Finally, the chicken decides that it's best not to follow anymore. I watch it as the lonely bird squawks then falls back in with the rest of the flock.

“Why can't people keep a fence around those things? They don't do anyone a bit of good being let alone to roam around like that.” I rhetorically ask. Giving no response, my companion just shrugs. Looking back around me, I notice that our cook is missing. “Hey where did Shibba go?” Before Giggs can answer, we hear our fellow crew member's voice from around the corner up ahead.

“Corshawl! Giggs! What about this one?” both me and the navigator head over to find Shibba standing in front of a small brick house with a small sign hanging from it.

“The Duchess's Delight?” Giggs asks somewhat bewildered. The building itself appears to be decent enough. Looks like a coat of fresh paint has been put on as well as a remake of the sign done. Also, it's located in a secluded part of the street. None of those drunkards appear to be roaming around here.

“Let's check the place out.” Shibba suggests starting to walk towards the entrance. I give a small nod and begin to follow.

“Hopefully we don't have to pay that much. We're going to be dangerously low on finances after repairs are done.” I say causing Giggs to remark

“We'll manage. I'm sure we'll find something to raise our funds. There's a lot we can do.” Seeing how I'm still not fully assured as to where the money is going to come from or what we're going to do about it, my companion gives me a pat on the back just before we enter. Once inside, the three of us begin to gaze around.

"I'm not sure we can afford this. This place might be a little pricy." Considering that there's eight of us and we're staying for three days, maybe four, I think we should try elsewhere even it means staying in one of those pubs. I know Kuron isn't in favor of those places, but from the looks of things we might not have a choice here.

"We still have to find out the price Corshawl. Who knows they might not be as pricy as we think." our cook says. I'm not sure I want to know the price of this place. As far as I'm seeing, like the well furbished furniture, the elegant vases full of flowers, and the counter itself, yeah I don't want to know the price of this place.

"Welcome to the Duchess's Delight. How long is your stay?" Turning our heads, Giggs, Shibba, and I see someone standing behind the counter staring at us.

"We plan on staying for three nights, maybe four." answering I while drawing near to the desk. "What's the price for at least one room?" I then ask. The person or rather the man gazes for a moment at me before replying.

"For one room and one night's stay, it'll be at least a hundred fifty. How many rooms are you planning to occupy sir?" I take a moment to think. Can we get away with just one room? So far we're looking at six hundred for just one room for four nights.

"Are we able to see how big the rooms are before we decide?" My question causes the man to step out from behind the counter and motion us down a hallway. We follow passing one or two doors before the man stops again. Then taking a key, the door is made unlocked and we're shown inside. What we see is two beds along the wall facing out with a small table in the middle of them. On the table is a single lamp. Looking further, we find a decent enough washroom occupied with a tub and a chamber pot. There's more, but I don't want to describe everything in the room. I send a look at Giggs and Shibba. "We can't stay here." Whisper I quietly. Looks like it's to the pubs we go. Now how do I tell the owner that we're not interested anymore?

Chapter 6

Corshawl's right...I shouldn't have signed that agreement. Right after the carpenter and his fellow carpenters went to work on the ship, he comes back some time later and tells me that the price been raised.

"What?!" I exclaim. "We agreed on a thousand and no more!"

“The wood is a little bit more expensive than I intended plus the type of cloth that is being used to repair your sails.” I’m told. So that doesn’t mean you get to up the price on me all due to a blunder you made.

“Can’t you use another type of lumber?” I ask desperately. He only shakes his head at me before getting called by one of his men.

“Excuse me Captain” Hmph! I’m not paying more out of my purse for a mathematical error he made!

“Captain!” another voice calls. At first, I don’t give it much attention that is, until I see Sly walking in my direction.

“Not now Sly” I snap. What a fast one this guy is trying to pull on me. I’m not going to- wait a moment, what is Sly doing off of the ship? “What are you doing? I thought I told you to-”

“I already know.” Sly says cutting me off “I can’t watch Gimp if he’s not around.”

“What?!” I exclaim. Oops, I didn’t mean for my tone to go that high. I’m being looked at with wide eyes and furrowed eyebrows. That swindling carpenter has got me in such a fix right now. “Are you sure he’s not in the cargo hold somewhere?”

“Kuron, I checked everywhere.” he replies irritably.

“Would you have any idea as to where he might be at this particular point?” I ask trying to control my frustration. Our finances are about to get cleaned out and Gimp is still hung over on the loose.

“Gimp probably disembarked when Sir John did.” My crew member’s answer causes me to sigh all the while rub my eyebrow. Speaking through clenched teeth, I close my eyes for a moment. “Is Nixon still on board?” The second of the Three Gunns nods. That’s at least one good thing “Good, go fetch him for me. Once, you’re back on the ship, make sure the doors leading below are locked. I don’t want anything to go missing.”

“Aye Captain” I watch the side of the ship until I no longer see Sly. It’s only a minute or two before my cannoneer appears.

“What is it Lassie?” he asks me. I tell him about Gimp’s disappearance and that he’s still intoxicated to a small degree and that I need him found. Nixon I know will have no trouble with hauling Gimp back to the ship. After all, he’s had to do it so many times before. Ugh, where’s that carpenter? I’m just dying for him to raise the price on me again. I swear, I’m going to blow a fuse if he does. A wait of fifteen minutes is tolled. My cannoneer is already on the hunt and I’m still waiting around for this money swindler to reappear.

“Ah, you're still standing there. I didn't mean to keep you waiting so long.” So the con artist finally returns.

“It’s about time.”

Chapter 7

We're stuck in having to stay at one of the pubs. Kuron's not going to like this, but at least we won't won't be staying anywhere near the Duchess's Delight place with its expensive scenery and its cantankerous owner. As soon as I told him that we'd be staying elsewhere which I was careful about it, the man became really irate and began to scold us about wasting his time. It's not like he had anything really to do at the time except to go back behind his desk. Anyway, we managed to find a pub that wasn't too crazy with remotely decent rooms for real cheap. The rooms are above the actual bar itself so we don't have to worry about much. We're just now waiting on the owner who is much friendlier to take our pay. The three of us, Giggs, Shibba, and me are seated at one of the tables. The place isn't real busy right now so he shouldn't be too long. While we wait I remove the coin purse from my waist to count out our stay's expense. Some of the coins dance across the table after being dumped from the bag. I'm quick to retrieve them and keep them close by just in case someone comes around with sticky fingers. As I begin to count the money out, my companions start to laugh.

“What’s so funny?” I ask not bothering to look up. Did I miss something? Giggs snorts with laughter while my other companion tumbles from his seat. I hear the thud as Shibba lands on the floor. Covering up the small stack of coins with both hands, I allow myself to gaze up.

“Take a look over there” the navigator says trying to point straight.

“Where?”

“Over there” he says pointing again. As I turn my head, I catch sight of a man with a water pitcher crammed over his face.

“How the heck did that happen?” I get no response. The poor victim stumbles around trying to wrench the sucking dish from his face. With a big body like that, you got to wonder how his big head was able to squish in there. Quickly do I scoop the coins back into the pouch. I'll count them once the owner comes back out. That guy seems to be really struggling with that pitcher. I scoot my chair out and then stand up. The cook notices me beginning to walk over.

“I wouldn’t Corshaw!” he chuckles. I ignore him and head over.

“Hold still” I say once I reach the victim. Then getting a hold of the handle and good grip on the other side, I begin to yank. This thing is really stuck. Whoever shoved it on his head did a good job of making sure that it would stick. Pulling it is not going to work. Suddenly the man begins to wiggle and jerks himself backward in attempt to detach the dish. The end result is me sent flying towards him then landing on top of him. Alright you idiot, that's not going to work. Taking his hand, I help him back on his feet. A piece of the pitcher falls from behind landing on the floor. Well, I guess that did work to a small degree. Picking the small piece up, an idea pops inside my head. I know how to get this off. Considering that the pitcher is now unusable, I can just break the rest off. “Hold still and don't move.” I tell him again. Hopefully he listens to me this time. Taking the small pistol I have, I turn it so the butt of it is up. “Don't move, I mean it.” I aim carefully. I don't want to hit this guy in the head.

“Uh Corshawl...” I hear Giggs begin to say. This is the only way I can think of getting this off. With one last measure, I swing downward. A giant crack springs up from the bottom near the man's chin causing the pitcher to shatter around his face. More pieces fall to the ground. Some are me from pulling them off the man's neck while the rest are from when the pitcher was shattered.

“Are you alright?” No response. With wide eyes does he move his head around before noticing me. Anyone home? Did I hit him on the head? No, I couldn't off. The pitcher itself was much taller than his skull. Still...I wonder. “Hey you-” Before I can get another word out, my hand is grabbed and shaken real violently.

“Thanks for helping me out there. That server girl really jammed it down. Thought I'd never get it off.” he says cheerily. That's great, now let go of my hand. Yanking my arm away, I back away a little to put some distance between us. He stands somewhat taller than me with eyes that keep looking around at the door. Is he expecting someone to come in?

“You okay?” I question again. I'm a little bit worried about this guy. He's acting kind of strange. Now I'm thinking I might have nicked him.

“You hungry?” I'm suddenly asked.

“What?” I give this odd man a funny look. When I don't answer, the man wraps an arm around my neck to lead myself to a nearby table.

“You here by yourself? You can come and have dinner on me.” Thanks for the offer, but I'm not interested. I duck out from underneath his arm then make my way back to where Shibba and Giggs are. The owner is still nowhere to be seen. What is taking that guy so long? “Oh you have friends with you.” My two companions glance at me once I sit down. The strange man pulls up a chair then makes himself comfortable. Nothing is said at the moment. I tap my fingers on the

table still in wait for the owner as well as trying to figure out what to do with this man. Looking around, I spot a serving girl. She appears to be busy with something at the moment. I do wish she would come over here. Maybe she's the one who shoved the water pitcher down on this guy's head. "You guys planning to stay long?" We're asked.

"Not really, we're just here for repairs." Giggs replies. "Our ship was damaged during a storm." Looks like our navigator is going to try to make small talk with him. As long as his attention isn't on me, I perfectly fine with it.

"The one that just hit? Aye, there were some other poor sailors caught in the mix. Unfortunately, their ship didn't make it and neither did they."

"My sympathies to the families of those men" they start to talk a little bit more now sharing stories, well mainly the strange man. Some of the tales this guy is sharing is leaving me along with Giggs somewhat disturbed. I haven't heard all of it, but the parts that I catch lead me to the conclusion of not wanting to know the rest. How long is this owner going to make us wait? We just want a room....Aside from our new "friend's" storytelling; a small snoring sound is heard. I look over at Shibba who has fallen asleep. Being exhausted out from the storm then having to do repairs calls out for an early turn in although, I don't think our cook is fully asleep just yet. His eyelids keep twitching.

"So that's how that turned out." That's how what turned out? My hearing has picked up another piece of the conversation and what I can tell from the face of my companion, it looks as though he could have done without the story. With a small sigh, I go to rest my head on the table only to shoot up in result of the man smacking its surface as hard as he can while calling out. Shibba is now wide awake...startled, but awake. He rubs his forehead.

"What do you want? I thought I told you to leave!" Our friend's ruckus has brought out the serving girl I saw a little while to go. She doesn't look too happy to see him.

"I just want something to eat and something for my friends too." deervictim moans. I have no doubt now that she was the one who made him suffer with the imprisonment of the pitcher. Me, Giggs, and Shibba are then gawked at. At first, it's with the same angry expression until I dart my eyes away as if saying...he's not with us. Please make him go away. It takes her, but a moment to walk over to get a full view of us.

"What can I get you boys?" the woman then chirps. Just like that, it's an entirely different mood. She even has a smile on her face. What are you staring at? Suddenly, I feel eyes tracing my face then making themselves down my neck.

“Could you bring out some stew? That would be real nice.” replies the strange man. Our waitress takes a moment to gaze at him before moving her eyes back over to me.

“Uh, for me too?” I manage to get out. Don't know why, but this woman is making me nervous. She won't stop eying me. Shibba and Giggs then add that they will settle for the same meal. Might as well get this over with. Disappearing and reappearing within a few minutes, our waitress returns with piping hot bowls containing a brown slosh in them. What kind of stew is this? She begins to pass them out being sure to give our friend his first who starts in on it as soon as the bottom of the bowl touches the table. An expression of anxiousness sets itself on Shibba's face after his is put in front of him. You're not the only one who is having issues finding out if this is kosher or even safe to eat.

Finally mine is brought around. This does not look appetizing in the slightest. I think I'm going to let it cool for a bit. Maybe our host will be back by then to give us a room. Maybe I won't have to eat whatever this is. There are chunks of some kind of meat sticking out of the surface with whatever these yellow pieces are. Picking up the spoon that was set beside my meal, I begin to stir the stew all the while leaning my head back. Suddenly, I freeze. What did my head just run into? Nervously, do I glance up. It's the waitress. What do you want? Seeing that now she has been acknowledged; a drink is then set out. Apparently, she already gave drinks to the other three.

“Thank you...” my cheeks are burning and my voice just cracked. The guy has already made me uncomfortable; you don't need to join in on that. With one last look does the woman finally leave. Oh bother...I let out a sigh while catching my companions' gazes. Giggs, there's no need to look at me like that. I didn't know she was right there. To avoid talking about what just happened, I stuff a spoonful of this gruel in my mouth and suffer for it. Ugh, what the-

“That's the special ingredient she adds.” laughs our friend. The revolting taste swishing about in my mouth causes me to shudder and continues to do so as I swallow.

“What is the special ingredient?” Shibba questions after seeing my disgusted look. I don't even want to know what the special ingredient is. Yuckth!

“Don't know, but it adds a bit of a fishy flavor to it, don'tcha think?” That's it for our cook. He pushes the bowl away from him causing Giggs to do the same. He apparently knows something about this dish that I don't. I think I'll pass on trying to finish this. Laughter is now heard from the strange man. “It takes one with a unique taste to enjoy this. Ya mind?” All of our heads shake. Then helping himself to our bowls, the man begins to dump the contents of our dishes into his. After all of the stew is in his bowl, he begins to talk. Great, more mental scaring facts about the man's past. Just what I need to end my day, but the torture doesn't stop there. Oh

no, we get to watch him engorge himself. Where the heck is the owner? I'm about ready to pay the six hundred at the Duchess's Delight.

I feel really stupid for helping this man. I should have listened to Shibba and left the water pitcher on the man's head. Who knows he might have wandered outside with it and manage to get it smashed out there along with his head, but we'll never know. No, I just had to help him because I felt sorry for him. I now feel sorry for myself along with my two mates that have to sit here and endure this. Oh my sanity...He's begun to babble endlessly now.

"Listen mister" I begin.

"Name's Boutka" Boutka says cutting me off.

"Boutka, don't you have somewhere to be?"

"No, I have nothing planned for the evening. I think it be best to spend it with you chaps." He replies continuing to engorge himself.

"I think I'm going to be ill." God forbid...

"So what do you have planned for the evening?" The question causes me to grimace. Why? You're not coming with us.

"What's it to you?" Giggs asks looking quite disgusted. Aw come on, just go away. Food keeps flying out of his mouth. You think he would be done eating by now with the way he keeps stuffing it full of the brown gruel.

"Just curious...no need to be rude." Rude?! I'll give you more than rude! You're driving me insane.

"You don't have anyone else that you can be an annoyance to; family, friends, or even the waitresses?" I have become desperate. Where's the owner? A part of me would hate to leave the woman here alone with him, but I'm sure she would manage. Having left him in a fix with the water pitcher, I highly doubt he would have caused any more trouble.

"Why do you think I had that water pitcher on my head that you graciously helped me with?" he points out talking yet again with his mouth full. Where's another one? I'll be able to have some peace with it planted down on that big marble of his.

"I'm beginning to wish that I hadn't. It's no wonder she did it, you don't shut up." The words fly out of my mouth uncontrollably. I've tried to be nice, I've tried to be patient, but there's just no way around it. This guy needs help. Boutka is now miraculously quiet. I look over at Shibba who appears to be sending me a message with his hands...I think. "What?" I mouth the words so the

stranger sitting next to me doesn't hear. Our secret conversation is interrupted when the strange man speaks again somewhat in a different tone.

"You fellas ever heard of the 'Black Knight?'"

"Who?" all three of us ask at once sharing similar facial expressions. He belches then replies

"He preys on ships during the day and attacks'em in the dead of night." Seeing that we have no 'rude' remarks he goes on. "They say that his victims never see it comin'. He's hunting every last one down."

"Wait, who is this guy hunting exactly?" I ask perplexed at this loon's story.

"Pirates; so many have disowned the king causing his majesty to disband them all that come from Shersia."

"Shersia? What do they have to do with the Black Knight?" I question. I'm not a doctor, but I can tell this man has been out in the sun for far too long. I highly doubt there's any juice left in his brain from it being baked in the heat. Giggs and Shibba make a sign that it's time to leave.

"Corshawl I think we should try elsewhere or comeback when the owner is here." My companions say.

"Yes, I agree."

"Wait this is important, especially if you're sailors." The man says grabbing my wrist. Of all things! He's got some of the gruel on his hand!

"Gah! Alright I'll stay, just let go of me!" I exclaim. My two companions wave me off as I take my seat again. "Tell Kuron, that once I'm finished making arrangements for the room I'll come out and meet her." That's if the owner ever decides to come at all. My call of exasperation reaches them before they leave. Boutka, now smiles then goes on with another one of his tales for twenty minutes. What I'm told is that the Black Knight, an alleged pirate hunter, has been hunting pirate ships for a few years now. Also, that the Shersians do not want any foreigners on their waters.

Right now Folyianna, Uphoria, and Shersia are allies, but due to what the Shersian governments have allowed over the last couple of months, that bond has weakened. The governments of Folyiana and Uphoria have tried to set up trade with foreigners many times, but anyone entering from the west has to pass Shersian territory and usually doesn't make it. To make sure that they get their goods; Uphorian warships have been sent to enforce the safety of the incoming merchants. Personally I don't like them; they have caused so much trouble that it's nearly escalated into Shersia becoming our enemy which would not be beneficial for Uphoria

whatsoever. I have heard rumors of Uphoria breaking alliance with Shersia. Folyianna has threatened to do the same, but that would mean Shersia would turn to Vexianna for aid.

“You be sure to steer clear of those accursed waters, pirates who go in don’t come back out.” he warns beginning to stand up.

“I’ll do my best.” I reply sarcastically while he leaves. Still no sign of the owner... Sighing with relief, I make my way to the door.

“Excuse me sir, but you’ll need to pay before you leave.” Spinning around, I almost smack in to the waitress.

“Um...” I stop to swallow. “Sorry ma’am, I’ve been waiting for the owner to return in order to set up quarters for a few days.” I say.

“My boss is due back any minute. I just spoke with him. He had some things to take care of. In fact, seeing how you’ve waited so long. I could give you a room.” She says beginning to play with my collar. Look, I don’t know what you want from me. I just want a room, not you! Very carefully, do I removedeerhand from my clothing. This is very nerve racking! I’m going to kill the owner once he gets in as payment for the torment I’ve had to endure here!

“Ah hah, actually I need a couple of rooms that will fit eight people.” My response causes the facial expression of the room to morph from happiness into disappointment. My eyebrows raise themselves up. Uh...no! Shaking my head slightly, I straighten myself out before asking “Where is your boss? I can no longer wait.” Before the waitress can reply, a man walks in from another door. He’s dressed with an apron holding in hands a ring full of keys. Please tell me this is the owner. “Um excuse me...” I call over to him causing his head to face itself in my direction.

“Be right with you” I’m told. With crossed arms do I watch the owner lock the door then make his way over. “So sorry to make you wait. I had to take care of some business matters. So how many rooms are you looking to fill?” The question causes me to reply

“Depends on how big they are and how much.” The owner, who is somewhat of an elderly gentleman, escorts me to a door nearby. Once inside, I’m allowed to inspect it. Not as pleasant as the Duchess’s Delight, but there are more beds and there appears to be enough. I give a small nod of approval. “This will have to do.” Now it’s on to the price which I come to find out is negotiable. It takes only a few minutes to settle on a price per night which is fifty a night making a total of a hundred-fifty for our stay. Once the arrangements are made, I’m handed a room key or rather a copy of it.

“Just let me know if you need anything. Darleen will be around too so just holler.” Our host says merrily. I give him my thanks while keeping the annoyance of waiting to myself. It's just not worth it. Then making my way to the entrance, I'm halted by Darleen, my looker.

“Now look you, I'm not trying to be rude, but I need to go. I really don't have time for this.” Sternly, I tell her. Darleen doesn't pay any attention to a word I just said. And as proof, deerhands latch themselves onto my coat then drag my body towards hers. “Whoa!”

“Now remember,” the waitress whispers. “Holler if you need anything.” deermouth moves closer to mine. Quickly do I snap my head sideways causing deerkiss to land on my cheek. Sorry madam, I'm not interested. Darleen pulls away after examining the expression of my face. This causes deer to chuckle. I back away slowly before taking off out the exit. What is wrong with that woman?! With my sleeve, I wipe off my cheek. Ugh, I can still feel the wetness of deerlips. I begin to run towards the docks when my ears pick up yelling. I stop to get a brief glance.

Is that Gimp and Sir John? I'm looking straight ahead of me now; Gimp is arguing with a girl while Sir John is trying to cut in. I wonder what the argument is about. As I continue to watch, the girl swings whatever is in deerhand nailing Gimp in the face. I grimace. Oh, that has got to sting! My body winces as I watch him tumble to the floor. It looks as though I'm not the only one who has had some misfortune with the opposite sex. Sir John is shaking his head as the girl storms off. I walk over.

“What happened?” A red mark is now painted on the oldest of the Three Gunns's face.

“Gimp was being his ‘charming’ self as usual” Sir John answers.

“Hey it's of no fault of mine! She started it.” Gimp retorts reddening.

“She also finished it” replies his little brother. The facial expression that his big brother has brings me to laugh.

“What are you sniggering at?” I stop for a moment to endure Gimp's glare.

“You don't know understand women, do you?” Sir John asks crossing his arms.

“I do to.”

“Very well, tell me then” a big grin spreads across Sir John's face. Gimp looks at me then at his little brother. “Well?” A tiny grin spreads from one side of my face to the other. The two of us stand there and watch our third companion fumble around with his fingers for a moment. I keep my mouth shut. Heck, I can't make sense of them myself. Take Darleen for example. Finally, Gimp replies

“They’re cats that just like to tease us and when we get too close or pet them the wrong way, the bloody things turn on you and try to sink their teeth into your skin. They’re devious creatures.” I’m just dumb stricken. Never have I heard women described as such... although, I do agree with the sinking teeth part. Sir John looks at me wide eyed.

“Well that’s an interesting observation” he says. Laughter can be heard with its source being myself.

“It’s just the way I see them.” Gimp grunts getting up. Not sure as to why I’m laughing. I’m not sure if I can agree with my crew member or not. The only woman, I’ve really dealt with is Kuron. Otherwise than that, I really don’t have experience there. Well...and that waitress.

“Did you get that from Captain Kuron?” I ask trying to control myself. No offense to her, but there are times when she is like that. It’s not often, but it’s enough to drive me crazy.

“No! I did it by observation.” If that wasn’t from the captain, then who in the world did he observe? Sir John and I send glances to one another before completely letting go of ourselves. “Oh shut up!” Gimp snaps. The nerves on my face along with my skin begin to tighten up. Oh, I had better get a handle on this. If I go any further, there will be no need to. We continue to laugh until our stomachs ache. Ah, this makes me feel so much better with the encounter of that bar wench. This is something to remember. Finally, the laughter stops. I still have a teasing smile on face as I begin to look around. I just noticed that Sly is nowhere to be seen.

“Where’s Sly? Don’t you three always stick together?” I ask suddenly expecting the third brother to jump out at me randomly. He’s done it before.

“We have no idea.” replies Sir John

“He must have stayed on the ship.” Gimp mutters. Another matter then hits me.

“Sir John, aren’t you supposed to be taking care of replacing our cargo?” I ask.

“The arrangements have already been made. Our new supplies will be loaded on the ship tomorrow at nine in the morning. I was told that it was too late to start doing that now.” I’m told

“I see. Is Kuron aware of that?” My question causes Sir John to nod.

“Did you find us a place to stay Corshawl?”

“Yes. It’s not the best, but certainly was the one of the cheapest.” I reply then suggest “Let’s head back to the ship to gather whatever we need for our stay.” Both Gimp and Sir John nod. I

don't know how much progress was made with the repairs. Hopefully, it was a good portion. The three of us start to head in the direction of the dock when Nixon shows up.

"There you are. The captain wants you on guard duty for the ship." he says to the oldest Gunn. Well, it's a bit late for that.

"We're heading back to the ship now to pick up essentials for our stay. I found us a place just around that corner over there." I inform him while pointing.

"Hmm, how much was it?" I answer his question as the four of us make our way back to the Star. Once we get there, I notice that Kuron is arguing with the carpenter still over the cost of our repairs.