

## Necessary

“First Mate Keats!” The gruff voice cuts through the sounds of lively chatter and crashing waves. I lift my head up at the sound as a hush falls over the crew, huddled in the corner of my quarters, at the clear urgency in his voice. My pale blue eyes lock on to them and they scurry away, dropping their cards and leaving the lower deck quiet except for the sound of heavy footsteps thudding against the wooden floor.

“What’s the matter, Webb?” I ask, noticing how his furrowed eyebrows make him look so much older.

“Intercepted this note,” he tells me, his breathing heavy as he hands me a piece of paper dirtied with soot and blood. “Maybe I should’ve shown the captain first, but she’s so focused on this next raid.” He goes silent for a moment, absentmindedly tugging at the loose threads at the end of his tan cotton shirt, before raising his dark eyes to mine. “You’ll know what to do,” he says at last, before nodding and making his way up the rickety stairs.

I take a deep breath before unfolding the letter. At first glance, everything seems in order. I immediately recognize Captain Reeves’ handwriting. He and Captain Archer exchange letters often, and I wonder why Webb is panicking over this. Poor kid. He must still believe the stories about pirate captains being seconds away from cutting each other’s throats. I smile, shaking my head at his naivety as I open the wobbly desk drawer by my side. I have other business to attend to, as does Captain Archer, and I will not trouble her with this right now.

But then I notice it. It isn’t until I’m almost done folding up the letter that I realize the letter addresses a Captain Hawk, and I wrack my brain trying to remember where I’ve heard the name. I ignore it for now and start to take in the contents on the page. Plans for a trap and

capture... payment and power in the pirates guild, all in exchange for Captain Elizabeth Archer and her loyal crew. Wait, the pirates guild? Why would they have it out for Archer? She's an important and respected captain. They should be grateful she gives them any consideration at all! Perhaps it is because this Captain Hawk is the new leader of the guild? Why were we not notified of this change? There's something deeper here, but it eludes me.

Shaking my head, I turn my attention back to the letter and the real threat at hand. Reeves. How could he do this to her, to us? We were friends once, or so I thought. I can't believe he would trick us for such ridiculous rewards. On the seas, all we really have is each other, and we mustn't forget that, but it's clear he has. I suppose I must remind him of this. I will put a stop to Reeves' treachery. I will protect my crew and my captain at all costs.

Careful not to alert the others to his threat, I rise from my seat and lock myself in for the night. As second-in-command, this is my burden. I begin memorizing the details Reeves included in the letter: his current location and his intention to trap our ship so as to execute us all. I draft up my own plan of attack with the information I have, and, over the next few days, I set the course for our ship, ensuring it evades his traps while still getting close enough to the island he and his crew are hiding out on.

At twilight, I sneak away in a dinghy, arriving on the island as night falls. My hands grasp the rough wood, and I drag the small boat over white sand, hiding it in the dense brush nearby. It's a strategy I am familiar with, one that once involved hushed snickers between old friends. There was a time when Reeves and Archer would band our crews together and make a game of ambushing the cocky aristocrats with their fancy houses hidden away on private islands. Now, there is no game, only betrayal and the reality of what must be done to ensure his plan is not realized.

I notice slivers of firelight poking through the dark jungle, revealing the pirates' location, and I sneak through the tangle of plants before arriving at their base. Kneeling, I watch the rowdy men drink themselves into a stupor. My eyes land on Reeves, who waves at his crew as he stumbles towards a rickety tent. *Perfect*. His men won't notice him gone, and even in their intoxicated state, none of them would be foolish enough to disturb the captain in his own tent.

I rest against a gnarled tree but remain alert, biding my time for the moment his crew falls into a deep slumber, knowing the copious amounts of alcohol in their system will do the job soon enough.

One by one, I watch as eyes begin to droop, and bodies begin to curl up on the dusty ground littered with leaves and weapons discarded in their drunkenness. It's time.

The tent is close, and I begin to creep along the edge of the clearing, flicking my eyes down as I walk to avoid fallen branches. When I arrive, I listen by the side of the tent and am greeted by the sound of muffled snores.

Pushing the thin fabric aside, I peer in to see Reeves face down on the ground, curled around a bottle of liquor. I hold in a scoff as I sneak closer. I gently tug on his greasy hair, and I freeze as he giggles, but he doesn't wake. I pull until his head is off the ground, kneeling over him as I slide my hand over his open mouth. Reeves' arms flail outwards, and his body thrashes under my own before going limp. As I remove my hand from his face and stand, I can't help but stare at his pathetic body. I look at him with pity and have half a mind to wait for him to wake, to interrogate him or beg him to change his mind. He was my friend too. But no. It's a risk I can't take. My emotions cannot compromise this mission. I grab hold of his lean arms and drag his body out of the tent, not stopping until I reach the dock.

“It’s just what has to be done,” I murmur aloud, gazing down at the unconscious body in a heap by my dusty black boots. “I hope you understand,” and with a kick, his body rolls off the pier, sinking down, down into the murky waters below.

Aboard the ship, locked in my quarters once again, I feel the weight of grief taking hold of me, but I must ignore it. The threat is far from over. Reeves won’t be the only one coming after us as long as Captain Hawk is pulling the strings.

It dawns on me then. Hawk. I believe I knew him once, briefly, but that was a long time ago. I remember the way Archer laughed as she threw the boy into the sand, watching him writhe as he struggled to stand on those bony legs of his. His wild eyes were full of fear as she jabbed her sword into the ground around him, his body jerking in every direction to avoid the blade. The whole crew was in stitches, and some joined in on the humiliating affair. He truly thought he could sneak aboard our ship and simply be welcomed as a part of our crew. Such audacity. He needed to be taught a lesson, and Archer did exactly that.

But the letter... *Captain* Hawk? It couldn’t possibly be the same weakling, could it? I want to believe this Hawk is not the same feeble, shaggy haired boy from my memory, but Reeves had promised him revenge in exchange for riches and a place of honor in the guild. This Hawk is one and the same. I know it, or at least I must assume so, else I risk the lives of my captain and crew. My family.