

Borrowed Time

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Borrowed Time

by [whatsup818](#)

Summary

Meenah Peixes has lived the majority of her life in hiding and thieving. With the condesce around, her grasp at life is a miracle in itself. Now at the age where her blood color will become more visible to the world, she decides to join a pirate crew as a means to hide more effectively.

Chapter 1

In the earliest time of the night, right before the sun set, a hooded figure pulled itself from the ocean depths and onto dry land. The dark cloth shielded the troll from the searing rays of the departing sun that would normally burn the flesh off of any unfortunate soul that wasn't a jade blood. Light on her feet, the hooded figure was careful to not draw too much attention as she rushed through the oceanside town, in search of someplace to hide. She could feel the eyes of the Empress upon her, searching for her to bring her to an unfortunate and bloody demise.

Honestly, it was a miracle she was alive now. Most defective trolls and tyrian blooded sea dwellers would be killed as small wrigglers. Barely able to walk on their new legs after molting from their infantile grub bodies, they never stood a chance. Yet somehow, she managed to escape the cold hand of death from just being herself and wandering off instead of following the elders orders to congregate in the throne room. The screams and wails of pure agony is still fresh in her mind today, haunting her dreams. Everyday she is aware she is living on borrowed time. Any second could be her last, especially now since she has gotten older. The color in her fins and in her eyes are unmistakably tyrian. Just one look from anyone loyal to the crown would spell her doom.

Luckily, during her travels she had managed to get her hands on a pair of goggles that completely hid the color of her eyes from any troll, instead reflecting their own image back at them. Her five fingered discount ensured she got away with them without raising any alarms. Thieving was her saving grace over the years that was carefully perfected with daily practice. Once couldn't only live on meat and fish, especially with blood like hers. Any wound, no matter how small, was like a beacon of death. Any cut or scrape was bandaged immediately and efficiently with any stolen bandages she could get her hands on.

Recently she discovered the miracle of dyes. Yes, they were normally used in hair by highblood to boast their high status to the lowbloods, yet she found another use for them. Applying violet to her earfins, they would temporarily take on the appearance of the general sea dweller population, masking her empress worthy color for a lesser, yet still royal blood. Unfortunately it only lasted for a few weeks at a time before it wore off, plus the formula made her fins itch like crazy for the first few hours after application. Though that was the price she had to pay for survival.

Much to her horror, the empress has become aware of her survival somehow. Posters seemed to line the streets with promise of a large reward for locating this 'mysterious' tyrian that somehow avoided death greeted her at every turn. Maybe she just wasn't careful enough or maybe during those early twilight hours a jade blood peered out from their caves and saw her true color when everyone was supposed to be asleep. She didn't know or care, all she knew was that she needed protection and fast.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw it. A towering, intricately detailed ship with a pirate flag fluttering proudly in the sky. As soon as she saw it, an idea started to brew as she slunk around the closed down shops, glancing into the windows for any items that could be useful

for her travels. What if she joined this pirate crew? She would always be at sea, plus she would be moving around a lot in a protected vessel, safe from prying imperial eyes. Sure, pirates weren't the most trustworthy bunch, but they avoided the royal guard just as much as she did. No doubt their own crimes would deter them from the reward. At least that was what she was counting on if she were ever discovered.

After picking the locks of six separate businesses swiping bandages, thread, needles, dyes, food and even a little gold, Meenah headed to the docked ship. Who knows, maybe luck will continue to be on her side.

Chapter 2

In the early hours of the night, the pleasant smell of the salty sea air greeted Aranea as she awoke in her recupercoo. Their time in this town had been sorely needed for her, captain Mindfang, and her rather ragtag crew. After their last battle at sea, they were lucky to have at least half their crew with them. Most were taken by the unforgiving sea or the royal guard that ambushed them in the twilight fog. It was a miracle their ship survived the encounter, though that didn't stop Mindfang from agonizing over the severity of the damage once they landed in this neutral seaside town.

Luck, as always, seemed to be on their side as the ship was able to be repaired to its former glory at minimal cost. Though that may have involved some minor 'influence' from the captain herself. With all the money they saved, Aranea took the liberty to buy a few more books, as well as some new maps and compasses for orienteering. Having the most up to date information was always a must in her eyes. That and she had a love for learning and sharing what she learned. Unfortunately the crew did not share her sentiments, and often found herself ignored, even when she presented them with some vital information. Mindfang and the helmsman at least paid attention when it came to directions and the sailing patterns of their enemies, but it just wasn't enough.

Oh well, someday she will have her own pirate crew. A crew that will listen to her during the quiet nights out on the sea. Not to mention her reputation as an infamous pirate will grow throughout the sweeps, possibly becoming even more well known than Mindfang herself! Oh she could just picture it now .

The sounds of frantic, angry trolls violently ripped her from the fantasy. No matter how many times she accompanied Mindfang and her crew in battle, fear still bubbled deep in her chest like a deadly poison. Biting it back like a bitter pill, Aranea raced to get dressed, cursing at the slight tremble in her hands, something she couldn't quite rid herself of even after all this time. A good pirate knows no fear after all.

Tension, not only from herself, weighed heavily on her as she reached for her sword. Air seemed to thicken around her, becoming harder to inhale with every passing minute. Grasping her sword tight in her hand, she swore everyone on the ship could hear her heart thundering in her chest. Knowledge that this could be her very last battle cut through her mind like a hot knife as she approached the cabin door. With all these feelings rushing at her from nearly everyone aboard the ship, the couple minutes it took to get herself ready felt like hours.

No matter how long she practiced blocking others emotions, she never truly thought she could quite get over the impact of such a massive influx of powerful emotions. Even if she trained for thousands of sweeps. At least it didn't lock her in place like it used to.

Yet, something was off about these feelings being thrown at her. It was a different kind of fear that fueled them. Even some undercurrents of anger flared to life amongst the chaos. Curiosity spiking, she yanked her cabin door open, freezing at the unexpected sight.

A sea dweller, no older than her, stood in the center of the ship. Even with her eyes covered, she could feel the raw fear radiating from her in droves, nearly suffocating her and the emotions around her. Never in her life had she witnessed a sea dweller so terrified in her life. It was enough to halt her attack and observe the strange situation. After all, one did not learn the enemies weakness by rushing into battle blindly.

Each crewmember that attempted to harm her was easily maneuvered around and tossed to the side like a sack of potatoes. It was as though she spent her entire life developing a fighting style that worked around another trolls attack instead of initiating it. Something very unlike typical sea dweller fighting styles which usually involved aggressive stabbing and lunging with the very real intention to kill. This was more graceful, a deadly dance with an enemy, using gravity and motion to disarm and disable the threat.

It was obvious the fight was seriously taking its toll on the sea dweller. Her mouth hung open, breathing ragged as she grabbed a lunging trolls wrist and drove him straight into the main mast with a simple jerk of her arm. Despite her obvious enhanced strength over the low bloods, she looked too thin to be healthy, face gaunt with the ever present look of hunger. Almost as though she had to struggle to survive just like any low blood would. But that couldn't be right....sea dwellers were born in the lap of luxury. What did they know about struggle?

"Seems like we have a rather unusual guest now don't we?" The sound of her mentor's faintly amused tone was enough to rip Aranea away from the commotion. Before she could question further, the pirate captain strode out into the chaos, a slight smirk playing on her lips as she approached the sea dweller.

"Enough!" Instantly the pirates backed off of the exhausted sea dweller, backing away just enough to give their captain and the intruder room. Despite the tension rolling off the sea dweller in droves, she straightened up, standing tall and proud like any sea dweller would. Apparently pride, even in a rather ragged looking sea dweller, runs strong in their line.

"Obviously you are alone. Seems rather foolish when boarding a ship full of pirates, though I am sure your sea dweller superiority complex must have given you a green light to go wherever you want without repercussions hmm?" A low, mocking chuckle fell from Mindfangs lips as she slowly circled around the trespasser, taking note of her torn and tattered clothing. "Why are you here?"

"I want to be a pirate. I want to join your crew" The admission was surprising enough it even made the captain pause. A sea dweller willingly asking to be placed in a subordinate position to a land dweller? It was unheard of. The conviction in her voice was undeniable, and any underlying intentions were minor from what Aranea could sense.

Soft murmurs between the crewmembers disturbed the silence as Mindfang strode to face the young sea dweller. Lightning fast, she grasped the sea dwellers chin. Collectively the crew, and even Mindfang snickered as she nearly flinched away from the action. Yet she not only permitted it to happen, but allowed her to twist and turn her head around as much as the captain pleased. The near untouchable power the sea dwellers held over them seemed to shatter in that moment as the captain assessed the potential crewmember.

Certain the sea dweller was only going to be turned away, Aranea sheathed her sword as she observed the scene. Obviously allowing a sea dweller could be a major threat to their livelihood, not to mention their own lives. For all they knew, this could be a trap by the same sea dweller ship that had taken them only a few days prior. Although she didn't really think they would be stupid enough to send in one of their own. That was practically suicide.

Although...there were some advantages to having a sea dweller. Namely their ability to breathe underwater. Anyone tossed overboard during battle or a raging storm would at least have some kind of chance of survival. Not to mention all of the sunken treasure they would now have access to. This was quite the conundrum.

"Alright. You may be apart of my crew. Aranea! Take her down to the lower deck and show her the job she will be taking over." Aranea was so caught up in her thoughts, she nearly jumped when her name was called. The lower deck? Well, guess it was fitting that she would give this new crewmember the worst job on the ship.

"Certainly Mindfang." With a pleasant smile, she strode over to the new recruit, pleased to see the crew part for her just as they had done for Mindfang. "Follow me, miss and please pay close attention to your job description. We don't like screw ups sailing on this ship."

The sea dweller visibly seemed to be holding back a scathing retort. The way her jaw clenched together so hard she was almost worried she might break her teeth. Almost. By her reaction, Aranea was nearly certain she would try to back out of this arrangement, yet she followed silently, earfins drooping slightly in defeat.

Interesting.

"As I am sure you already know, we store important items and goods in our lower decks. Ammunition, food, rum, rope and building materials all reside down here for safe keeping. Your job is to keep all these items secure, bring up any item requested and the amount requested with no complaints as well as repair if we receive any kind of damage while sailing. Normally we would have several down here to repair the ship if there is a hole but your sea dweller strength should be enough to hold back several tons of water pressure." Stories of sea dwellers dragging things the size of whales through the water with only the power of their legs was something that always stuck with her ever since she read about it in one of her books. Witnessing a sea dwelling captain shoot an over the shoulder weapon with massive recoil and not even flinching only reinforced that belief.

"These are the sleeping quarters for the crew. Pick any hammock you want. Only the captain, first mate and helmsman get recuperacoons." A smug little grin tugged at the corner of her lips. Being good enough to be Mindfang's first mate was something she did not take lightly. As they approached the stairway down into the bowels of the ship, she stepped aside and gestured for the sea dweller to head in first. "This is where you will be for the majority of your time unless stated otherwise."

Only after a slight moment of hesitation did the new recruit head down the stairs. A soft splash and a few choice swears about the smell signalled that she was finally at the bottom. A nasty surprise to land dwellers that were forced to work down here. Usually slaves did it since the constant dampness and water on the floor caused serious cases of trenchfoot. Which

unfortunately made the entire lower deck smell like decaying corpses. A problem they will no longer worry about with a sea dweller below deck.

Even the possibility of a fire was diminished. Due to living so deep in the ocean depths where almost no light could penetrate, sea dweller had excellent night vision. Sure it was all in black and white. Only tyrain bloods could see like they could in the natural moonlight. Guess being a rare, once in a million sweeps birth gave them plenty of perks to rule over all trolls.

“Secure everything below deck and take count of everything we have. There should be a checklist hanging near the stairs on a nail for you to use. Report back to me in two hours with accurate numbers. We want to cast off today so we need to have a full stock of supplies. Understood?” Pointed ears swiveled forward, eager to hear the obedient response from the grumbling sea dweller below. The sounds of swishing water and crinkling paper met her ears before she finally got a reply.

“Waterebber you say...Aranea.” Satisfied from the rather gruff response, the young pirate took her leave. She had a lot of work to do after all. New charts and plans needed to be drafted and she was just the troll to do it.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

What did she just get herself into?

Climbing onto a pirate ship uninvited was possibly the worst idea she had in a long time. Sure she survived out in the ocean and on the seaside docks for many sweeps, but apparently those skills didn't apply here. Though in hindsight, she probably should have realized the folly of her plan. Sea creatures always reacted violently to trespassers whenever they were near their homes, why would trolls be any different? As far as she knew, pirates lived on their ship, and she had just invaded. Guess it wasn't the same as walking on the docks after hours, where home invasion involves picking locks and slipping silently into what was thought to be a secure home.

Just remembering all those deadly blades slicing into her loose clothing, nearly sinking into her grey skin made her already cool blood run colder than ice. Meenah's entire struggle for life could have come crashing down with just a careless nick of the blade. If it wasn't for the captain's intervention...well she didn't really want to think about that. Even if the whole experience left her fins burning in humiliation, she was just glad to be alive.

Though this new job that was dumped onto her was rather good at distracting her from the degrading experience above deck. The smell of rot and decay was so horrific she could barely see through the tears welling up in her eyes. The putrid water was thick and slimy with bits of rubbery looking grey flesh floating in it, all in various states of liquefaction. Homemade foot wrappings did little to shield her feet from the unholy soup of rotten flesh and sea water. Just the feeling alone made her skin crawl.

Retching, she clutched a nearby crate as she dry heaved into the water, shivering as bitter bile burned its way up her throat and spilled into the disgusting mixture she stood in. Panting heavily, she uselessly covered her mouth with her hand in an attempt to keep the smell and even the taste of the air in the lower deck away. Was all of this really worth it just to stay alive? She really wasn't certain anymore.

Despite her shaky start, Meenah slowly pushed on with her new job, counting the supplies and checking the security of the ropes that bound them down to the ship. It was pleasing to see that the storage items were held above the water on their own platforms, and it was taken advantage of by the thief. Deftly she climbed the crates, crawling from one to the other when they were too close to the ceiling, and leaping when they were lower. Anything to keep out of the water.

Once she finished the inventory count, she practically shot out of the lower deck like a rocket, nails making deep grooves in the second deck floor as she clawed her way onto the dry deck. Breathing in the clean air greedily, she laid on the rough floor for a moment longer

before finally sitting up, thankful she had enough forethought to bring the checklist with her. Though her relief didn't last long. The ruined cloth wrapped around her feet felt rather sticky against her skin for reasons she really didn't want to think about. Not to mention the odor coming from the soaked cloth. Grumbling, she started unwrapping the tainted wrappings from her feet, wishing she could just dump them in a nearby fire once they were off.

“Where are your shoes?”

Earfins perking at the slightly alarmed tone of the rather chatty troll from earlier, Meenah glanced up at the cerulean blood and nearly smirked at the wide eyed expression on her face. A dry laugh rumbled in her throat as she returned her attention to the wraps, finally ripping one off of her foot. “Aint got none. The shell would I need shoes for when I been swimmin around most of the time?”

A prim hrumph and the slight narrowed cerulean eyes was the only warning Meenah received for the impending signature Serket lecture. “Well despite your rather crass point, it is imperative that you wear shoes now. Especially with your new workspace. Who knows what kind of incurable infection you could contract from having the tiniest scratch on your foot? It's a miracle you haven't gotten one already with your lack of proper footwear!”

“Yeah yeah. Clam down nerd. I whale grab a pair beshore we leave aight?” Waving Aranea off dismissively, she yanked the second soiled wrapping off triumphantly and tossed it dismissively to the side. “If ya didn't keep it so dam nasty down there then this wouldn't be a probubblem”

“We cannot help what happens in the lower levels of the ship when we are attacked at sea. Canons do hit us and do cause some water to fill our lower levels during battle and it is impossible to get the water completely out once that happens. It is why you are placed down here. Anything that pierces the hull you are expected to put a stop to while dealing with rising waters. The only reason why it is disgusting is because Mindfang contained prisoners and slaves down there to take care of the work themselves, and she did not allow them the privilege of clothing, which includes shoes. A rather gruesome yet effective means of torture which-” And that was the exact moment when Meenah started to tune out Aranea's long winded lecture.

Wow she could go on forever couldn't she? Just watching her hands wave this way and that for emphasis along with the rise and fall of her voice was enough of an indication that this lecture was no where near the end. Yet, Meenah found herself listening. Not to the words themselves, but to the surprisingly soothing sound of her voice as it changed like the ebb and flow of a rising tide. It was almost as if Aranea was getting lost in her own lecture as well. So pleased to hear herself speak and show off her vast knowledge, she might not notice if she dozed off. Well maybe not at first.

It seemed as though this lecture could go on for a few hours, much to the sea dwellers discomfort. The longer it took to get the supplies, the more guards there will be on the docks. Especially when those trolls that 'donated' their merchandise finally realized it was missing.

Leaping up, she pressed her palm against the blabbering cerulean blood's mouth, effectively silencing her.

"Aight nerd, I get it! Shoes are important....along with waterebber otter carp you were talkin boat." Disregarding the muffled, indignant grunt, she was quick to pull away once she felt those long fangs drag along the palm of her hand. Glancing at her palm, she sighed softly in relief. No blood was drawn. "You can glub on aboat that shit when we get back aight?"

Whatever retort Aranea prepared seemed to die and fade away with a look of genuine surprise briefly changing the disgruntled frown on her face. "First of all. I am not a nerd. I am first mate Aranea Serket and shall be addressed as such. Second, my lecture wasn't 'carp', it was necessary information that you seemed to have failed to grasp. None the less, I shall continue 'glubbing' about it when we get back since you have so kindly offered to listen."

Snorting softly in amusement, Meenah flashed a cheeky grin at the smaller troll. "Shore Serket. Long as you buy the shoes and anemone otter nice things I sea, I'll sit and listen to ya run that motorboat of a mouth ya got."

Smacking Aranea jovially on the back, she sauntered up the stairs, leaving a dumbfounded pirate gaping at her retreating form. The quick footfalls that followed only made that smug smirk on the sea dwellers' face grow. Spinning on her heel, she shamelessly displayed her amusement at the rather exasperated cerulean blood. Unfortunately, the land dweller was less than amused.

"Listen here you heathen. I know you sea dwellers have a knack for treating anyone lower than you like dirt, but as a new recruit you will give me your respect." A sharp jab to the chest by the pirates slender finger was all it took to erase her mirth.

"Hey gill relax....I aint tryin to disrespect nofin here aight? Can't a gill have a little fun?" Meenah did her best to stem the fear in her voice as she held her hands up in surrender. The all too familiar feeling constricted her chest as she reminded herself over and over again that one angry cerulean blood wasn't enough to blow her cover. Though it was a little harder to convince herself when this cerulean blood came with a ship full of lowbloods that had a distaste for sea dwellers. Maybe she was getting a little too comfortable with Aranea, but there was just something about her that made her feel safe.

Whatever she said it must have worked as Aranea's stern scowl softened into a light frown. "Right. Well....Let's buy some new cargo before it gets too late. Captain Mindfang wants to set sail tonight"

Unfortunately, Meenah's midday thievery had everyone on high alert. Guards were particularly thick in the shops she infiltrated. Cursing her sticky fingers, the sea dweller was careful to position herself so Aranea was always between her and the guards. Minimal eye

contact was made with any authority figure, almost as if she believed they could see through her dark goggles and into her incriminating tyrian eyes.

It was especially difficult to avoid prying eyes as time went on. Seeing a sea dweller toting around crates of goods and armory for a land dweller wasn't a common sight. All the extra attention was unnerving, sending chills up her spine as her lungs seemed to constrict and rebel with every breath she took. It was all she could do to focus on the troll in front of her and keep going.

By the time they arrived at the shoe store, Meenah's nerves were frayed. Enough so that when the shopkeeper approached, she shrieked and sent the owner careening into a nearby wall with a quick flick of her wrist. "Shit did ya sea that? He glubbin snuck up on me. His fault."

"Right. His fault." Thoroughly unconvinced, Aranea rolled her eyes as she carefully stepped over the broken shelves and scattered shoes. "Sorry about my friend. She's not good in crowds."

The rust blood wheezed as he was pulled to his feet. Once fully upright, he clutched his ribs, wincing as he took a deep breath. Fear shown clearly in his eyes as he turned towards his assailant. "S-sorry for upsetting your friend. I-It was my fault, really!"

"Don't worry about that. I will pay for the damages. Now if you please, could you help my friend find some shoes? She seemed to have misplaced hers. Any black pair will do. Nothing too fancy, ok?" As the shop owner rushed off to complete the order, Aranea wheeled on Meenah, arms crossed tight to her chest.

"Mind keeping it together long enough for me to buy you some new shoes? I want to leave this shop without spending every last beetle I earned on your destructive outbursts." Somehow, Aranea's tone wasn't as sharp as before, despite her obvious frustration. In fact, she seemed rather curious as she fixated her analytical gaze on the sea dweller.

"Shore Serket. Waterebber you say." She muttered as she slumped into a nearby chair, and nearly leaped out of it again as the shoe salesman rushed out with several boxes stacked high in his arms. A soft curse fell from her lips as she attempted to settle in the chair. Clearly he wasn't going to harm her, not with those nervous glances he shot her way as he pulled out a strange metal device.

Tyrian eyes shifted between the device and the salesman as she struggled to figure out just what it was. They didn't actually need to draw blood to sell a pair that fits, right? She had witnessed tailors draw the blood of their clients a few times to dye their clothes the exact shade of their blood, but shoes didn't work that way. At least she didn't think it did. It certainly didn't look dangerous with its two sliding parts and all the numbers and lines that ran along the middle. Still...it didn't exactly look safe, especially when the maroon blood started to approach her with it.

"Hang on, asshole. What the hell is that thing?" The salesman's eyebrows rose in shock at the question, uncertain he heard the sea dweller correctly.

“This is to measure your feet, ma’am. If you may allow it, I can show you how it works.” The soft spoken salesman kneeled before her, holding his hand out for her foot. His nose wrinkled as the residual smell from the bowels of the ship hit his nose, though he did his best to hide his disgust.

Still a little apprehensive, Meenah reluctantly lifted her foot for the lowblood to take.

Aranea watched the entire exchange absolutely flabbergasted. Just watching the sea dweller get over her initial fear of a Brannock Device of all things was one of the strangest things she had ever seen. Not to mention the wriggler-like curiosity that seemed to take over, fins perking up with interest as he carefully explained how the device worked.

Certainly a far cry from those egotistical sea dwellers she had the displeasure of meeting.

Soon a new pair of shiny boots were on Meenah’s feet, thanks to the shopkeepers suggestion of boots over shoes. As Aranea paid for the damages and boots, the sea dweller was content with clomping around the store while looking at her new footwear. It was almost...adorable.

Shaking her head clear of such thoughts, Aranea crossed her arms and cleared her throat loud enough to get her to look up. “Now, if you are finished admiring your boots, do you mind gathering everything we purchased today so we can head back to the ship? We are expected back soon and I for one do not want to be late.”

“Waterebber ya say Serk.” Flashing a rather wide grin, she effortlessly gathered up the crates and held them as if they barely weighed anything at all. As they left, the grin that decorated her face slowly dissipated into a tight frown. Weaving around guards in plain sight was a serious mood killer. Luckily, they weren’t on the docks for long and were once more standing on the deck of the massive ship.

Observing the cargo, Aranea nodded curtly. “Thank you for the help, Meenah. Now take those crates below deck and secure them with the rest.”

“Right.” Apprehension practically dripped from that single word as Meenah slowly approached the stairs. Might as well get used to the smell of death everyday, but it didn’t mean she had to like it. Those thoughts halted when she felt a warm hand gently grab her arm. Startled, she nearly dropped the crates as she turned towards the smirking cerulean blood.

“Don’t forget you promised to listen to one of my lectures once we came back. I will be waiting for you in the galley. Hurry back.”

Staring wide eyed at Aranea’s retreating form, Meenah found herself thinking the same thought from earlier this evening.

Just what had she gotten herself in to?

Sorry for taking forever to get this out. I got really busy with things and had some writers block. Hope this chapter was worth the wait. I will try to be faster with the next one

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“You seem to be getting close to our new sea dweller, Aranea. Anything you want to tell me?”

Aranea nearly spilled her inkwell from Mindfang’s catty remark. She could practically feel the little smirk on the captain’s face as she composed herself and continued to chart their course through the Alternian sea. If the captain wasn’t actively blocking her own emotions from her empathic abilities, she was certain she would have drowned in her smug amusement. Pursing her lips, she glanced up at the older troll only to confirm her suspicions.

“I find that she is rather good company to have around. Unlike the majority of the crew, she actually sticks around when I have something important to say.” Sure, she isn’t quite certain that everything she says actually gets through to the sea dweller. Many times when she asks her to repeat what she just said, she gets vague fish pun riddled answers. At least it’s on topic, though she swears if she could see behind those thick, dark goggles during those questions, Meenah’s eyes would resemble a startled hoofbeast.

Though, she had to admit, it was nice having someone on the ship that regarded her in such an open and friendly manner. The way those expressive fins fluttered whenever she looked in Aranea’s direction was certainly endearing. She almost didn’t mind that she may possibly be using her lectures to avoid working on the ship.

Almost.

Despite being able to read her feelings loud and clear, she could never quite penetrate her mind enough to read her thoughts. Puzzling considering how hard she worked and trained her abilities throughout the night when she wasn’t busy and even during the daylight hours when the sun was too bright for any sane troll to be out. Practicing with Mindfang only sped up her process, picking up tips and tricks from the master as well as putting her own spin on them to make it better. The rigorous training she received ever since she molted from grub to wriggler was finally starting to pay off in big ways. Namely, being able to read the thoughts of some, feeble minded violet blooded sea dwellers.

Not saying Meenah was stupid but...she was certain she would have been able to penetrate enough to read the simplest of thoughts. Especially from a troll, who a few days ago, didn’t even know what a brannock device was. That and she really didn’t know a lot about troll culture and history, something she took upon herself to teach her. Thoroughly.

Still, she was intelligent in her own right, especially about the sea. She remembered the foggy night Meenah practically hung on the rails of the ship, fins twitching and swiveling as she listened to some unheard sound. If she could see her eyes, they would have been sharp, focused on some unseen mass in the distance. It was enough of a disturbance, it even caused Mindfang to question Meenah’s sanity.

“Somefin big is cuttin through the water. Bigger than this ship, and its headin towards us.” Was her ominous response. It was enough for Mindfang to heed, ordering the helmsman to reroute his course immediately. Not long after, the sounds of rushing water was heard as a large, royal battleship sailed by. It’s devastating ram gleamed in the water, right in the path they had previously sailed in. That was enough for Meenah to be promoted from out of the disgusting depths of the ship. At least when it was foggy.

Aranea, while happy her friend was finally allowed to do more than wallow in that cesspool below deck, she absolutely needed to know just how exactly she knew the ship was there in the first place. There was little research released to land dwellers on sea dwellers, something that irked her to no end. Asking Meenah herself was fruitless as her answers were always vague at best.

“Just got that feelin serk.”

“Reel great question serk. It’s just a thing that happens sometimes when outside, ya know what I marine?”

No. No she doesn’t know what she ‘marines’, though it would explain how Dualscar’s ship always seems to locate them under the foggiest conditions. All her suspicions of some kind of sonar technology had been thrown out the window thanks to this rather unusual sea dweller. It was a wonderful discovery, yet it frustrated her to know end that she couldn’t just research the topic for answers.

Watching the sea dweller while she was at work was a challenge as well. Meenah was always extremely careful about how close anyone actually got to her, let alone if they were watching her. Anytime she would try to observe the phenomenon, the new recruit would tense up and shuffle away at least a few feet, muttering about ‘nosy glubbin trolls’ under her breath. The spike of anxiety that always followed never failed to baffle her. After at least three failed attempts, she backed off, not wanting to distress her friend anymore than she already had.

Aranea was broken out of her thoughts by a pair of fingers snapping in her face. Yelping, she leaped back, only to glower indignantly at Mindfang’s chortling face.

“Look, whatever is going on, don’t let it interfere with your work. Getting too attached to a pirate is dangerous business. Any voyage could be their last.” The mirth dissipated as the pirate captain spoke, her expression now serious. “Are you really prepared for that?”

Aranea felt a heavy weight build in her chest as she listened to her captain’s words. The only other troll she’s ever been close to was Porrim, and it didn’t last long. Barely a sweep went by when the jade blood ended their relationship. The worst part was that she could feel the affection slipping away thanks to her abilities, yet she chose to ignore it in hopes that it would pass. After all, trying to change herself to solve negative feelings in the past always resulted in scorn and distrust from her fellow trolls.

Affection turned cold and she was let go. Now she was presented with these warm feelings again and she wanted nothing more than to hold onto them. “I understand that, but I think I

can handle this. I am not a wriggler anymore.” There was a slight edge to her voice as she spoke, something Mindfang noticed.

“That’s my girl. We will make a pirate of you yet.” A smirk and a slight nod of approval for what she assumed the captain perceived as the correct answer. For once, she really wasn’t too thrilled to receive her approval. She needed some air.

“Now, since we are done prodding at my personal relationships on this ship, I think I will take my leave since I finished charting this map.” With a final swipe of her pen, she returned it to its well. “Despite the status of our relationship, I do have one mystery I must solve before it drives me insane.”

Not bothering to wait for a response, Aranea left the cabin with purpose. The subject of her frustration already out and about, sitting on the railing of the ship as they sailed through some mild fog. Those earfins were already out and twitching already, like little satellite dishes attuned to the sea.

It was time to try a different approach. One that would hopefully ease the permanent cloud of anxiety that seemed to surround the sea dweller since the day she met her.

“Hey Serk! Aint much to sea out here right now. Promise I aint makin us go in circles like last time, I got yer glubbin spinny arrow thing.” Aranea rolled her eyes in amusement as she eyed the compass that was presented to her. Meenah really was taking her concerns into consideration instead of blindly leading them wherever she wanted to go during the fog. It certainly saved her a lot of headache after the fog lifted. A familiar warmth bloomed in her chest as she regarded the smiling sea dweller.

“Thank you for using the compass I gave you, but that is not why I am here.” Gracing her with a small, fanged smile, she leaned against the rail Meenah was sitting on. “I am here to observe your fins. I want to find out how you are able to find unseen things in the ocean since your explanations are so dreadfully unhelpful. Would that be alright?”

Normally, she would just watch without interruption, knowing that interfering with anything could potentially affect how Meenah reacted to the world around her. Specifically her ability to sense things in foggy waters. Since she seemed to always notice and subsequently leave her all alone to wallow in her frustrations as well as her slowly growing guilt from upsetting her, it really was the only option she had.

The sea dweller seemed to squirm under her gaze, subconsciously reaching up to touch her fins, as if checking for something. An internal battle seemed to rage within her before finally answering with a quick, sharp nod.

“Ocray...just..don’t look too close aight? I don’t like people starin at my fins.” Said fins, seemed to twitch out of sync with each other, possibly from the growing anxiety from the sea dweller. Somehow, this felt like more than just observing a pair of fins. As if Meenah were extending a form of trust she never allowed anyone to experience before, and she was not about to waste or tarnish such a precious gift.

Nodding, Aranea remained silent as she watched those fins work. As the anxiety dissipated, the movements became slower and more fluid. That was when she finally saw it. Tiny black pores littered the spines of those fins, much like the sensory pores found on sharks noses that made them so sensitive to the world around them.

It was a major discovery, one that had Aranea reeling with excitement. Maybe that was why she was so protective of her fins. Would that mean if they were touched she would receive a sensory overload? There were so many unanswered questions! She was practically bouncing in place from her barely contained excitement. The sight of the giddy first mate was enough to erase some of the sea dwellers fear, and even draw out an amused chuckle from her.

A rather large wave crashed against the ship in that moment, causing her to bounce herself literally over the edge. Excitement fell to fear as she dropped like a rock towards the deep blue water below, sincerely wishing she knew how to swim. All thoughts of drowning screeched to a halt as a strong hand wrapped around her ankle, stopping her descent into the dark sea. Before she could even process what was happening, she was yanked back onto the ship and righted into a shaky standing position by a pair of very strong arms.

“Holy shell Aranea. Maybe you shoalndn’t be so close to the edge right now. Wait til it aint so shitty out. You can stare at my fins then aight?” Never before had Aranea been engulfed by such strong feelings of concern and relief all directed at herself. Speechless, she nodded slowly as her hands gripped the strong forearms that kept her upright.

“Shit ya aint talkin, you shore you feel aight? Cmon, lets get inside so ya don’t glubbin pass out on the deck ocray?” As Meenah spoke, she quickly swept the cerulean blood away from the side of the ship, only to be stopped by Aranea herself.

“T-thank you, Meenah, for your concern” Her voice shook, adrenaline still coursing through her system at what she perceived as a near death experience. Taking a moment to calm herself, she smiled up at the sea dweller, staring into those thick, reflective goggles. “But, you are needed out here. I appreciate you allowing me to observe you for a little while. Thank you for trusting me.”

“Heh..yeh shore nerd. Don’t gotta get all mushy boat it. Just try not to throw yershelff overboard again. Then I’d have to drag yer flounderin ass back on board.” Aranea huffed, lightly smacking the snickering sea dweller’s arm in retaliation. Just as she was about to retaliate, she fell silent at the sincere smile that was directed her way.

“You looked reel pretty smilin like ya were beshore ya fell off the ship...hope next time I sea it I don’t gotta save ya from drownin.” There was a light flush dusting Meenah’s cheeks as she spoke, something Aranea found to be incredibly cute. Even so, as she nodded and watched Meenah return to her post, something about that blush didn’t sit right with her.

Was it normal for violet bloods to blush a shade brighter than their blood color?

Sorry this took so long. I was having some technical issues where my writing wouldn't save and I would lose chunks of my work. I hope this was worth the wait.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Smoke and cannon ash filled the air.

“Load the cannons!”

Meenah’s gills burned and itched from the heavy fog spewing from the reddened tip of the cannon, it’s deadly load screaming through the air, splintering the side of the opposing ship in a single blow. Her ear’s wouldn’t stop ringing from the blasts, even as she rushed down to the depths of the ship, returning with heavy crates filled with cannon balls in each arm. The crew dove on the new supply, quick to wrench off the wooden lids and rush steel balls to their respective cannons.

“Fire!”

A series of shots rang out. Eight blasts in total, shook the ship as they aimed true for the battered vessel before them. The crew cheered as the unfortunate ship crumbled before their eyes, mast snapping in two and tumbled into the unforgiving sea below. The ship itself was partially submerged, most of its crew overboard and struggling to stay above water as waves crashed and sucked them deep into the dark depths below.

“Board the ship! Kill anyone that fights back and bring those that surrender.”

The captain’s order rang loud and clear over the cheering pirates, immediately setting them in motion. Trolls of all castes crawled and climbed up the rope rungs along the mast, several untying rope as the ship neared its target. Dozens flew threw the air at a time once they were near enough using the untied rope to swing over to the doomed ship, landing on the slowly sinking boat with swords drawn and guns ablaze. Others threw down boards to use as a bridge between ships, rushing across with murderous intent. Meenah herself joined the fray, though her approach was a little unconventional.

The sea dweller dove into the churning waters below, careful to avoid the sinking bodies of drowned trolls as she darted directly for some of the sizable holes in the ship’s hull. Aside from general supplies that were unfortunately ruined from the cannon blasts, Meenah managed to find a chest with bags of gold and beetles within. Her sticky thieves fingers couldn’t help but pinch a few smaller bags from the chest before hauling the rest up the the ruined staircase.

Dead bodies with arms, and even heads blown off from a cannon blast lay before her on the upper gun deck, some with gaping voids in their chest, their brightly colored blood staining the wood all the colors of the rainbow. She barely batted an eye at the macabre scene, reacting only with a sneer when she stumbled and sunk her boot deep into a rather thick pool of dark blue and teal blood, some of it splashing up and into her boot. Quick to pull herself from the viscous material, she rushed up the stairs, muttering curses under her breath.

Clashing swords and pistol shots filled the air the second she pushed her way out from under the deck. The real treasures were hidden within the captain's quarters. Maps and charts among other valuable information were stored within, at least that's what Aranea said. To Meenah, it was just a bunch of lines and gibberish over a picture of the ocean and some land. She could already imagine the horror stricken face the cerulean blood would have if she said just as much.

A bullet broke her out of her thoughts as it whizzed by her earfin, nearly shooting her fin off before it embedded itself in the doorframe. Her grip on the chest tightened in her hand as she charged through the chaos, swinging the heavy chest like a club at anyone that got in her way. Multicolored blood splattered over the deck and her clothes as each swing connected with a dull thud and a wet crunch of shattering bones.

One opponent managed to dodge her initial swing and lunged forwards with his cutlass, nearly impaling her in her ribs when a bullet shot through his arm. It simultaneously shattered his elbow and forced him to lose grip on his sword as he cried out, arm flopping uselessly at an angle the sea dweller was certain an arm shouldn't bend. Without thinking, she whipped towards the source of the shot, only to see the smug smirk of the first mate, obviously pleased her rather lucky shot connected.

With a good natured roll of her eyes, Meenah smirked back at the cerulean blood and finished the job, slamming the chest down on the head of the wailing troll, silencing him with a wet crunch. Perhaps she would thank Aranea later for the save, or maybe she will try not to smear her outfit with the rainbow of blood she was accumulating on herself instead, now featuring a rather strong shade of blue. Though she would not take her brush with death lightly as she made a beeline to the captain's cabin, eager to finish the job and to be out of harm's way.

Documents and maps littered the room, some recently damaged by a certain sea dweller's blood covered feet despite her best attempts to avoid the valuable paper as she trudged into the room. Luckily, a battle damaged captain's coat was discarded in the room, giving her the chance to clean up her bloody hands, lest she damage them further while gathering them. It was easier to defend footprints on documents than handprints as she found out during their last raid. It was a heart stopping moment when Mindfang threatened to 'liberate' her of her earfins for being so careless when Aranea stepped in to calmly remind her of how useful those fins were for traveling in fog.

Being locked in the bowels of the ship for a week without food seemed a little overkill, but at least she got to keep her fins, and most importantly, her identity secret.

Coat in hand, Meenah wiped her shoes before finally attempting to save the footprint covered pages. They didn't exactly look all that important, but that didn't mean much, she couldn't read any of it anyways, at least not without sitting down and sounding out the words with ones she already knew. The most schooling she ever received was the short perigee after she molted from a grub to a wriggler and only learned to read very simple sentences. Mostly it was just in case the empress didn't make it during her many conquests. The second she returned, schooling stopped, and her world changed for the worse.

Over half of the documents were gathered and packed into the chest full of treasures when the subtle click of a cocked gun turned her already cool blood to ice. Fins twitching

nervously, she turned towards the source of the sound. A large, upturned desk appeared to have housed the captain of the ship, if those medals meant anything on his chest. Well, what she could see of his chest anyways. Splintered wood pierced his upper body, one lodged particularly deep in his eye, violet blood oozing slowly around the edges. His hand shook with effort just to keep the gun steady, something Meenah took note of as she subtly gripped the chest's handle.

"D-drop those. If her highness finds out....finds out pirates stole these documents.." The captain shuddered, out of fear or pain, Meenah didn't know. "I will not let a dirty pirate like you leave with those papers...even if you are a high blood. Disgraceful."

A nasty coughing fit overtook the mortally wounded captain, violet blood splattering over his outstretched arm as he struggled to keep it steady. It was obvious he was dying, which perplexed Meenah as why he would waste the last moments of his life defending papers. Still, she wasn't about to waste this opening. The second his aim dropped from her head, she lunged, swinging the chest down onto his head as hard as she could.

The sickening crunch did little to mask the sound of the gun, deafening her ears from his last act of defense. Pain burned through her leg only a moment later, only rivaled by the raw panic that overtook her. She could practically hear her heart thundering in her chest, threatening to break through her rib cage as she took several shaky steps back, her horror growing as her own royal blood dribbled onto the floor. Black spots swam in and out of her vision as she slumped against the desk, leaning heavily against it just to remain upright.

No, there was no way she was going out like this. Defiantly she sucked in the salty air between her teeth as she forced herself up. A boost of adrenaline pushed the sea dweller forward as she shoved the desk against the door, effectively blocking herself in as she assessed the damage. The leg of her tattered black pants was yanked up and despite the blood that continued to ooze from her wound, it was simply a diagonal graze along her inner calf.

Taking a moment to breathe as another surge of fear raced up her spine, she dug into her pockets and pulled out a flask of pure alcohol. Her teeth easily sunk into the cork as she wrenched it free from the bottle. The alcohol burned horribly as she poured it over her wound, nearly causing her to bite the cork in half, but at least it would disinfect the site as well as wash away her damned tyrian blood.

Next she pulled out some fishing wire and a needle she kept safe in a tiny pouch. After threading the needle, she dipped it in alcohol and immediately pushed it through her skin, tugging the torn flesh together with even strokes. The sounds of battle waned as she tied the end of the wire tight against her skin before clipping the excess free with her claws. She just barely managed to wrap and tie a relatively clean cloth around it when the door clacked hard against the desk, scaring Meenah so badly she nearly ripped open her stitches as she leapt away from the desk.

"Meenah? Meenah! Are you ok? I heard a gunshot!"

Clutching her chest, a shaky laugh fell from her lips as she listened to Aranea's rather comforting, if not rather alarmed, voice. "Fuckin shell Serk. Ya gotta not do that shit when somebuoy almost got shot. Nearly gave me a cod dam bloodpusher attack"

A sense of ease washed over her as she spoke, feeling a million times lighter that it was the cerulean blooded first mate on the other side of the door. No one ever made her feel this way before and it honestly scared her a little whenever she sat down and really thought about it. After everything that happened, all she wanted to do was sit somewhere safe and listen to more of her long winded stories. Sure, they were boring, but her voice was pretty and it was nice seeing her look so damn proud of herself as she talked on and on about things no one seemed to care about. If she were honest with herself, those stories were one of the few sources of comfort she found within her hectic life.

“Gimme a sec, I gotta move the glubbin desk” After smearing the dead captains blood over the trail of tyrian as well as the tyrian blood that stained her pants, did she actually pull the desk away from the door. Aranea practically fell into the room, though she paid no mind to her moment of gracelessness as she rushed up to the heiress, immediately looking her over for injuries. It would be hard to miss the panic in her eyes, almost as if she could feel the fear that clutched painfully at the sea dweller’s heart earlier.

“Clam down Serk, I don’t need ya pokin at me, I already took care of it. It wasn’t nofin aight?” Meenah was careful to angle her injury away as she batted Aranea’s hands away. What she didn’t expect was how quickly the cerulean blood recoiled from the rejection, almost as if she had been burned. “...Let’s just get outta here beshore more bullship happens.”

“Fine,” Aranea was rather curt in her reply, her face unreadable. “I’ll be sure to keep my concerns to myself next time.”

She was out the door before Meenah had the chance to respond. Honestly, the sea dweller was rather bewildered by the sudden shift in emotion from the first mate. In fact, she even felt this strange queasy feeling crawling in her chest as she retrieved the violet stained chest and headed out of the captain’s quarters.

Dead trolls were strewn across the deck, their rainbow blood staining the deck vibrant colors as the thick life giving fluid slowly drained from their bodies. A small group of prisoners were forced onto their knees before Mindfang, swords pressed into the backs of their necks to keep them in place. The captain was pacing before them, looking quite pleased with herself. Her smile only grew at the sight of the blood splattered chest as Meenah dragged it into view.

“I trust these documents are flawless this time?” There was a dangerous flash in her eyes as she approached as she saw the rather poor state the chest was in.

“Mostly. Blood was glubbin everywhere beshore the otter guy popped out.” Quick to wipe away the blood, the sea dweller opened the chest, putting the mostly unscathed documents and treasures on display. “I got everyfin that I could sea.”

Mindfang remained stoic as she examined the contents of the chest carefully. Meenah could feel the familiar claws of anxiety digging into her chest, joining that uncomfortable queasy

feeling that seemed to have made itself at home already. Seconds passed by like hours before that trademark smirk grew on the captain's face, easing the sea dwellers rather frayed nerves.

"Looks like we have everything we need here." Turning towards the prisoners, her smirk darkened into a sinister smile. "Too bad there were no survivors to tell the tale."

Terror barely registered on the captive troll's faces before swords were violently thrust through their necks, spilling their rainbow blood to join the rest that pooled on the deck before them. Meenah hefted up the chest and quickly headed for their ship, ignoring the distinct thud of lifeless bodies dropping to the deck of the slowly sinking ship. After all, she wasn't home free until these stolen goods were safely inside Mindfang's cabin.

As she crossed the narrow plank between the two ships, the pain in her bullet wound began to amplify, nearly making her stumble and fall from the perilous perch. Adrenaline that had coursed through her, especially so when she was shot, was starting to drain away. Trembling limbs and exhaustion were left in its wake, an experience Meenah was all too familiar with. The pain in her leg kept her moving, a promise of rest flashing in her mind once she completed the task at hand.

"Meenah!" Aranea's voice pierced through the haze as she rushed to the sea dwellers' side just as she pushed open the doors to Mindfang's cabin, with barely enough time to drop the chest before the cerulean blood was upon her. Whatever was upset her earlier seemed to have vanished, much to her relief. "Meenah, you have to stop pushing yourself so hard! You've been hurt, I can see you limping, and moving around is only making it worse!"

"I'm fine." Impulsively she grabbed both of Aranea's hands in her own, mainly to keep her from possibly poking around for her injury as she shifted her injured leg away from the cerulean blood. She hardly registered the look of surprise, or the faint cerulean blush that dusted the first mate's cheeks. "I just needed to drop this off. I'll go lay down or waterebber, aight."

"Hang on. You are not going to climb down into the lower deck with a gunshot wound, and don't you tell me that you don't have one. You've been limping ever since you came out of that cabin." As she was lectured, Meenah found herself being pulled out of Mindfang's cabin, and into Aranea's. She didn't bother resisting either, that queasy feeling from earlier slowly vanishing as she stepped into the rather tidy cabin.

"You need to be more careful." Guided to a resting platform next to a recuperacoon, she was encouraged to lay back onto the soft surface by the gentle press of the cerulean blood's palm on her shoulder. "Please, just rest here for a while. You did enough for today."

It was...strange. Very strange for someone to care so much about her wellbeing. Feelings she could hardly identify surfaced as she watched those cerulean tinted features soften as she brushed some unruly hair away from Meenah's goggles. Somehow, the action felt rather, intimate.

"Aight...I guess I could do that for ya nerd." She couldn't help but return Aranea's smile, though hers was more out of relief than anything. "Ya betta get goin though, Mindfang probabbly wants ya to go through all that carp we stole."

At the mention of Mindfang, the first mate straightened up, all traces of empathy gone. It was rather remarkable how she could become all business at a moment's notice. "Right. Those documents you stole may have enough information to tip the scales into our favor."

"Tip into yer favor? For what?"

"The location of the rogue princess."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this took so long. The second half of 2016 was all kind of bad for me and it made it difficult to get this chapter out. I did my best on this and I hope you all enjoy it!

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Royal documents detailing the once decorated captain Vonaro sat before Aranea, spread across the table with the hope that they would dry before they took on further damage. While it did show that Meenah had been careful to not stomp all over them like the last ship they raided, it didn't change the fact that they did suffer some damage during the fight. Words had started to bleed together, and some violet blood seemed to have been purposely smeared across several pages, obscuring what could possibly be vital information.

No matter. Aranea was the best at restoring damaged documents, at least she claimed to be. Learning to repair, preserve and protect books and papers only seemed logical to the knowledge loving troll. Given enough time, she was confident she could clear up most, if not all of the blood on these soiled pages.

As she gently dabbed the wet cotton cloth on the soiled documents, her mind wandered to the sea dweller in the other room. Specifically, the absolute terror that struck Meenah from the incident on the ship to the lingering tension that still radiated from her room. It was a fear so intense that its icy grip nearly stopped her in her tracks.

Time seemed to stand still as she raced to the captain's cabin on the battle torn ship. With each frantic step, Mindfang's words rang clearly in her mind like a cruel symphony. 'Any voyage could be their last. Are you prepared for that?'

No. No she was not.

The fact that Meenah was not only ok, but able to move an entire desk was reassuring, until she saw the pools of violet blood that covered the floor. Her heart nearly stopped at the sight of the sea dweller and just how heavily the violet blood stained the sea dwellers clothes. Aranea's fear overpowered the thousands of emotions thrown her way as she raced inside the cabin, determined to help, only to be pushed away and quieted by a few meager words.

To say she was upset by this was an understatement. Fists clenched tight, she spat out a quick retort before storming off. With the enemy crew mostly incapacitated, she had no trouble shoving her way through to Mindfang's ship. Obviously she wasn't needed anymore.

Aranea had already fallen back into her usual routine after Mindfang had taken a ship. Charts and books lay open before her, ready to be used as reference and as a canvas for her quill. A fresh inkwell was ready and waiting for her steady hand to record what was taken, what kind of ship they captured, if any of the crew joined them, and if they should pursue any found information aboard the ship. She had just finished setting up when she felt that familiar tug on her psyche. Meenah was boarding the ship.

Annoyance bubbled under the surface at first, but they were quick to fade as she examined the emotions thrown her way. Shaking her head, the cerulean blood rushed over to the sea dweller the second she saw her stumble over the threshold of Mindfang's cabin. From how much she was limping, it was a miracle she didn't fall off the narrow plank on her way over.

Once again, Meenah was trying to brush this off as no big deal, and she wasn't about to have any of it, even if the gentle way she grabbed her hands made her heart skip a beat. She practically dragged her to her cabin, somewhat surprised when she was left with little resistance. This troublesome troll must be in more pain than she anticipated. What she did notice, was just how much those anxious feelings started to fade, especially once they were in her cabin.

Not once had Aranea been around someone who felt so calm and relaxed around her. The fact that this rather guarded sea dweller felt comfortable enough with her made her feel almost giddy. She couldn't resist reaching out and brushing away the stray strands of hair that fell in front of the taller trolls goggles. If only they weren't so opaque....she would like to see her violet eyes someday...

With the mention of Mindfang, their little moment of...something...was gone. Instantly those emotional barriers that had opened just for her had slammed shut with a vengeance. It was so jarring that she almost missed the sudden spike of panic that had risen within the sea dweller.

"Well...guess you betta get goin...I aint gonna get in no troububble cuz of you bein worried boat nofin" Meenah turned away from her as she laid back on the bed. The sudden cold treatment made her heart hurt in ways she hadn't experienced, even when her relationship with Porrim deteriorated.

"Fine." Aranea turned on her heel and stalked out of her cabin, punctuating her silent fury with the slam of her door that was just hard enough to knock over a few books from her bedside table. The first mate couldn't seem to care as she stormed over to Mindfang's quarters as she muttered to herself about foolish sea dwellers. At least she did stay and rest like she asked her to.

Now however that she had been given the chance to calm down, did she examine the situation. The second the missing heiress was mentioned she clammed up and even seemed to be making a valiant effort to squash her feelings on the matter. It didn't work, she could still feel traces of fear emitting from her room, but why?

Was she a spy? Aranea snorted at the thought. A royal spy wouldn't have helped them take down so many royal ships or would have killed so many in their navy. Even if it was to keep her cover, killing high ranking captains had to be against their training.

Why would a spy join a pirate crew anyways? Sure, Mindfang was one of the most infamous pirates, but what would there be to gain from joining a pirate crew, aside from the fact that the captain had made it her mission to find the heiress? Any pirate that found her would just turn her in for the empresses ransome...unless.

Did they know about their hand in the rebellion? The damp cloth dropped from her hand as a new sense of dread washed over her. If that was true, everything they had worked for would be for nothing. Those secret meetings Mindfang held with the Summoner, though less business appropriate than they should be, would all be for naught. The rebellion could be compromised if this was true.

What she needed to do was inform Mindfang of this....but the thought tore at her heart in ways she never felt before. If this was true....no. No it couldn't be. There had to be another reason as to why she would act this way, she just needed to calm down and think.

Aranea pressed her palms to her eyes, her glasses pushed askew as she took several deep breaths. A spy wouldn't be so unguarded with their emotions. A spy wouldn't want to learn basic information that nearly everyone learned while being schooled. In fact, it would be a waste of her time. She wouldn't blindly hand over important documents and not bother to question them until now. A small question that didn't probe any further than just asking what they were specifically for.

Another breath and she pulled her hands away from her face, absentmindedly re-adjusting her glasses as she sat back in her chair. If she wasn't a spy....then the only logical conclusion would be....her eyes widened. It just couldn't be.

Could it be that they actually have the princess they had been searching so long for? The fabled sea dweller that escaped her fate of being culled just for daring to be born with the royal blood so few live to see? Joining a pirate crew would be an unprecedented, reckless and downright brilliant move in being even more elusive to the capture the empress has demanded for so long.

Aranea hadn't realized she stood until she heard her chair clatter to the floor. It was though she were on autopilot as she rushed out of the captain's cabin, barely reacting as she nearly plowed into a passing pirate. She practically threw open the door to her cabin, her eyes fixed on the sea dweller as she shot up from her spot on the bed.

Cerulean eyes scanned the wounded pirate critically, taking note of the vast amount of violet that covered her as well as the violet tint of her fins. At first she didn't notice the string of curses that fell from Meenah's lips, or her questioning words until the light from the moon caught the sea dwellers goggles and flashed into her eyes. Blinded for a moment she blinked, the interruption brought her attention to the slightly annoyed tone of the new pirate.

"The shell serket? Ya gonna answer me or are ya gonna glubbin gawk at me? Why ya bustin down yer own door?"

Wordlessly, she shut the door behind her. The spike of anxiety from her guest only heightened her suspicions as she locked her door. "Meenah. How much do you know about the rebellion?"

Genuine confusion was what she was met with, much to Aranea's relief. It even extended to the sea dwellers face, what little she could see of it at least. No spy, no matter how skilled,

would be able to mask their emotions so well, even if they had trained for sweeps, and with how much Meenah let her emotions run wild, that could not be the case.

“....There’s a what now?” In fact, she sounded absolutely lost as to what a rebellion was, something that anyone should know about. Unless they lived under a rock, or have been in hiding for several sweeps.

“Aranea, I aint-” “Take off your goggles.” She cut the sea dweller off, silencing her with those few sharp words. Tension once again started to build in the room.

“Serk...heh...are ya feelin aight? Do you need to lay down? My leg don’t hurt that bad no more, I can leave so you can-” “You heard what I said, Meenah.”

She could visibly see her friends jaw clench as a new wave of fear from the sea dweller bathed the room. It was just as, if not more intense than those terrifying moments on the ship when she was shot. It took Aranea’s breath away and it took everything within her to hold her ground and not succumb to the building panic that surrounded her like a vice.

“Please.” Her voice cracked, pleading as she gazed up at the troll before her. Already she could feel the guilt bubble in her chest for causing her friend so much strife, even if she was a spy. God she hoped she wasn’t. Nothing would be more humiliating or defeating than to find out that this connection they seemed to share was all a lie.

Was no one genuinely interested in her? Was talking too much really that awful?

Could she even kill her if she was a threat?

“Aight”

Aranea was shaken out of her emotional spiral as Meenah approached her. Honestly, she thought she would reject her demand, forcing her to assume the worst. Instead she was caught so off guard she hadn’t noticed the emotional change in the room until they were just barely a breath apart.

“Keep it between us....or else” There was a threatening edge to the sea dwellers voice. One that made Aranea’s hair stand on end. A distinct growl that only the highest of royalty could possibly possess. One that commanded respect.

Wordlessly, Aranea nodded, her eyes never leaving those goggles, afraid that if she looked away she would change her mind. Her breath caught in her throat as Meenah lifted her hands and slowly slipped off her goggles. Closed eyes was the first thing she saw, squeezed tight with apprehension.

Without thinking, she reached up and gently brushed her fingers along the sea dwellers cheek. She faltered and jerked away when the sea dweller flinched. Nodding wasn't going to cut it, she deserved verbal reassurance. "I promise. This will be between us."

Tension that furrowed her friends brow relaxed from the reassurance, much to the first mates relief. Despite being able to literally read others emotions, she wasn't exactly the best at de-escalating a tense situation. Those thoughts were short lived as she was drawn to her friends eyes as they opened and revealed the deepest set of tyrian purple the cerulean blood had ever seen.

As she stared, transfixed by the rare sight, one nagging thought grew. How was she going to keep this from Mindfang if Meenah did not want to participate in their plans?

Would she even have a choice?

Chapter End Notes

Wow this took way longer than I ever intended this to. So much happened last year. A lot of bad and some good, but it definitely kept me away from this story. I really hope this chapter was worth the wait and I am really sorry for making you all wait for so long.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Please.

That was all it really took for Meenah to give up her secret. Though it had to be more complicated than that. Maybe it was the way she said it. Voice cracking, desperate and distressed, as though it were a life or death request. Or maybe, just maybe, it was because it was Aranea specifically who was so distressed that she was willing to beg to an unwanted nobody that only just joined this ship two perigee's ago.

Possibly.

All she knew was that she never wanted Aranea to look that way ever again. Never wanted to hear that level of distress that tainted her normally soothing voice that she loved to hear so much. That was when she realized that she would do anything for her, and that terrified her.

Aranea's eyes were a more intense blue than she realized.

"Meenah..." A warm hand pressed against her cheek as the cerulean blood stared into her eyes. She leaned into the touch as she reached up and covered Aranea's hand with her own, and squeezed gently in return. Whatever this moment they shared was, she almost wished it wouldn't end.

The sound of approaching boots striking the wooden floorboards shattered the moment. Panicked, Meenah jerked back towards the resting platform, away from the first mate. The sudden and unnatural movement nearly sent her to the floor in agony as it strained her gunshot wound immensely. She just barely bit back a cry of pain as she fumbled with her goggles, just managing to yank them over her eyes as the door burst open.

A loaded pistol was aimed straight at her heart before she collapsed onto the floor, leg convulsing violently from all the unnecessary strain it had been under. Earfins drooped and trembled like a terrified puppy as she applied pressure to the injury on her leg, trying her best to get it to stop. The movement caused her stitching to tear, and she was desperate to stop the flow before it bled through the bandages.

Well...she always imagined her blood reveal would go terribly, she just figured it would be the troll that saw her blood that would kill her instead of this.

"Mindfang, No!" Meenah's head snapped up at the sound of Aranea's panicked voice, more than surprised to see she had placed herself in the path of the gun.

"Was this," Mindfang gestures down at the sea dweller, whose leg convulsions were just starting to subside. "All because of this wader getting shot? The way you two were throwing your feelings around I thought she was going to kill you!"

The slur had her baring her teeth despite the pain. She heard it many times before when she was young. Bitter low bloods cursed at her, chased her and threw things at her whenever they could. Wader was a favorite between all of them. She didn't know what it meant, but she knew it couldn't have been good with the way they spat it at her as if it were acid. However, as she got bigger, the more they were afraid of her. The words were more of a hiss under their breath than anything.

"Please don't call her that! I just...let my emotions get the better of me." Meenah was snapped out of her thoughts by Aranea, eyes wide in disbelief. No one has ever stood up for her before. Not like this. "I was worried about her."

"You better. The way you two were emoting, I thought I was going to have to save your ass!" Anger boiled in Mindfang's eyes as she aggressively holstered her pistol. She was practically glaring daggers through Aranea's skull with how furious she was. Her gaze was only broken by the sea dweller herself wincing as she applied more pressure to her wound.

"Help her, then get back to those documents. We will talk about this later." With an irritated sigh, Mindfang shook her head and tossed a small bottle to Aranea, who just barely managed to catch it. An almost inaudible Aye Aye Captain fell from the cerulean bloods lips before the door slammed shut, leaving the two alone once more.

So many questions buzzed through Meenah's mind as Aranea rushed through her room. She could hear her cursing to herself as she gathered up fresh bandages from the drawers in her room. "Aranea."

The cerulean blood hesitated as she grabbed a small box out of the drawer. "Yes, Meenah?"

"What did..she marine when she said that thing boat us emotin and ship?" Honestly she didn't think they were being very loud. Even if her heart felt as though it were thundering in her ears the entire time. No one should be able to hear that, right?

"...Mindfang and I, can sense emotions ." Aranea started slowly as she carefully avoided Meenah's surprised gaze. "We can also control the minds of trolls and read minds, though it's harder with higher castes and trolls with strong mental facilities. So far, the highest caste we can control would be blue bloods but even that is a little tenacious. Neither of us have been able to read a sea dwellers thoughts, and I don't really think it would be possible to either."

"So...are ya tellin me that....whenever everybuoy gets scared, it's like yer hearin them scream and their thoughts scream at ya at the same time? Dam, no wonder the captain just stabs the shit outta her anemones" How horrifying. If it were her, she would just bury herself in the deepest trench of the ocean and wait for death instead of dealing with that forever.

"Well without years of training, yes." Aranea clarified, rolling her eyes as she locked the door to her cabin. They had quite enough unexpected surprises today. "It's more like the constant sound of waves crashing against the ship that can easily be blocked out, but also easily

tapped into when things get tense. It's a great way to gain an advantage in a dangerous or difficult situation."

Meenah snorted as she slowly relaxed. She was acutely aware of just how exhausted she from the emotional roller coaster she just couldn't quite escape from. Though couldn't rest yet, she still had so many questions. That, and an injury that seemed to pulse with pain in time with her heartbeat. "Then...how come she knew we were in here emotin all over the cod dam place?"

"The only time I've had difficulty blocking out another trolls feelings is when I feel particularly close to them. In fact, they always seem to be even more prominent than anyone else's...." Aranea started as she approached the sea dweller. "Maybe...she finds me to be important to her, besides being her first mate."

It was easy to hear the awe build in Aranea's voice as she spoke, as though she had been struck with a revelation. She definitely understood why. Mindfang wasn't exactly the friendliest person on this ship. To have someone like that think so highly of her and consider her to be important had to be special. That was when what the cerulean blood said hit her.

"Serk.." She started, straightening up as Aranea kneeled next to her with her first aid items at the ready. "Are...are you tellin me that you only knew I got shot on that ship through all that shootin and trolls bein scared is cuz you...feel close to me?"

Aranea nearly dropped the antiseptic bottle at the question. Her face became an incredibly dark shade of cerulean, as she avoided the heiresses gaze. Well she avoided it as best as she could Meenah assumed. She was at least trying not to see her own eyes reflect back at her though the goggles.

"I-I well...you know you're my dearest friend." It was surreal seeing the usually composed and well versed land dweller crumble and stutter under such a simple question. "Is it a crime to worry about my own friend's well being?"

"I dunno. I aint never had no fronds beshore" The sea dweller shrugged as she pulled out the small pouch that held her needle and fishing wire. "Is worryin aboat yer fronds a crime? Cuz it does kinda feels like it sometimes "

"....What do you mean?"

Meenah missed the hesitation in Aranea's voice as she reluctantly started to pull down her pants just enough for her to work on the injury unobstructed. "I marine....when I sea ya just on those ships, almost gettin hurt or some shit. It makes me feel bad, in here." She briefly presses a hand to her chest. "For a whale I thought I was sick or somefin cuz I aint never felt that waves beshore boat nofin and no one. I don't efin wanna know how I'd feel if ya reelly did get hurt."

"Wanna gimme that bottle Mindfang threw at ya?" As she grabbed the bottle in Aranea's hand, she froze as the cerulean blood gently covered her hand with her own. Warmth

travelled up her arm and into her chest, and only seem to grow. A light shade of tyrian stained her cheeks as her head jerked up and met Aranea's gaze.

"Do you really mean that?" The way the pirate gazed at her, searching and hoping for...something, made this question seem more important than she ever anticipated. It even made her a little nervous.

"Whale yeah...If somebuoy hurt ya I'd fuckin murder the shit outta them" A light giggle quieted the heiress, her earfins perking curiously as she watched her friend dissolve into a fit of laughter. Tears even started to streak down her face from how hard she was laughing. Alarmed, Meenah pulled her hand away from her injury in favor of wiping away her cerulean tinted tears.

"Oh my cod did I break you?" Aranea shook her head, her laughter finally dying down as she practically beamed at the befuddled sea dweller. "No Meenah. I've just never heard anyone sincerely say anything like that to me before."

"Whale why not?" She frowned as she watched the mirth leave her friends eyes. "People find me more annoying and a bother to be around. You're one of the few that don't think so."

"Don't feel too bad...I aint never had no one that wanted me around beshore. Yer doin waves betta than me!" Meenah flashed an awkward grin as she tried to lighten the mood. It only earned her a slight frown much to her dismay. A sharp sting from her injury broke the moment as she visibly winced and jerked the bottle out of Aranea's hands.

"I..gotta do this."

Instinctively, she shifted away from the first mate, shielding her injury as she unwrapped the bandages that were slowly soaking through with her tyrian blood. Damn, she was going to have to waste more violet dye...hopefully Mindfang planned to port soon so she could steal more. "Thanks..for not lettin the captain krill me..."

"I couldn't imagine doing anything else." A dry laugh fell from Meenah's lips as she glanced back at her friend. Her smile had returned, but it wasn't as bright as before. She missed that joyful smile.

It was strange, how such a slight change in her smile seemed to affect her. In fact, it seemed more than just her smile affected her. She could still the warmth on her hand where Aranea once held it, and it still made her feel warm in her chest.

She huffed as she tugged the cork free from the bottle. Focusing on her actively bleeding wound was way more important than whatever was going on whenever the cerulean blood was around. When did her priorities get so topsy turvy?

The liquid antiseptic seemed to fizz in reaction to her blood as it was poured onto her reopened wound. She hissed at the stinging sensation that radiated along her leg. It nearly made it seize once again from the overstimulation.

A comforting hand on her shoulder startled the sea dweller as she jolted in surprise. Liquid sloshed out of the bottle and onto her leg as she swore under her breath at the mess. The hand pulled away instantly, almost as if it were burned. "Please excuse me, Meenah. I didn't mean to scare you."

'She only wants to help.' Meenah glanced back at the cerulean blood who looked as though she had fully retreated into herself. Guilt tugged at her heartstrings for a moment before the feeling was replaced with determination.

"It's ok." Meenah started as she slowly turned towards Aranea, no longer hiding her injury. She smirked wryly as she watched the first mate's eyes lock onto the tyrian blood. Another visible confirmation that she was, in fact, the one they had all been looking for.

Even though she knew now who she was, she could still see the wonder and disbelief on her face. Guess someone like her didn't exactly fit into typical royalty standards. Whatever. She doesn't even care about any of that. All she wants is to live free and to be her own troll. Is that too much to ask?

Aranea once again reached out and placed a comforting hand on Meenah's shoulder as she readied her needle. Concern took over as she gave the sea dweller a reassuring smile. The sea dweller found herself returning the smile with one of her own, hoping that it would ease the first mate's obvious worries.

A deep breath steadied her arm before finally, the push of the needle turned that reassuring grin into a grimace. Years of practice was the only reason why the sea dweller was able to hold her tongue as she weaved the thread through her torn skin. The only indication of pain was her tightly clenched teeth, as if she were fighting against her own agony.

Meenah could feel the hand on her shoulder tighten as she worked, though she barely registered it as she focused on her task. Only when it was over. When the wire was tied, her leg was cleared of blood and bandage, and finally her pants pulled back in place, did she return her attention to Aranea.

She was taken aback by the sorrow in her eyes. She couldn't remember any time that anyone had ever given her such a look before. Not even as a wriggler. "Did you learn to do this on your own?"

"Yeah. I marine, I watched otter trolls do it so I figured I could too. It ain't that hard rea---" Suddenly she was engulfed in a tight embrace. Aranea had slid closer, paying no mind as her coat was stained with blood and disinfectant as she held the sea dweller in her arms.

"You deserved better." She started as Meenah found herself slowly sinking into the embrace. Warm arms wrapped tight around her and held her as if she were the only troll that mattered. "You at least deserved a lusus."

Her fingers dug into the first mate's coat as the smell of sea air, ink and old books seemed to fill her senses. It was so distinctly Aranea that it somehow comforted her more than any

words she could possibly say. She couldn't help but get lost in this hug as she was starved for any kind of affection. She couldn't remember the last time she was hugged...or if she was ever hugged. Still, her own lingering fears couldn't let this moment be.

"You got my blood on you." She whispered as she reluctantly pulled away. Immediately, she felt a sense of loss as they broke apart. Aranea clearly wasn't ready, as her hand remained on her shoulder. Her fingers twitched as if it were a struggle to not just pull her back in for another hug. "I aint done yet."

A bottle of violet was fished out of her pouch before she could be questioned. She quickly covered her tyrian blood with the darker purple dye anywhere her blood touched. She even made a point to inspect and stain Aranea's clothes, muttering soft reassurances that it will wash out with enough soap. She's had lots of experience with this dye after all. Luckily, it was really only her fins that needed to be dyed, that was easy to avoid when bathing.

Finally she soaked her old, bloody bandages and dribble some on her newly bandaged leg. It had to look authentic right?

"Do ya think when ya go glubbin to Mindfang, that you could get her to stop somewhere soon?" She asked as she held up the nearly empty dye bottle for her friend to see. "I..need more supplies."

"Of course, Meenah. I will, as long as you promise me you will stay in here and rest as you heal, ok?" The sea dweller laughed as her eyes followed Aranea as she stood. Once again, she was surprised, but this time by her offered hand. It only took her a moment of hesitation before she grasped her hand and allowed her to help her to her feet. Just how many times is this pirate going to surprise her today?

"Heh...ya got yershellf a deal, nerd." Meenah returned as she hobbled back to the resting platform. "Hope ya don't get yelled at for scarin the captain"

Aranea giggled. "No promises there. Now rest. You absolutely need as much as you possibly can get after everything you have been through today!"

"Yeah yeah. I'm restin, I promise." The second her head touched the pillow, she was out. Everything had finally caught up with her, and now thoroughly exhausted she was finally getting some well deserved rest. Her earfin flickered at the sound of the metal tumbler on the door as it locked her in the dark room.

Chapter End Notes

I had some computer issues this year. My keyboard on my laptop stopped working so I had to wait for that to get repaired before I could work on this again. Still, this was much faster than the last update haha. I hope you all enjoy it!

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“You need to control your emotions.”

It had been a week since her talk with Mindfang, yet her words still rang in Aranea’s head as clear as when she first said them. She had tried to go back to work on the documents after, but after everything that happened, she just couldn’t focus. The documents would be fruitless anyhow now that the location of the missing princess was known, even if only she knew it.

“There are more trolls than just us that can read emotions. This can be used against you.”

Still she finished them to the best of her ability. Even if the main quest wouldn’t be fulfilled by completing them, other useful information would be found. Naval docking locations, new shipments and settlements, all of it would be useful for the rebellion and pirating.

“You cannot afford to let anyone know you have vulnerabilities, for your, and her sake.”

Information about a secret naval base in the middle of the ocean filled several pages. Solid steel reached down into the depths only sea dwellers could hope to see. The newest and best defense weapons lined the tall walls on the surface, easily striking down any enemy that dare approach. What it was for, she couldn’t say. A prison? A stronghold? Did the base reach the ocean floor?

“If you cannot withhold your feelings, then you need to learn to block out anyone else who may hear them. Even if we have all the luck, we cannot depend upon it forever.”

What could possibly be within these walls? Whatever it was, Aranea wasted no time in bringing this to Mindfang’s attention. Thus began her new task of charting out the location and safest course to the base. Once there, maybe a possible infiltration.

“I want you to spend two hours a day meditating. Work on your mental barriers. Make it so even I have trouble reading your emotions. If not for yourself, then for the sea dweller in your cabin.”

Deep breath. In and out. Clear the mind of any distractions. At least, that was what Aranea was trying to do until the almost inaudible sound of footsteps approaching her cabin reached her ear. A small smile played on her lips as she turned towards the door. There was only one person on board that could move that quietly in boots.

Her smile grew as the door opened to reveal the grinning sea dweller. Though that smile turned into a slight pout when she realized she had been discovered. “Aw shell. Though I was gonna scare ya again.”

As Meenah recovered in her room, she became aware of how careful each step she made was. Years of experience must have made this second nature to her. That and the longer she stayed, the quicker she seemed to be able to move. Not from healing, but because she seemed to have memorized where each squeak and creak in the floorboards resided.

She had definitely startled her on more than one occasion. In fact, Aranea may have jumped and possibly screamed a few times. Meenah always found that to be hilarious much to her chagrin. Despite this, she found having the sea dweller as a guest in her room to be more enjoyable than she thought.

“Yes well, I would like to think that I have come accustomed to you trying to scare me every few seconds. You will have to become more creative if you want to scare me in the future.” As she rolled her eyes, she patted a space next to her. “Come on, we still have time before we reach the town to meditate.”

Once Meenah became aware that she broadcasted her emotions everywhere she went, she had taken great care to restrain her own outbursts. In a way, it helped her as well, as they would sit together while she healed as they worked to control their emotions. Problem was, sea dwellers seemed to have an abnormally high amount of energy, and it didn’t take long for her to lose focus.

Aranea couldn’t count how many times she had opened her eyes to see the sea dweller poking around her room. She supposed she couldn’t blame her, she had a lot of items that Meenah was curious about. A telescope in particular always seemed to capture her attention as she had caught her on more than one occasion peering through the glass while her fins fluttered excitedly. If it wasn’t so adorable she may be a little more irritated by it, but her curiosity about everything was so earnest she couldn’t feel anything but warm affection for her.

Tonight was no different. As Meenah took her place next to her they had a solid hour or so of meditation before her ears picked up a soft shuffling sound. Her eyes cracked open and spied the sea dweller peering out the window with her collapsible telescope. She shook her head, a slight smile quirked on her lips as she slowly stood. “Well, at least you lasted longer this time. Maybe next time we could meditate for two hours.”

Amusement faded when she noticed Meenah’s fins weren’t fluttering as they usually did. She almost didn’t notice the sombre emotions coming from her. The meditation was working better than anticipated. “Meenah...are you ok?”

“I’m gonna head out beshore we land.” Her face was unreadable as she slipped away from the window. “I’ll be back beshore anemonebuoy knows i left.”

“Where are you going?” Concerned, Aranea rushed over to the window and grabbed the discarded telescope. All she could see was the town as the sun slowly started to peak over the horizon. She was going to have to pull her blinds soon. “It’s too dangerous for us to be out right now.”

“Don’t worry Serk...I’m reel good at workin in the day.” Aranea squeaked in surprise at the voice in her ear. She didn’t even hear her approach. “Heh...looks like I gotcha nerd.”

Whirling around, she noticed the discarded boots on the floor. No wonder she couldn’t hear her. “Yes, well I guess you did, but just because you can do this, doesn’t mean you should!”

“Serk, it’s gonna look glubbin susfishous as shell if we go there tomorrow and I go buy a boatload of violet dye. I know they been swimmin round lookin for me so I aint aboat to make myshellf look guilty of nofin.” Well...she did have a point. “I’ll be back beshore ya know it.”

With a heavy sigh, Aranea nodded. There was no use arguing about it. As much as she hated to admit it, her logic was sound. “Well, I will wait for you, so you better come back here right away or else there will be trouble!”

The cerulean blood found herself pulled into an impromptu embrace by the chuckling sea dweller. Her strong arms wrapped around her so tight nearly had her melting into the embrace as she returned it instantly. It made her feel as though everything would be ok. “I know ya’d krill me if i didn’t come back here right awaves. I’ll be reel fast I promise.”

With that she pulled away and disappeared into the light. Aranea couldn’t help but watch her as she dove into the sea and swam toward the town as long as she could without blinding herself by the sun. Hours seemed to drag on as she waited for her. She did her best to distract herself with her favorite books and more meditation but by hour four she could barely concentrate on the simplest task. As the fifth hour reached its end, she was seriously weighing the pros and cons of rushing out there herself to save that foolish sea dweller.

The soft squeak of her cabin door stopped those thoughts in their tracks. She leapt up from her chair and rushed over to the dripping wet troll before her and hugged her without hesitation. She was so relieved she didn’t mind as the cold water soaked into her clothes. “What took you so long?”

“Well I-” “I was about ready to go after you!” She shivered as the hug was returned. Meenah’s body temperature was the coldest she had ever encountered, and combined with the water, she didn’t have a doubt that if she were a warmer blooded troll, her breath would be a visible mist that fell from her lips. Despite this, she didn’t pull away as the sense of security within their damp embrace was stronger than the chill she received from it.

She was certain if she didn’t just watch her stitch herself together a week ago, she wouldn’t be so worried. Luckily, trolls heal fast. Her stitches could be removed any day now, though that didn’t change how she felt about it. “Did you get enough? Did anyone see you?”

“Hey I’m aight Serk...I didn’t steal for glubbin sweeps just to fuck up now. They aint gonna know nofin is gone til night.” She just smiled at the sound of her confident laugh, already feeling more than relieved that there weren’t any altercations.

“Good. Now go rest so we are ready to gather supplies for the ship tomorrow. Mindfang will be furious if we are late, and I don’t want to have to explain to her why either.” Slowly she pulled away once the cold wetness that enveloped her became unbearable. She waved her hand in the general direction of the resting platform Meenah had been using as she disappeared behind her privacy screen, eager to get out of her now soaked clothes.

“Yeah yeah. Clam down, I know we got a lotta shit to do.” Aranea could practically see her friend waving off her instructions. She huffed quietly as she quickly changed, though the sound of the mattress creaking did wipe away the pout on her lips. “I’m tired anemonewaves.”

As she slipped out from behind the screen, her eyes were immediately drawn to the sea dweller on the mattress. She felt a small sense of relief that she hadn’t bundled herself up under the blankets in those soaked clothes, but she knew how futile it would be to ask her to remove them. Even during horrible thunderstorms at sea or deep sea treasure hunts Meenah wouldn’t bother to change into anything dry once it was over, though it probably didn’t make any difference to her. In fact, she probably didn’t own any outfits aside from the one she was wearing at the moment. Still, the sight made her feel uncomfortable and she felt sympathy chills despite her friend showing no signs of discomfort.

It was definitely the one thing that made the urge to join her a lot less tempting.

She would be lying if she said she never imagined what it would be like to be held in those strong arms of hers while they slept. That thought never left her mind since she first hugged her and felt that firm, comfortable embrace. Sometimes, she wondered if Meenah felt the same, as she had caught her staring once or twice with quite a colorful mix of emotions that were too numerous to decipher.

As she slid into the sopor of her recuperation, she mentally pushed those thoughts aside. Right now she needed sleep. Tomorrow was too important of a day to waste being half asleep. The mental list of items needed for their trip into unknown waters took its rightful place in her mind as she settled in.

“Sleep well, Meenah.”

Aranea awoke with a start as the ship docked. Bleary eyed, she rubbed her eyes in a futile attempt to become more alert. A loud, rather inelegant yawn seemed to force its way from her chest as she stretched. Her long sharp fangs were on display as she stretched, which earned a low whistle from her guest.

“Damn Serk, ya got some nice fangs. Is that how ya scare off bassholes that are tryin to bother ya?” Aranea huffed quietly, her fangs pressing into her lower lip as she narrowed her eyes at the playful grin on Meenah’s face. Still, she could sense a hint of something else from her, but it was difficult to decipher with all her training she had done.

“Yes well, not all of us have rows of piranha teeth like you do Meenah.” She rolled her eyes, but she couldn’t stop the grin that grew on her face as the sea dweller grinned even wider to show off her dangerous teeth. It was impressive that they hadn’t dulled much from her hard life. It was terrifyingly attractive.

Aranea shook her head as those thoughts entered her mind. No time for weird feelings regarding her friend. There was a job they needed to do after all and they were not going to be late. She pulled herself out of the sopor in one fluid motion and landed gracefully on the floor. "If you would please excuse me for about eight minutes, I need to get ready."

She turned towards Meenah, who seemed to be watching her rather closely. At least that's how it seemed with those goggles of hers. Before she could ask her what was wrong, she spoke. "Is it bad that I aint never slept in sopor? I know ya told me it keeps terribubble nightmares awaves but...is that all it does?"

"Well, typically you're suppose to sleep in sopor nude to get the full effect, but it does more than keep away nightmares." Aranea started as she scraped some of the green slime off herself. "It also helps us relax more quickly and fall asleep faster, but I suppose it isn't an absolute necessity as you have proven obviously."

Meenah nodded, satisfied with the answer as she turned to leave. "Don't take forever Serk. I wanna get some reel glubbin food here. Tired of that cook on board makin barely edibubble carp all the time."

Aranea just giggled as she watched Meenah slip out of her cabin. Her complaints for his food were always loud and somewhat creative. She did have a point though, a lot of his food was rather questionable at times, but it was better than starving.

Once dressed, she followed the sea dweller out of her cabin and off the ship. The grievance against their cooks food still fresh in her mind. "Well, if you don't like his cooking, why don't you take some time to learn how to cook yourself. You could show him how it's done then with some actual edibubble carp."

The sea dweller beamed at the fish pun, her smile practically ear to ear as her fins fluttered in excitement. "Shell Serk, you right! I bet I could do waves betta than him! Just gotta get all that good shit that makes food taste good and one of those books for food and aint nobuoys gonna wanna eat none of his carp again!"

Warm feelings washed over her from her friends excitement, and it only made her smile grow. Just seeing her smile so earnestly made her heart skip a beat. If only she could see her eyes, she could only imagine how beautiful they would look with her joyful smile. "I'll be sure we stop somewhere along the way that sells spices and recipe books, Meenah."

Extra guards and suspicious shop owners greeted them as they worked their way through the docks. Now that Aranea was aware of Meenah's mid-morning adventures it really did explain why every time they docked everyone was so on edge. Specifically the seamstress shops...which was unfortunate this time but at least kept them from looking suspicious. What kind of pirate would steal dye anyways?

Ammunition supply remained untouched and were more than willing to sell their wares. Meenah, seemed eager to help move the mortar shells, bullet and cannon balls, though she had a feeling it was more to show off than anything. She hoisted and delivered multiple crates with ease while the mid blood staff needed at least two to haul the heavy crates onto the ship.

Before, Aranea found it to be obnoxious. Of course she could do this, she had read of sea dwellers dragging lusi several times their body size effortlessly through the depths of the sea. Though now, she appreciated the warm feelings and genuinely pleased smile on her face. She liked to show off, something she was guilty of after all, and it made this somewhat endearing to her.

That, and it did speed up their job and gave them plenty of extra time to explore the shops. With the extra stop they needed to take today, they were definitely going to need all the time they could get. Though, she couldn't resist spending extra time in the food market, Meenah in mind as she picked out a set of spices and a cookbook the featured mainly seafood dishes.

May as well admit it. She had grown quite attached to this sea dweller and she couldn't imagine it any other way. Even if she was a little infuriating at times. The furious screeching from the weapons shop, a place they just visited, had Meenah written all over it.

"Meenah.." The sea dweller turned towards her, earfins perked with the most charming and pleased grin plastered on her face. She was completely guilty. "We have a very important job to do today regarding our new mission, please stay focused!"

"Yeah, yeah Serk. I get ya." She waved her off as she peered at the list in Aranea's hands. "We almost done yet? I wanna sea more of those food places around here, like that bakery. Shell they probubbly got those books that tell ya how to make that shit there!"

Aranea smiled at Meenah's excitement as she gently gripped her elbow and guided her away from the bakery. "We only have one more place to go and it requires you staying still for a few hours. Think you can handle that?"

She chuckled as she watched the sea dwellers cheeks puff out in a fishy pout. "I guess if I gotta. Don't make no sense though. Aint these jobs usually me carryin shit yer lil noodle arms aint abubble to tug on the boat."

"Excuse you, I am a lot stronger than you think Meenah. Even if I am not able to carry the incredibly heavy items you can carry, doesn't mean I have noodle arms as you so eloquently put it." Aranea shot back as she rolled her eyes. "Besides this is for a new, very important job that only you can do, and we need you to look the part for it ok?"

"Yeah..I guess." Meenah muttered as they entered one of the seamstress shops near the shore. The guards seemed to have finally left with all the evidence they could get, which wasn't much considering how the place was practically untouched aside from the dyes behind the counter. One large vacant space within the neat row of colorful vials. The ones closest to the violet were either tipped over or bumped out of their neat rows.

The frazzled shop owner stood behind the counter with her head in her hands. Whatever she was muttering under her breath was lost on her, but she could feel the desperation radiating from her. It almost made her feel bad for the early morning theft.

"Excuse me," She smiled as the shopkeeper jerked up, eyes wide at the two highbloods in her shop. "I know this may not be the most opportune time, but we would like to commission an outfit from you for my friend here."

The shopkeeper's mood turned around almost instantly as she rushed around the counter. Meenah shifted away from the rather excitable olive blood, already looking incredibly uncomfortable with the invasion of her personal space. "Oh, yes yes! I can create something amazing for your royal friend here. If you could provide some of her violet blood, I could make the perfect dye for her clothes!"

Meenah practically growled, fins flared aggressively at the notion. The growl of royalty sent a shiver of fear through Aranea's heart, yet she stepped between the petrified seamstress and her glowering friend. "No need....no need. We have one vial we purchased earlier on our travels. You may use that."

"She..doesn't like needles." Aranea continued as she gently nudged the sea dweller behind her. Meenah only huffed as she dug into one of her pockets and pulled out a violet dye. "We don't need a lot of violet anyways for her clothes. Just enough to accent everything."

The shopkeeper nodded quickly as she took the dye with shaky hands. "R-right well, I do need to get her measurements. If you could both follow me into the back room, I will get started right away."

Aranea flashed a small, reassuring smile at the anxious glance Meenah shot at her as they followed the olive blood into the back room. The olive blood had already set the dye aside by a few reams of dark cloth. When she saw the measuring tape in the seamstresses hands was when she realized she had forgotten one of the most important steps in clothes fitting.

"I'm sorry, I hadn't introduced myself earlier. You may call me Tenova." She sent a disarming smile in the sea dwellers direction as she gestured to a small platform in the center of the room. "If you don't mind, would you please remove your clothes for your measurements? I will be very fast."

Aranea met what she assumed to be Meenah's gaze as she saw her eyes reflect back at her from her goggles. Even with all the practice, she could feel the anxiety spike from her friend. Before she could say anything, the sea dweller straightened up with a new, false bravado masking her emotions.

"Be fast then. I aint got all day!" Aranea's eyes widened as she watched Meenah grasp the bottom of her baggy shirt and practically rip it over her head. Her eyes gravitated to her torso, blindsided by how toned and muscular she was. Sure she was still on the skinny side, most likely from her hard life, but it didn't change how her body seemed to have been sculpted from the finest marble.

She swallowed dryly, suddenly feeling incredibly hot as she watched her disrobe. Those baggy clothes were definitely misleading as she never expected them to be hiding such a gorgeous swimmers body beneath them. Idly, she wondered how she would look if she carried the cargo onto the ship while on display like this. How her biceps would bulge and her abs would ripple under the strain....no, no she needed to focus.

Once Meenah had kicked off her pants did Aranea realize she was using bandages in the place of underwear around her chest and groin. That, and the numerous scars along her body

that she had dyed to be more violet in color. Many seemed to be bites from fish, but others...well she wasn't quite sure.

The seamstress did keep her promise once Meenah was on the pedestal, the tape cinching around her bust as soon as she was ready. Aranea had to tear her eyes away from the sea dweller, already feeling somewhat guilty for gawking at her. That, and she could feel a stirring within her that she was not at all ready or willing to deal with at this moment.

"So...how long will it take for you to make this for us, Tenova?" Yes, talking was good. Talking meant she could avoid all these thoughts that made her squirm in place. "If you could rush this order, we would be very grateful."

"Well, I could make something fabulous based off of the outfit she was already wearing." The seamstress seemed to hum as she measured the slightly nervous sea dwellers inseam. "It shouldn't take too much time or materials so I could have it ready for you by tomorrow if you are willing to pay for a rush."

"I will pay for the rush ahead of time if you will ensure this will be done." A large bag of beetles was dropped on the workbench by the cerulean blood. Tenova grinned and nodded vigorously as she finished writing down the last few measurements.

"Of course! The last thing I would need is her sign." Aranea paused as she dared a glance at her friend. Did she even have one? "I would like to add it to her new top which will tie the whole outfit together."

"Gimme some paper." Meenah muttered much to the cerulean bloods surprise. "I'll draw it for ya."

Several very confident lines were definitely drawn on the paper provided to her by the seamstress. Curious, she approached and took a quick peek as she handed it back to Tenova. Four curved lines, two curved to the left and two to the right with one line in the middle that curved upwards on the left and downwards on the right. It was so similar to the current Empress's that it couldn't be a coincidence.

"Aight Serk, let's get goin and do somefin acshelly fun now, ocray?" Aranea just nodded. She didn't trust herself to keep her voice even as she watched her very attractive friend gather up her clothes. "Do ya think they got some shellbeast food around here?"

They spent the rest of the day exploring. Meenah did find her shellbeast stand and proceeded to eat the steamed crab, shell and all. It was both horrifying and incredible to watch as her strong jaws and sharp teeth easily cracked and chewed through the shell and tough tendons of the crab like it was nothing.

Soon enough they were back on the ship, Meenah gushing over her new cookbooks. The sea dweller had gotten her hands on one from the bakery and she was already looking through all the recipes with a child-like excitement. She had nearly tackled Aranea to the floor when she was presented with the spices and the book about seafood.

“Serk, you reelly are the best frond ever!” Her words echoed in the cerulean bloods mind as she watched her, her sides aching slightly from how hard she was squeezed. It didn’t matter though. Just seeing her so happy was worth it.

“Hey gill, check out what I got from the weapon place.” Aranea was broken out of her thoughts by the devious grin on the sea dwellers face. She pulled out a large dagger and slowly unsheathed the blade to reveal the marbled steel underneath. An incredibly beautiful and expensive blade. “Think its gonna look good with that outfit yer makin me get?”

Once again, Aranea felt as though she were brought back to that room at the mention of the outfit. Wow, she didn’t think she would ever get over how breathtaking she is.

“Yes..absolutely. In fact, lets get some sleep now so we can get your outfit right away. We need to be ready for our mission.”

Yes. Sleep will distract her from these thoughts. She was already starting to feel uncomfortably warm as she slipped into the sopor slime, pleased that the mind numbing properties were easing the thoughts out of her mind. Thank god for sopor.

Aranea awoke the next day to an excited sea dweller shaking her recuperacoon. “Cmon nerd! I wanna sea this real glubbin expensive shit ya gills think I need to have!”

“Okay okay, stop shaking my coon so I can get out!” Aranea shouted, laughter clear in her voice as she poked her head out of her recuperacoon. “Let me get ready ok? I will be fast.”

A quick scraping of residual sopor and a change of clothes later, and they were already on their way back to the shop. Her friend was practically vibrating in excitement as they approached, and she did nothing to hide it either. Honestly she couldn’t blame her as she probably never had new clothes in her entire life. Especially ones tailored to fit her and only her.

Tenova was waiting for them, grinning from ear to ear as she welcomed them into her shop. “Come with me miss. Let’s get you dressed in your new clothes. You are going to love them, I made sure to make them as practical as they are fabulous!”

Meenah rushed into the back with the seamstress, eager to try on her new clothes. Guess being almost naked in front of someone really eased the apprehension she felt earlier. “Now it will only be just a minute. Please wait out here, okay?”

Aranea, leaned on the counter as she drummed her fingers against the glass. The anticipation seemed to build with every second that went by. She was about ready to head into the back room herself after about five minutes went by when the doors burst open.

“Say hello to your friend’s new fashionable, yet functional new look!” Tenova beamed as Meenah stepped out in her new outfit. The first thing Aranea noticed was a thick black coat with violet cuffs around the hands and the base of the jacket. The violet from the base flowed up the zipper to the collar of the jacket. A thick purple stripe branched off from the zipper and went around the middle of her back.

“Check out the hood Aranea!” Meenah exclaimed as she tugged it up and fitted the holes comfortably around her horns and posed. She could see the cloth moving as her fins fluttered excitedly underneath. There were two purple stripes on her hood that tapered off into curved V shape, just like her horns. “Aint it fuckin aweswim?”

Her jacket was unzipped and she could clearly see it was a simple black shirt with the violet symbol Meenah had so graciously provided in the center of her chest. Nothing spectacular but it definitely tied it all together.

Though she was rather impressed by her pants, which while they were made of a sturdy, functionable material, still looked incredibly expensive. Violet surrounded the base of both legs, the right side went up to the knee while the left cut off at the ankle. The violet continued on the left side just above the knee and ended at the groin. Small studs and leather lacing went along both legs to make them rather form fitting.

It was all incredibly attractive. Aranea bit her lip as Meenah turned to thank the seamstress. Her butt looked really good in those pants. She did idly notice the violet went around a lot lower from behind. Just up to her calves and that was all. In an attempt to refocus on the task at hand, she shook her head and handed Tenova the rest of her payment.

“Thank you so much. This is perfect.”

“Shell yeah it was! I aint wore nofin that felt this nice in forever!” Tenova just lit up at the compliment. It seems like they had turned the whole theft incident around for her after all, even if it was Meenah’s fault.

As they left, Aranea jolted as she felt Meenah’s arm drop around her shoulders, weighing her down as the taller troll leaned against her. “Serk, this plan you guys got is already the best glubbin plan ever. This coat has secret pockets and everyfin! I didn’t efin know clothes could feel this nice.”

“Yes well you were due for a change of clothes.” She gestured at the clothes Meenah was currently carrying in a burlap sack from the store. “I’m glad we could provide you with some new clothes, but now we must go on to the next phase of the plan.”

“Yeah? What’s that?” Aranea glanced up at the sea dweller as they boarded the ship. She seemed so happy and content that she almost felt guilty about the plan now.

“We found a sea dweller base in the middle of the ocean, and we need you to sneak in and steal anything important regarding...the missing princess and the naval battle plans.” She glanced up at Meenah, already seeing her smile fade. “We are going cripple her military and take her down. But before we can take her down, we would need to...find..the heiress.”

“Would you be willing to join us and our cause?”

Check this out! <https://aszeah.tumblr.com/post/174603742647/a-little-comic-based-on-shella-aweswim-borrowed> One of my readers, Aszeah, made some fanart from my story! This was from the last chapter during their first hug! Its really great.

I hope you all like my super long chapter. This is the longest one I have ever written for this fic.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Nothing nice ever seemed to last did it?

Everything seemed to be going great for once. More of the crew respected her ever since she became the chief navigator during foggy and stormy voyages. That and many of her other feats had warmed them to her presence. They claimed she was one of the good ones, whatever that was suppose to mean. As long as it meant she didn't have to sleep with one eye open, then it could mean whatever the hell they wanted it to mean.

While their acceptance was unexpected yet welcomed, what truly caught her off guard was whatever was happening between herself and the first mate. Aranea insisted she stay with her in her private cabin! It was absolutely crazy! Meenah never had such luxuries, such as a resting platform, pillows or a blanket. In fact, she was barely use to the hammock she was given to sleep in when she first arrived. Now this? Incredible!

She definitely didn't miss the smell down below deck from the sweaty crew after a long days work combined with the rancid smell below deck. At least Mindfang scheduled a few of the crewmembers to clean it when they landed. The smell was starting to reach out from below deck like a horrible poltergeist bent on revenge. Considering who the captain of the ship was, she wouldn't be surprised considering all the atrocities she is known for.

The cabin was a massive improvement. In fact, it was neat, organized and it only seemed to smell of things that made her think of the bookish friend. It was a place she couldn't help but relax in and actually forget about her troubles for a moment. Especially when the land dweller was there with her, either reading or telling her some random facts about whatever interested her that day.

Hugs were something she just couldn't get enough of and luckily Aranea seemed to feel the same. Any excuse she had to embrace the smaller troll wasn't wasted, and she made sure to make every hug count. She couldn't stop herself from smiling whenever she felt her friend bury her face into her neck; even if the feeling of her warm breath against her gills made her shiver.

For once, she felt safe and wanted. She wished this could last forever, or at least prolong these good feelings. Maybe while they slept they could embrace, but that would be weird right? It didn't stop her from watching her as she headed to her recuperacoon every night, hoping she would turn around and invite her in or ask to join her on the platform.

She had tried to invite Aranea onto the platform several times; either after they had woken up or before bed, and she always chickened out. Honestly, she was afraid to ruin this good thing they had going between them. The questions always turned into small inquiries about things she had been curious about instead. At least something good came out of those failed attempts, but she was starting to run out of questions.

The night Meenah returned from stealing dye, she had expected to return to a cabin with a sleeping troll. Not one who was wide awake, in a state of frantic relief as she rushed over and embraced her. She never felt such strong feelings of affection for the shivering troll in her arms until that moment.

What she did not expect was how daylight changed how private the privacy screen actually was. When she laid down, the muted light from the window cast a very revealing silhouette of Aranea. All her curves were on display leaving little to the imagination other than the finer details. Her chest was definitely bigger than she thought. The thick coat she always wore did a great job at not only protecting her from bullets but also hiding her....assets.

Overwhelmed by the sudden desire that warmed her body, she rolled over and pretended to be asleep. She was just thankful that she had been doing those meditation exercises, because otherwise she bet she would just be unintentionally screaming these feelings at Aranea. That would definitely get her thrown out of this room.

Now she was given actual clothes that fit her. Unlike her other clothes she had acquired through theft; these ones didn't feel like they were made of burlap and sandpaper. It was like she really was just a regular troll instead of some hermet that began living in the bowels of a ship several months ago.

Even other trolls seemed to give her more respect in her new outfit as they headed back to the ship. They practically jumped out of the way just at the sight of her. Was this what it felt like to be respected? Or...was this fear she saw in their eyes? Though it was somewhat cathartic, it just didn't feel right seeing trolls look at her with the same look she knew she had in her own eyes ever since she was a wriggler.

For now, she was willing to push those feelings aside and just bask in this moment. Who knows how long it would last or if it would ever happen again? Even the prospect of another job couldn't ruin her good mood.

Or so she thought.

"....I can help ya get the plans." Meenah muttered as she pulled away from the first mate. She wasn't feeling so chummy anymore. "I'll see if they got information or waterebber ya need for yer lil quest."

In other words: No.

"Meenah, could we talk about this...privately?" A hand gripped her bicep and slowed the sea dweller down. She glanced down at Aranea's hand, stomach queasy at the thought of what she had to say.

A whistle from their captain tore Meenah's attention away from the cerulean blood as she faced the older troll. Mindfing's eyes roamed her body as she examined her clothes in a way that actually made her miss her old baggy clothes. The sea dweller shifted uncomfortably at the hum of approval and devious little grin on her face. "Well, I didn't know you would clean up so well, Meenah. Who knew there was an attractive troll under those ugly, torn up things you called clothes."

“Yes, she does clean up well,” She could feel Aranea’s hand squeeze her arm at those words. A slight edge was in her voice that seemed to only amuse their captain even more. “Why don’t we discuss the plan with her instead of laminating about her looks? It will certainly be more productive if she knows what she needs to look for.”

“Oh, I’m sure it doesn’t take too much time away from our plans to pay this lovely sea dweller a compliment.” Mindfang’s eyes were trained on the first mate as she said this with a knowing look in her eyes. Obviously she having the time of her life. The irritated huff next to her confirmed that Aranea felt otherwise.

“How about we just go and shell me waterebber I need to know so I don’t get myshellf glubbin krilled.” Whatever this was, it was weird and Meenah didn’t quite care for it. In fact, it made her a little nervous considering one of the players of this strange Serket game was a well known murderous pirate captain.

“If you insist. Having my favorite ocean navigator and treasure retriever dead would be incredibly inconvenient,” Mindfang shrugged, seemingly satisfied with their silent exchange as she turned on her heel and headed to the Captain’s quarters. Well, at least she moved up from, who cares if you die to, it would be inconvenient. She was really moving up in the world.

“We can talk later, Meenah” Aranea muttered quietly before rushing off after the Captain. The sea dweller could only sigh, already dreading the conversation as she followed after the two cerulean blooded trolls.

Meenah never really got over how nice Mindfang’s quarters were. It was so large and filled with tons of treasures she had gathered over the years. If she wasn’t so certain she would be skinned alive if she even breathed on them, she would have snatched one of the trinkets as a souvenir.

A grand chandelier hung from the recessed ceiling had exactly eight lit oil lamps in each arm that lit the room with a pleasant golden glow, which gave it a rather cozy feeling. A very plush cerulean and silver rug filled the center of the room and cushioned her feet as soon as she stood on the luxurious material. Intricate web and spider designs were stitched into the soft material with a circular solid dark cherry oak stained table in the center. Maps and documents were strewn across the table haphazardly with a book of notes scrawled out in blue flowing handwriting she only recognized to be Aranea’s.

At the end of the room were eight floor to ceiling windows that filled the room with the moons light. Each window curved at the top in a gentle arch shape, the sills carved with spiders and inlaid with silver for the webbing. The spider theme continued with the floor to ceiling cerulean drapes, thick enough to block out the sun once drawn over the windows.

Her own recuperacoon and resting platform were securely nestled in between two built in bookshelves that were overflowing with books. Now, Meenah wasn’t going to make accusations, but based on everything she has ever seen a cerulean blood own, they were all nerds. Some, cooler than others, but still at heart a giant nerd.

The snap of fingers in her face brought the sea dweller out of her thoughts. Blinking rapidly, she refocused on the first mate, who had a slight frown on her face. “Meenah, please try to pay attention while we go over our plans. This is incredibly important and we cannot afford any screw ups!”

“Yeah yeah, I’m listenin...clam down” Meenah flashed a rather charming grin, hoping to diffuse the irritation from her friend. It seemed to have worked, as Aranea’s irritation seemed to fade into a soft huff from the land dweller.

“As I was saying, this complex is well guarded with the Empress’s naval forces. They have top of the line guns and mortar that could sink a ship as large as Mindfang’s with only a couple direct hits,” The Captain seemed to grumble at that. It was obvious that she wanted to prove that no amount of military prowess could sink her ship. She didn’t doubt she would try it too if this wasn’t so important.

“That’s where you come in, Meenah,” Aranea started with a slight encouraging smile. “For you see, not only do they have military within these walls, they also have important sea dwelling scholars. They maintain the top secret military and diplomatic information as well as care for other important matters relating to the crown.”

Already this idea seemed ludacris. Meenah barely remembered half the crew members names on this ship. How was she supposed to prove she was an incredibly smart and trusted scholar? Mindfang just snorted quietly at the mention of her even attempting to be a scholar. Great. At least someone else sees a flaw in this plan.

“Ocray...so betides the fact that I’m a glubbin sea dweller...how the shell am I supposed to fit in with a group of nerds? It aint like I can bait em with random carp til they think I’m one of em. Speshelly since they gotta have their own uniforms n shit right?” Already this plan was a nightmare for her. Just how many close calls will she have while staying with this crew?

“Relax, Meenah. I researched further into sea dweller scholars, and I am happy to report that they actually dress as you are dressed right now,” Now this was information Meenah never expected to hear. She glanced down at her new outfit with a slight frown. She was...dressed as a royal nerd?

“Now, they all have their own designs and signs, but essentially they wear a hood that obscures most of their face. It has something to do to symbolize their vow of silence and secrecy for the crown.” Well, at least it was comfortable, and it seemed to give her a lot of undeserved respect. Definitely a plus. Though, it seemed to leave a rather hollow feeling in her chest she couldn’t quite identify.

“Luckily, you wore an outfit that could easily be translated to their dress without suspicion. That way, if anyone tries to trace us, the seamstress will not remember a special request to make a scholar’s outfit. We were just another customer, sea dweller or not, who requested a better version of what they were already wearing.” Aranea was just so pleased with herself, she was practically bouncing on the balls of her feet. She would have found that cute too if this plan didn’t feel like death sentence for herself.

“Aight then...that don’t tell me how I’m supposed to reel em in with my lie. I aint got none of that knowledge they got. It’s insmanatee if ya think you doin a quick schoolfeedin on it is gonna make a difference.” If Aranea honestly thought she was going to sit there and learn intricate details about the empire just for this then she’s out of her mind. Of course, that pleased little grin just grew a little more.

“As fun as that may be, we do not have to worry about that,” Aranea pushed slid the map on the table closer to Meenah. Trade markings and small notes were scribbled onto the surface with blue ink with times and dates included. “According to the documents you recovered from that ship, they have an underwater trade system that both military and outside scholars handle. What you need to do is assimilate yourself in the delivering ranks. That way, your ignorance within the fortress would not seem out of place.”

Damn. She really did think of everything, didn’t she? Honestly, she never realized until now just how much work it took to be the first mate for such an infamous pirate. Even if her plan was rather wordy, she couldn’t deny how impressive it was.

“Try to take whatever it is they are delivering too, even if it’s just a little of it.” Mindfang grinned as she proudly patted Aranea on the shoulder. “I want you to get as much information as you can from this mission. God help you if you come back empty handed.”

Meenah’s fins pinned flat against her head at the slight threat. She still had nightmares about her fins being sliced off by the Captain. It was hard not to considering she had the cold blade pressed against the side of her head. The bite of sharpened steel grazed the thick cartilage just before Aranea rushed in and stopped her.

“Yeah...no probubblem” She mumbled as she avoided the older trolls intense cerulean gaze. Mindfang’s eyes weren’t as welcoming as Aranea’s, who were like warm waves of the ocean on a nice day. The Captain’s were more like blocks of ice. Cold and unforgiving to the world around them. It still amazed her how they seem to thaw for her first mate and the flying troll that visits her every so often.

“Then it’s settled,” Mindfang grinned wide as she ushered them both out of her cabin. “We set sail at dusk. Until then, I want to enjoy my time here.”

The Captain slammed and locked the door behind her as soon as she stumbled out of her cabin. Meenah nearly face planted as a loose floorboard caught her foot and sent her stumbling ahead a few paces. Aranea, however, seemed use to it as she avoided the floorboard and flowed gracefully onto the deck. Just how many times did Mindfang end meetings like this?

“Don’t scuff my ship’s deck with your face, sea dweller.” Mindfang chortled as she clapped her on the back jovily. Meenah jolted forwards from the unexpected smack and was left grumbling under her breath as the Captain breezed past her.

“Meenah.” A hand on her arm made the sea dweller pause. Cerulean eyes stared up at her with mild concern shining in their depths. “Would it be alright if we spoke privately now?”

“Can we naut? I’m already gonna be doin some dangerous bullship, I don’t wanna do nofin eelse to make it efin more impossibubble than it already is” She shifted away from the first mate, for once wanting some distance between them. “Now, I’m gonna go try makin stuff with those cookbooks we got. I’ll sea ya later, ocray?”

She walked off without another word, pushing the thoughts of rebellion out of her mind. At least for a while, she was going to distract herself from these swirling negative emotions by doing something she always wanted to do herself. Learn how to cook. Who knows, maybe she would actually be good at it.

Over the next few weeks, Meenah poured her attention and energy into cooking whenever she had time to herself. The cook didn’t really mind her using the kitchen, much to her delight. She found that tasting and experimenting with different spices and seasonings to be a lot of fun, even if some of the dishes were a little....off.

One of the main reasons the cook didn’t put up too much of a fuss was that she caught her own food to cook. She would dive into the sea and drag up all kinds of edible sea life, such as swordfish, flounder, clams and sometimes crab. Usually, it was only just enough for herself as no one seemed interested in trying her food. That suited her just fine, as she wasn’t really keen on the idea of sharing.

Though, as time went on, some of the flour, sugar and other ingredients were liberated from their stores. Mainly she experimented with baked goods during the day when everyone was asleep. Thanks to the live cluck beasts and the liquor cellar, she whipped up her very first rum cake, complete with glaze. It was a little on the burnt side, but damn if it wasn’t fun to try. Baking quickly became her favorite activity in the kitchen after that.

As time passed, she started to spend more and more time in the kitchen. Ever since the meeting about her new mission, she had been doing her level best to just to avoid the topic. A topic that Aranea seemed to be more and more insistent on discussing.

She knew this wouldn’t last. Each day they sailed closer to the naval base and it became harder to avoid the subject. Eventually, she was going to have to talk to her about it as the comfortable atmosphere in the first mate’s cabin seemed to become more and more strained as time went on. Though, ever since the meeting it was already somewhat uncomfortable as some dark thoughts swirled in her mind whenever she allowed herself some time to think about it.

Baking was better. At least she wasn’t torturing herself with thoughts in the kitchen. Only her taste buds suffered whenever she messed up a recipe, which was happening less and less as time went on.

It was when she was carefully splitting open the vanilla seed pods with her new favorite dagger, when Aranea burst into the kitchen. Swearing loudly, Meenah just barely caught the bowl of vanilla seeds as it tumbled off the table. “Holy fuck, Serket. Didja have to try and break the glubbin door down just to get in here?”

The first mate looked rather frazzled as she shut the door quickly behind herself. She had used an umbrella to shade herself from the sun, but that obviously didn’t ease her fears of the

blistering heat. It was as though she ran here as she observed the way she seemed to pant softly in exertion.

“Meenah, please. We need to talk about this, and we can’t if you spend every single day in here.” The sea dweller huffed irritably as she began to grind the vanilla seed into a paste. She could feel her friends eyes on her, boring into her as she worked.

“You already know what I thought about that insmanatee when ya first told me about it” She snapped as she poured part of the vanilla into a big mixing bowl along with a half a cup of spiced rum. It was just easier to focus on baking than this. “Do ya think talkin about it would shrimply change my mind?”

“Meenah, I just want to explain my reasoning.” A dash of salt. Crack a few eggs. Whisk the ingredients together. “Please, I didn’t get the chance to when I first brought it up. At least let me explain.”

Meenah sighed quietly as she beat the ingredients together with a fork. She supposed she could hear her out. That way when she said no, Aranea wouldn’t have any more reason to bring it up to her ever again. Maybe then these bad feelings that had been stewing inside her would go away too.

“Aight...fine. We can talk about it, but only after I finfish what I’m doin,” The land dwellers elated smile made her heart flutter as she poured the batter into a pan. She shook her head as she slid it into the wood fired oven. “Don’t hit me with a krillion words neither. Otterwise there aint no waves I am gonna remember all the carp you say.”

“Don’t worry, Meenah. I will be sure to keep it short and to the point.” A cup of sugar. Another half cup of spiced rum. “Though I do have a quick question for you. Does Mindfang know you are using all this alcohol for cooking?”

“No.” A little more vanilla and some water. She could already smell the cake as it baked. The sweet aroma filled the cabin with promise of a moist and sugary treat. It was easier to focus on that than the horrified look on Aranea’s face. “But I figure, if I’m gonna be riskin my life for you gills, why don’t I do somefin I wanna do too beshore that.”

She set the glaze on top of the stove to simmer and stirred quickly to avoid burning the sugar. Last time she made this, she left it sit for too long on direct heat and it turned the sauce into a black sludge that smelled of burnt rubber. This time, her sauce turned a pleasant caramel brown before she removed it from the heat.

“...I guess I can’t fault you for that.” Aranea started quietly once her shock wore off. Meenah flashed her a big grin as she pulled the cake out of the oven. Her grin only growing at the sight of the perfect golden brown color. The smell of sugar and the spices from the rum filled the room as the cake was set out to cool. She could tell this was going to be her best cake yet.

“Coralse not,” Meenah stated as she poked several holes into the cake with her fork so the glaze could soak in more effectively. Once finished, she slowly started to pour the glaze over

the cake. “Betides, I wouldn’t be abubble to try this recipe out that ya got me without it neither.”

“I suppose not, but I would prefer you not getting yourself in trouble with Mindfang. You should know by now she isn’t the most understanding troll.” Meenah snorted at Aranea’s soft reprimand. Of course she knew that, but it wasn’t like she was going to find another sea dweller to do this job for her and not betray her. So for now, she was going to test her limits. She could always blame the missing alcohol on the crew anyways as many of them took more than their fair share.

Careful even slices were made into the spongy surface. Two perfect slices were lifted from the pan. One was presented to the cerulean blood with a confident grin adorning the heiresses face. “Have a slice, nerd. That waves we can be in troububble together.”

“Yes, Meenah. That would definitely make all of this better, me getting in trouble as well.” While Aranea wrinkled her nose at the idea of also being in trouble with Mindfang, she still took the offered plate. The sea dweller grinned as she took a large bite from her own plate.

The cake was warm, moist and chewy. Sweet with a kick of spice that was only boosted with the warm glaze that practically melted in her mouth. Yes, this was definitely the best cake she had ever made so far. She glanced over at Aranea as she took her own bite and grinned as she watched her practically swoon at the flavor.

“Meenah! This is incredible!” She beamed at the praise, more than pleased that all her hard work seemed to have paid off. If she doesn’t die during her mission, then she could probably do this more often! “I thought you were only experimenting with seafood. Have you been working on cakes during the day this whole time?”

“Shell yeah! I can’t use the otter stuff whale everybuoy else is around or they’d beach at me aboat it or probubbly get me in troububble and I aint gonna deal with none of that carp if I don’t have to.” Meenah shrugged as she ate a few more bites of her cake. “Thanks for the spices and the book by the waves. Efin if all the food I made at first was glubbin garbage, I think it’s waves betta now than what the cook makes.”

“Really? Do you think that you could make some for me next time?” The question was unexpected. Meenah’s earfins twitched and flared curiously as she gave Aranea her full attention. There was a proud spark in her eyes, her smile hopeful as she waited for her answer. It made the sea dweller feel rather warm, inside and out.

“Whale yeah...I guess so. Shoalnd’t be a probubblem.” She muttered, unable to stop the small smile that tugged on her lips as Aranea’s hopeful grin turned into delight. “Just give me extra time to find extra fish or somefin.”

“Oh of course, Meenah!” The heiress shook her head in mild amusement as her friend bounced in place. She honestly didn’t think anyone would be this enthusiastic about her cooking. Maybe she really was getting good at this. “If it’s half as good as this cake, I am shore to love it!”

Meenah nearly dropped her plate at the fish pun that fell from Aranea's lips. Her smile seemed to double in size as she practically lifted the first mate up into her arms in a tight embrace. This earned her a soft squeak of surprise from the smaller troll as she hugged her close. "Shore! You said shore! Yer the best, Serket!"

"Yes well, it was just a slip of the tongue. You know I meant sure." Meenah's fins fluttered excitedly as she felt Aranea drape her arms around her shoulders. She nearly missed the embarrassed tone in her voice.

"Waterebber Serk, you glubbed up and said shore and ya can't take it back!" She could hear the defeated huff from the smaller troll and it only made her grin wider. "Fish puns are aweswim and you know it!"

"Alright, alright. Fish pun's are fun ok?" Meenah grinned up at Aranea as she felt her slowly start to play with her braids. The cerulean blood returned the smile with a softer, more affectionate smile than she was use to. She glanced away, the look making her feel all sorts of confusing emotions that made her stomach feel as though it were being tied up in knots.

"How about you put me down and we go back to my cabin? You promised we would talk after you finished your cake." Oh, right. Those forgotten feelings seemed to resurface with a vengeance at the reminder. Why couldn't they just eat cake and make more fish puns instead?

With a heavy sigh, the sea dweller set her friend back down on her feet. She eyed her curiously as her hands lingered on her shoulders before finally pulling away. "We can take the cake with us if you want."

"Yeah, aight," Frowning slightly, Meenah grabbed the cake pan as she put out the fire in the oven. Might as well get this over with, then maybe everything can go back to normal with them. She was getting tired of sneaking into the cabin and pretending to be asleep so she could avoid this conversation. "But we aint talkin aboat it ever again after this. Not unless I bring it up or somefin."

Aranea looked as though she were about to protest. One sharp look from the sea dweller seemed to quash whatever she was going to say as she sighed, resigned. "Alright."

With her hood up, Meenah skirted under the slight overhang of the top deck. She never liked being in the sun for long, even with the protection of her sun resistant clothes. When she was younger, she was severely burned by the sunlight. She was forced to hide in the ocean for a week due to the deep tyrian purple they turned. She could hardly move them during the first few days as they healed.

Luckily it didn't scar as her skin peeled and grew back to its normal grey color. Still it was something she never wanted to repeat. She had been incredibly cautious since then, but adrenaline still coursed through her during the brightest parts of the day. She already felt as she as being cooked alive in her clothes as she hurriedly pushed open Aranea's cabin door.

Relieved to be back inside, she tossed her jacket aside as soon as she set the cake on a nearby table. She didn't realize how great t-shirts were until now. Never again was she going to have to suffer through the heat, at least in Aranea's cabin.

“Ocray, what kinda glubbin speech ya got for me nerd?” Meenah sighed as she plopped onto the bed, more than ready to get this over with. She arched an eyebrow at the rather distracted look on Aranea’s face. The way she seemed to flush, fangs pressed into her lower lip had her squirm slightly under her gaze. “Ya..feelin aight?”

“Oh! Yes...Sorry.” The light blue that dusted Aranea’s cheeks turned a furiously dark blue in an instant. She couldn’t help but snicker at her embarrassment. Whatever has gotten into her friend lately has been rather amusing. Though it did leave her with more pleasantly confusing feelings than usual.

Those thoughts didn't last long, as she noticed Aranea straighten up. She was about to deliver her ‘rehearsed speech’ and she was absolutely not ready to hear it. Dread filled her as she waited as she gripped the blankets beneath her to keep herself calm.

“Meenah, I really think you should join our cause as who you really are. Mindfang knows many trolls that could help you develop your skills to face off against the Empress!” The sea dweller scoffed, unmoved by the speech. Obviously it was the opposite of what the first mate was hoping for as she redoubled her efforts. “Your presence on our side would inspire more to come and fight with us. That we are a cause to believe in!”

“And then what, nerd? The Empress and all her glubbin armies are gonna find me reel easy and I would get krilled super glubbin fast cuz I aint got thousands of glubbin years of bein alive and krillin the shit outta everybuoy like she does” Meenah threw her arms up in the air in exasperation. Why Aranea hadn’t thought about something so obvious?

“Please. We could keep it secret while she helps you become powerful enough to fight her.” Aranea crossed her arms tight over her chest, unwavering from her stance. “We wouldn’t let anyone know until then!”

“That don’t change shit and you know it!” Meenah grumbled as she shook her head. “Me bein out and in the open won’t make anemone of this betta or in yer favor more than it is now. I’ll still have to hide all the time and I would have to trust Mindfang with my secret. Don’t know aboat you, but I can’t efin trust her to stand next to me sometimes.”

She shivered slightly at the memory of a gun pointed at her face. Of all the deprecating comments sent her way whenever she messed up. Especially, how she was forced to live in the bowels of the ship for weeks on end as punishment. No, that wasn't someone she could trust.

Honestly, it was Aranea herself that kept her aboard this ship. Sure, having an actual somewhat stable place to live and get regular food was nice, but she gave her something she had never had before. She couldn’t bare the thought of losing this relationship they had built together. Her friend may not realize this, but she was willing to put up with almost anything to keep this relationship they formed.

“It was hard enough trustin you with this. I aint never trusted nobuoy with this and I don’t wanna regret trustin you.” The irritation she felt slowly melted away as she dropped her head into her hands. She didn’t even want to think about what she would have to do if Aranea really was untrustworthy.

Aranea's hands fell to her sides. She looked absolutely blindsided by this confession. How was it possible for an empath to be so blind to another person's feelings?

"I spent so many god damn sweeps tryin to just stay alive...and you tellin anemonebuoy could ruin this in a glubbin instant. Shell, me showin ya this," She practically ripped the goggles off her head and tossed them down at her side. Piercing tyrian eyes glared hard into shocked cerulean. "This coulda been a death sentence and I did it anemonewaves. I did it cuz...I dunno...you were the first troll that was acshelly important to me and made me feel like I was important."

A barely concealed sob caught in the sea dwellers throat. It was as though whatever wall she had built around her emotions had finally crumbled. It was almost too much to mask, hyper aware of the other empath on the ship.

She huffed and rubbed at her eyes as she clutched her goggles tight in her hand. "Me havin to wear these colors tells me I aint efin suppose to be alive. Me havin somefin this nice made me think that this marines that maybe that's ok cuz somebuoy wants me to be alive."

Her voice cracked as she spoke as so many repressed emotions took over. A few deep breaths, and she was able to mute the outpour of feelings that flooded her, thankful for the many meditative sessions she participated in. "But then...it turned out to be apart of some perchfect plan ya had with Mindfang. It wasn't cuz you cared or nofin. Not reelly."

"Meenah..." She stiffened slightly as she felt Aranea's hands on her shoulders, unsure whether she should lean into her touch or pull away. "I'm so sorry that I have made you feel this way. It was never my intention to have done so. I have always wanted to get you new clothes ever since we became close, but we never stayed in one place long enough to do so. We're at the mercy of Mindfang's schedule."

Meenah sniffed quietly, slowly relaxing into her friends touch. There was a slight tremble in her grip, just enough for her to look up at Aranea and notice the pained look on her face. Even with her frustration, her heart ached at the sight of her looking so troubled.

"I don't want to violate your trust. I must admit I had not completely thought it through about how you would feel about all of this, especially after everything we are asking for you to do. I should have known better than to expect you to put yourself at such risk after already risking so much for us." The sea dweller grunted quietly as she wiped her eyes and glared down at the tyrian tinted tears that stained her hands.

"I wish I wasn't this waves" Meenah muttered, her tone quiet yet scathing as she furiously wiped away the tears from her hands. "I hate seeing my blood color"

"I think you are perfect just the way you are." The remark earned Aranea another humorless scoff. Of course she would. How else would she be useful to their stupid plans?

"No, I mean it Meenah. I mean it besides the plans and the status. I find you perfect as you are because you're you." Confused, Meenah peered up at the cerulean blood, searching her face for an answer. "I find you to be beautiful and wonderful to be around. No matter what

color your blood may be, I would always consider you to be someone of great importance to me. I couldn't imagine living without you."

A dry laugh fell from her lips as she slowly embraced her. She buried her face in Aranea's stomach and let out a shuddering breath. A soft sigh fell from her lips as slender fingers combed through her hair and gently massaged her scalp. The tension slowly easing from her touch.

Exhaustion slowly started to take over as time went on. Her grip on Aranea's jacket loosened as she leaned heavily against her, relying on her to keep her upright. The weeks of daytime baking and turbulent emotions were finally taking its toll.

Aranea apparently could sense this too as she slowly started to pull away. Meenah's grip tightened instantly as she shifted closer to her. She wasn't ready for this to end. "Would you sleep with me tonight...please?"

There was a moment of hesitation. She kept her face buried in her friend's tummy, figuring it would be easier than seeing the possible rejection on her face. The sea dweller felt as though she were holding her breath as she waited for an answer.

"Of course, Meenah." The land dweller barely finished speaking before she started to pull her onto the bed with her. She was so light that it was almost effortless as she scooted back onto the bed with the smaller troll in her arms.

"Careful," Aranea braced herself on Meenah's shoulders as she quickly moved and adjusted herself in the sea dweller's hold. The heiress responded by moving more slowly, her grip becoming more gentle to accommodate her friend's wishes. Somewhere in the fray, the first mate had discarded her glasses on a nearby table, something she was only aware of when she saw her face free of those cat eyed glasses.

Once they were both comfortable on the mattress, she fully embraced her friend. She barely registered the goggles dangling around her wrist as she felt Aranea tuck herself close. She sighed wistfully as she felt her warm breath on her gills. A pleasant shiver rushed through her as Aranea's warm breath brushed over her gills.

"I promise... to keep this between us. No one will know unless you want them to." It wasn't long before they both fell asleep, soothed by the other's presence. Thoughts of the rebellion and the naval base were forgotten, if only for a moment.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, I got this one up really fast! I really hope you all enjoy this chapter. It's even longer than the last one somehow.

Artist Aszeah also made a really awesome comic of the seamstress measuring scene if you want to check it out. Enjoy that Aranea thirst haha

<https://aszeah.tumblr.com/post/176567771727/just-a-nice-scene-from-sheila-aweswim-fic>

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Aranea awoke early in the evening to the sounds of trolls traipsing across the deck as they started their evening. However, she made no move to get up, or even open her eyes. Instead, she opted to bury her face into soft fabric as the smell of salt water and sugar invaded her senses.

Honestly, she was in no hurry to begin her day. Not when strong arms held her so close in a firm, comfortable hold. Plus after being deprived of her favorite trolls attention for far too long for her liking, she wasn't about to wake her either. No, she was going to relax for once like Mindfang told her to do almost every other day of her life on this boat.

As she dozed off, she subconsciously began to reflect on the weeks that lead up to this embrace. In a way, she was happy it happened. She felt much closer to the sea dweller than before now that they had opened up to each other, even if it was for a moment. Plus, she never realized just how comfortable sleeping in the arms of a sea dweller could actually be.

At first, when Meenah brushed her off, Aranea thought she just needed a little time to process everything. After all, she did give her a lot of information rather quickly, it would be a lot for anyone to take in. Besides, she hadn't had any alone time for a while, this was a good time for her to get back into that book she had been reading.

However, the day's quickly turned into weeks of aloofness from the sea dweller. It seemed like she had every excuse to avoid being around her. She needed to go fishing. She wanted to try a new recipe. She just wanted to swim for a while. All of the deflections needled their way into her insecurities and dug deeper and deeper with every rejection.

Had she become sick of her, just like everyone else? Just like....Porrim? These thoughts swirled in her mind like a toxic sludge as she desperately tried to reconnect with the sea dweller. Yet it seemed every time she tried to reach out, the atmosphere became tense and uncomfortable until Meenah made a flimsy excuse and left. It only made her feel more hollow inside.

The daytime disappearances really wore her down, especially with how Meenah would always sneak in and pretend she never left. Pretend she didn't notice she was still awake sometimes and just go straight to bed. Sure, she did say she was going to bake, but it didn't exactly make her feel better about it.

It was even starting to affect her work. Missed calculations, improperly divided rations and even the work was starting to be divided unevenly. Mindfang, with a sharp eye as she analyzed her work, was quick to swoop in and put a stop to it.

"Now I love making our favorite sea dweller work too, but I don't think it would be good if she worked the entire night with no breaks." Aranea blinked down at the list of orders she

compiled for the evening. Subconsciously she had given Meenah almost every job to do throughout the day with only a small window to eat in between. “She needs to be able to be awake and useful in case of storms and fog. What’s the matter? Is she not putting up with your long winded stories anymore? You do know there are better methods of revenge that won’t also inconvenience me, right?”

“I didn’t mean...” Aranea only huffed as she scribbled out the schedule. Really, she couldn’t lie, she absolutely did mean to do this. Of course she never meant to actually do it, though it was an idea that spawned in her mind recently. “Meenah keeps avoiding me whenever I try to talk to her. I guess... I thought that maybe if she was exhausted at the end of today, that she would actually stay still long enough to listen to me.”

Her frown only deepened at the sound of Mindfang cackling in amusement. Of course she would find this hilarious. Lately she has found anything that involved herself and Meenah to be absolutely entertaining. “How deliciously manipulative, Aranea. Tell me, do you have other plans of that caliber just waiting to come out?”

Aranea nearly stabbed the parchment in shock. Manipulative? Sure, she was learning how to implement manipulation into her plans. Becoming a clever pirate required an element of manipulation, but she never wanted to manipulate someone close to her.

No, she needed to be direct with her. It was only fair and the right thing to do. Even if Meenah was losing interest in their friendship. God, she sincerely hoped that wasn’t the case. “Maybe for future pirating plans, but only those plans. No one I consider a friend.”

A simple scoff from Mindfang put her at ease. She shook her head as she resumed her work, though a plan was formulating for later. Meenah was going to be in the kitchen this morning again, and she was going to be there. There will be no other trolls or jobs to pull her away this time. Maybe then she would give her a chance and hear her out.

What she thought would be a simple confrontation about their plans and hopefully a way to clear the air, ballooned into something she never even considered. Yet, it was so obvious she wanted to kick herself for not realizing it sooner. Was she really so self absorbed that she hadn’t even considered how her friend would feel about all of this?

This was the second time she had ever seen those vibrant tyrian eyes. The amount of pain and fear they held as tyrian tinted tears pooled in her eyes struck her heart like a speeding train. Meenah’s anguish was all her fault. Hell, she didn’t even realize that she wasn’t the only one who had mentally tortured themselves for weeks just because she hadn’t considered anything beyond the plan.

Guilt twisted and tied her stomach into knots as she desperately tried to apologize for her behavior. She reached out in hopes to make a connection with her friend despite the tense air that surrounded the weeping sea dweller. Her hands trembled with emotion as she squeezed her shoulders and attempted to comfort her with her words.

Somehow, what she said melted the tension that surrounded them. So much so that she was pulled into a tight embrace as Meenah hid herself from the world in her tummy. Cool tears

soaked her shirt as she tentatively worked her fingers through her hair, doing her best to soothe her friend.

Small tears of her own shimmered in her eyes, yet they never fell. Not only had Meenah embraced her, she actually asked her to share the resting platform with her. Honestly, she was fully prepared to be told that she needed some space after such a major violation of security and trust. Her mind was spinning when she agreed, and she nearly lost her balance as she was pulled from the floor and onto the platform by the needy sea dweller.

All she could think about once she had her glasses safe and out of the way was to get as physically close as possible. Her fingers curled into the soft cloth of her shirt as she nuzzled into her neck. The feel of her cool skin on her cheek along with the smell of the ocean relaxed her immensely as she settled into the embrace. She was out before she knew it and would have been happy to stay this way if it weren't for the fact that she did have to get up at some point to do her duties. The time she had left to relax was dwindling much to her dismay.

Idly as she lay on her friend, her fingers traced along her sides. She could feel her muscles as they jumped and flexed in response to her touch. Her face felt warm as fangs pressed into her lip. More than friendly feelings blossomed in her mind and it was in that moment she decided she had spent too long relaxing on her very lovely friend. Now was a good time to get up, before she made a fool of herself.

Complicating things after everything that happened last morning was definitely the wrong thing to do. That, and she would rather Meenah be awake and aware as well if she were going to do anything beyond the boundaries of their relationship. Still, she worried that it would be the wrong move. What Meenah needed was a friend, not more complicated issues than what she really needs to deal with.

"It's time to wake up, Meenah" Aranea muttered quietly as she reluctantly pushed herself up and out of the wonderful embrace. Said sea dweller groaned irritably. Tyrian eyes squeezed together as her arms reached for her cuddle buddy and tried to draw her back in. The land dweller had to brace herself against the mattress to keep herself somewhat upright.

"Come on, Meenah. We already slept in a little, we have to get up now, ok?" A soft giggle bubbled up from her chest as she watched her friend's fins flare tiredly in irritation. She just could never get over how adorably expressive those fins could be. "Getting up isn't the end of the world ok? We can sleep like this again."

Tired tyrian eyes peeked through barely open lids at that. Somehow her grip became more firm around her waist. Almost as if she were afraid she would disappear. "Promise?"

"Of course," Seeing those eyes open more fully accompanied by a soft, happy smile made her heart skipped a beat. She definitely wouldn't mind waking up to this everyday. "I would love to sleep with you again."

Suddenly, the sea dweller was no longer laid back on the bed. Instead, she sat only inches away from Aranea's face as she grinned from ear to ear. She was only vaguely aware of those strong arms that kept her steady as her face turned a deep cerulean. Without warning she was pulled into a tight embrace. "Yer the best, Serk."

“O-oh, yes thank you.” She stammered as her heart raced a mile a minute. Her mind was struggling to process what just happened, or more accurately, what it thought was going to happen. How foolish of her to think anything other than a hug was going to happen.

All thought was put on hold as she noticed she was slowly being pulled back down again. Damn, sneaky sea dweller. She rolled her eyes as she held out her arm and pressed it firmly against the mattress, stopping them from fully laying down. “Meenah, please. We have to get up!”

After a few more minutes of their little struggle, Aranea was finally up and ready for the day. A grumpy sea dweller trudged after her, goggles back in place as she muttered about how much better it would be if they were still sleeping instead. Everything seemed right once again, much to her delight.

“Since I am so late, I won’t be able to eat breakfast with you today. I have to get to Mindfang’s cabin to distribute work and examine our plan one last time.” Meenah’s pout seemed to only grow at that. Though she had no sympathy for that look as this was her own fault. Well, maybe she had a little sympathy. “If you had gotten up when I tried to get up the first time, then we would have been able to. We can eat together later, ok?”

“Yeah, yeah. Layin down longer was worth it anemonewaves. Less time I gotta be out workin.” She clapped Aranea on the back jovily as she headed to the kitchen for her rations. The force of the friendly smack jolted the cerulean blood forwards a few paces towards the Captain’s cabin. Honestly, Meenah really overdid it sometimes with her strength, yet she was starting to find it more endearing than annoying.

She smiled and shook her head in mild amusement at the sea dwellers retreating form before finally heading into Mindfang’s cabin. The captain was apparently waiting for her, arms crossed over her chest with a knowing look in her eyes. Great.

“Are you ready to work or do you need more time to recover from your fun with your favorite sea dweller?” Aranea flushed at the implications of Mindfang’s coy little smirk. In her sleepy haze, she had completely forgotten concentrate on muting her emotions. Now she was going to be insufferable to work with for who knows how long.

“We didn’t do anything! All we did was sleep together on the resting platform. Emphasis on the sleep part!” If she was going to be accused of something, then she would rather it be because it actually happened. “Please, we are just friends!”

Aranea bristled at the disbelieving scoff from the captain. Before she could retort, she was silenced by the older troll with a simple sharp movement of her hand, held out like a literal and metaphorical stop sign. Instead, she bit her tongue and scowled down at the charts displayed before her on the table.

“Honestly Aranea, if you had done more than just sleep with her, I am sure you wouldn’t be striding in here like you usually do. She seems like she would be a rough ride.” The implications had her cheeks turn a light cerulean as she did her best to keep her cool. “Try not to wrestle in bed or whatever you two were doing for so long next time. We should arrive at the base at any time and I want to make sure everything is perfect.”

“Of course, Captain.” She muttered quietly as she approached the table to look over the maps. It was best to just get to work. It lessened her chances of being antagonized further for her tardiness. At least that is what she hoped.

“By the way, I’ve noticed some of my favorite rum has gone missing.” Oh hell. Aranea clenched her teeth as she scribbled down a few more notes about the current weather patterns for the log. She schooled her expression to look mildly surprised at the revelation as she watched Mindfang angrily stomp over to the small porthole that faced the deck. “Whoever took it better have a damn good reason once I find them too. Otherwise I’ll be certain their thieving hands will have stolen their last drop of alcohol. Permanently.”

“Is it possible that the crew mistakenly pilfered from your designated rum rack again? They hadn’t done it in a while and some of them have been drinking rather heavily lately.” She did remember a few bronze and teal bloods had been hitting the booze rather hard lately. It was a plausible excuse considering now the full crew was fully aware of their plans. Liquid courage was always popular with them whenever any of their plans made them nervous. “You know how they get sometimes. Perhaps we could let them off with a warning this time.”

Mindfang scoffed as she peered out of the porthole to the deck, her eyes narrowed at a few unseen crewmembers. Aranea glanced up at her curiously, careful to school her expression to be as neutral as possible. “I suppose we cannot afford to lose anyone now considering how close we are to the base. Afterwards, I will be sure to make the guilty parties pay.”

That threat felt more like a promise than anything. A promise she had not thought, up until now, that she could possibly be on the receiving end. That thought alone made her shiver. Certain she was just overthinking, she refocused on the maps. “Well, if it means anything, I will be sure to buy you extra of your favorite rum next time we come to port.”

A pleased grin from her captain at the promise of free alcohol at least eased the tension in the room. She bit back a sigh of relief as she finished scribbling in the ship sightings in the area. Only two so far. It was suspiciously quiet for such a large naval base. They would have at least seen a few naval ships wouldn’t they?

Aranea lost track of time as she poured her attention over the maps and plans they had drawn up. Everything had to be perfect, though now it wasn’t just for her own ego. Now she sincerely wished she knew what went on inside the base besides her own curiosity. If only she did, then she could effectively prepare Meenah for what she would have to face.

She was going to be alone in there, and all they had was bare bones knowledge of what was inside. An image of her tyrian tear stained face flashed in her mind. No, she had to work harder. There had to be more she could do to help her, right?

Suddenly, she was ripped from her work as the heavy wooden door of the captain’s quarters opened with a loud thunk. Both herself and Mindfang spun on their heels towards the door, the captain herself with her sword drawn. Aranea’s heart pounded in her chest as the supposed threat that had startled them so much ended up being Meenah with a large platter full of grilled tuna.

“I caught a whole tuna fish!” She announced, unperturbed by the sword as she was just too pleased with her accomplishment to care. Not only that, but she could see through the doorway that most of the crew was enjoying her work. That definitely explained her boisterous entrance.

To say Mindfang was less than impressed was an understatement.

“This fish better be good, or else I will kick your fishy butt across the deck of my ship and lock you in the lower deck for a week.” Mindfang snarled as she angrily sheathed her sword. Aranea bit her lip, anxious for her friend as she watched the captain stomp over to the offered food.

Everyone’s attention was on the captain as she examined the offered fish. Some of them had fallen apart as they were flipped, a mark of an amature, though they were still grilled to perfection. At least they appeared to be from where Aranea was standing.

It felt as though the entire ship held its breath as Mindfang finally popped a chunk of tuna into her mouth. Slowly she chewed the meat as she almost seemed to glare into Meenah’s goggles. Whatever mental game she was playing began to visibly wear the sea dweller down as she shifted uncomfortably under the gaze, yet she never submitted to it. Though it was impossible to tell if she really held the intense gaze with those opaque, reflective goggles.

“You know, this is actually really good. I think I will have you cook from now on.” Aranea sagged against the table in relief as she watched the captain finally swallow her food. Quietly, she thanked whatever deity that had given her friend this natural talent in the kitchen. Mostly, she was thankful she wouldn’t have to defend her from Mindfang’s wrath.

Though it didn’t seem she had much time to celebrate. A mischievous smirk directed at her from the captain had her straighten up from the table instantly. Already she began to prepare for whatever embarrassing comment that was going to be thrown her way. “You should have some, Aranea. I know you have developed quite the taste for fish lately.”

Aranea’s cheeks burned in mild embarrassment and indignation. What made it worse was the curious flicker of Meenah’s fins as she turned towards her. “Shell, I didn’t know ya liked fish Serk. I thought you liked that pasta they make with cluck beasts the best.”

That devilish grin only seemed to grow, much to her dismay. Meenah, for one was was openly curious and oblivious to the captain’s less than savory fun, which only seemed to delight the captain further. Mindfang shook her head, her tongue clicking in disappointment.

“Oh, well you know tastes do change. Aranea here has just recently realized she has quite the craving for fish. She’s just too polite to ask for some.” God, she was just going to die right here wasn’t she? Dying of embarrassment would certainly be an interesting headline in her obituary. She could only groan as that devious smile on the captain’s face grew just a little wider as she buried her face in her hands.

“Reelly? Why the shell ya doin that for, nerd? I can get ya as much fish as ya want! You could have it for every glubbin meal if ya want some that bad.” Never before had she seen Mindfang nearly lose it, her knuckles turning white as she struggled to keep a straight face.

Meenah's innocent bravado somehow cracked through her cynical shell as she shook with suppressed laughter. Aranea would have appreciated the moment if she wasn't so mortified.

"That is completely ok, Meenah! In fact, let's get out of here and talk about all the amazing food dishes you could make for everyone in the future!" Seeing the sea dwellers face light up at least eased some of the emotional agony of this moment.

As she rushed up to her friends side, she pointedly ignored the snickers from the older cerulean blood. Urgently she scraped some of the fish steaks onto a plate for the captain. "Here, have some delicious food, Mindfang. Now let's get out of here, please!"

Mindfang grabbed Aranea's wrist as the plate was practically shoved into her arms, slowing her escape. She barely suppressed the exasperated whine as she peered up at that devious grin of hers. "Remember, don't be late like this morning."

Oh god. This was what this was about. Mindfang was getting her back for being late. No, she definitely will never ever be late again. In fact, she might just be early for at least eight weeks, just to be safe. With a sharp nod, she ushered a somewhat bewildered sea dweller out of her cabin.

"Shell, did ya acshelly get in troububble for bein late?" Aranea sighed as she nodded, choosing to focus more on her friend than the snickering pirates that had witnessed the entire embarrassing display. "Fuck gill, how much time ya got to eat?"

Quickly, she steered the sea dweller to the upper deck, away from all but the helmsman. He was too busy guiding the ships course to really pay attention to them anyways. With a sigh, she slumped against a railing and rubbed her temples, willing the mild headache away as she felt her face slowly cool down.

"I have about an hour, so we don't need to rush." Honestly, after what just happened she really could use a two hour break. At least the cool sea breeze helped calm her frazzled nerves.

"Sorry ya got in troububble." A cool palm pressed into her back and Aranea instantly relaxed into it. It was incredibly soothing, especially when tiny figure eights were slowly traced along her spine. Subtly, she leaned into the sea dweller, quietly appreciating the temperature difference between them.

"I saved ya my best grilled fish. Betta eat it beshore it gets cold." Surprised, she watched as Meenah set the tray down on a barrel and carefully moved some of the less than perfect fish steaks out of the way. Buried beneath was a perfectly grilled tuna steak, lightly browned on both sides with a deep pink center, sprinkled with herbs and spices.

A fork was held out for her to use. She accepted the utensil with a soft mutter of thanks and immediately cut off a small piece to taste. Thyme, garlic and a hint of lemon blended nicely with the moist and flavorful fish that had her humming in absolute delight.

"Meenah, this is wonderful!" She gushed as she took several more bites. "What made you want to make this for the entire crew?"

Meenah beamed with pride at the praise. At the question, her grin softened as she gazed out to the sea. “Whale, I wanted to be shore I had the best glubbin fish for ya when I made our lunch, so I grabbed one of the nets and dove into a whole school of tuna.”

Aranea snickered as she imagined the sea dweller dragging an entire net full of fish aboard. The looks on the crew’s faces had to be priceless. “I was gonna find the best one when I brought it up but then the glubbin cook saw and thought I was tryin to take his job. So all his beachin got everybuoy’s attention and they all told him how his food aint shit and he got all pissy aboat it.”

“Really? You would think he would be aware of everyone’s feelings on his cooking” Honestly, the only reason why he was the cook was because his food was at least edible. Bland, suspiciously crunchy at times and sometimes overcooked but edible. Though, after a long voyage, everyone was eager to jump ashore and eat the food cooked by more professional hands.

“Yeah, whale he detided to bet that my food would be worse than his. He efin added Mindfang in, sayin that if I got her to like it, he would give me his reel fancy stabbin fork...spear., or waterebber he said it was.” A smug little smirk quirked on the sea dweller’s lips. The horror he must have felt when the captain, not only liked her food, but essentially demoted him in the same breath had to have stung

All this information did make her feel a little bit better about the laughing trolls when they left the Mindfang’s cabin. It could have all been directed at the foolish cook instead of her. Well, at least that’s what she will tell herself unless proven otherwise.

“You know, I never thought he would wager his Ranseur spear. He stole it off a sea dweller two sweeps ago and claimed he was going to skewer every sea dweller he met with it.” Thankfully, that wasn’t true considering the newest member aboard. “He must have foolishly thought winning the bet would be a sure thing.”

“Shell yeah! Now I got his money, his cool as shell stabbin fork and his job! I aint never gotta go below deck again!” Pure delight was how Aranea would describe her friend’s smile as she practically bounced on her heels with joy. Pride for her friend’s accomplishment bloomed in her chest and shone bright on her face with a smile. So much so that her face started to ache a little from how wide her smile had become.

Meenah’s smile dimmed slightly after a moment. Aranea’s own smile shrunk as well as she observed her troubled face. She wished she could see those tyrian eyes now. Even though she was fairly good at masking her emotions after all the practice they had together, those eyes never masked her feelings. In fact, they held so much emotion within their tyrian depths that they were like windows into her very being. “Is there something wrong?”

“I just wish...I could bring it with me when I go. I don’t like that the only thing I got to keep myshelf from not gettin krilled is me bein careful and a dagger.” Aranea reached for her friend’s hand and gently took it in her own. She laced their fingers together and smiled as she watched her friend’s earfins perk curiously at the show of affection.

“You will be fine. I know this, because you’ve gone so long without fail and still continue to prosper even now, despite everything against you. I am certain this little mission will be a breeze.” The first mate gave her friend’s hand a gentle squeeze. She smiled a little wider as the gesture was returned. “I believe in you, Meenah.”

The beginnings of a smile tugged at the sea dwellers lips. Aranea felt her breath once again catch in her throat as the taller troll shifted closer to her. “Thanks, Aranea. Ya know-”
“Fortress Ahead!”

The cry from the barrelman startled the cerulean blood. Silently she cursed his name for ruining the moment as she turned to see the approaching naval base. Fortress truly was the proper description for the dark, steel tower. The sight of it looming in the distance made her stomach drop.

The sheer size of it cast a shadow so large she was certain it would encompassed the entire ship in less than half a nautical mile. Large mortar barrels sat along the edge of the solid steel fortress, clearly visible even from a distance. Any unauthorized ship within its radius was more than likely taken care of with only a single shot. She had a sick feeling that it’s radius was within the shadow it cast. The sea around it also seemed foreboding and dark, as though it rested upon the deepest part of the ocean, where only sea dwellers dare explore.

Meenah’s hand tightened around her own to almost painful levels the second the base was in sight. She bit back a soft cry of pain as she ripped her eyes away from the naval base. Her free hand wrapped around her friends clenched hand and tugged urgently to get her to let go, or at least loosen her grip

“Meenah, what-” Her words died on her lips as she looked up and saw the sea dwellers ghostly pale face. All blood had drained from her face as she stood frozen like a statue before the approaching base. Fins trembled with undisguised terror as she finally ripped her hand away from Aranea’s and turned away as if to shield herself from it.

Tentatively, she reached out and grasped her arm and carefully shook her in an attempt to pull her from her stupor. It was eerie. As though she had seen this place before. “Meenah, please. Tell me what’s wrong.”

“I’ve been here.” What? “I never thought I’d be back...back at this horribubble fuckin place.”

Meenah jerked away from Aranea’s touch as she clutched the railing for support. It was as though she were afraid to be touched. Her fingers dug into the railing so hard, the first mate was certain there would be finger shaped marks left in the wood afterwards. “Meenah, what do you mean, you’ve been here?”

Worried, she once again attempted to reached out and placed a comforting hand on her friends shoulder, but it was shrugged off. She pushed back the mild ache of rejection, reasoning that it was her distress that caused it. “This...this is where they take sea dweller wrigglers...all of em when they molt.”

“What...why would they bring them all here? Why wouldn’t they stay in the caverns with the rest of the grubs?” Yes, she did want information, but this was not how she wanted to get it.

The absolute emotional distress her friend was under was definitely not worth this.

“They take em here so they can be separated into jobs.” When Meenah finally spoke, her voice was trembling as she struggled to keep it together. “They take them here, to separate....violet from tyrian.”

Aranea swore her heart nearly stopped.

“I almost died here.”

Chapter End Notes

This was super fast. I hope you all enjoy it. I had a lot of fun with it!

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Traumatic memories, suppressed over the years, were torn from the recesses of Meenah's mind and brought to the forefront of her thoughts. They began to play in her mind like some kind of horrible movie she couldn't escape from as soon as she laid eyes on that cursed base. Memories of how they were rounded up from the caverns the second they molted from grub to wriggler. How they were herded aboard a large submarine, filled with different violet blooded lusii for the wrigglers to bond with.

Everyone, except her.

Inferior branded sea dwellers were shunned from preliminary school-feeding aboard the ship. Trolls with frayed or underdeveloped fins, deformed gills, and other physical disabilities were taken to a separate room as soon as the first classes started. Now that she thought about it, she never saw any of them leave either. Not until the Empress arrived.

For a while, she was treated like a queen. Above everyone else in the room, according to the adults. She was always given the best of everything. The best food, clothes, even weapons for military training in between classes. Not to mention the private combat lessons tailored just to her. All because she had the right shade of purple blood.

The base believed that if they began military style training as soon as the schooling began, every sea dweller would grow to be an unstoppable force. While she didn't understand why then, she was always given extra private lessons while the violet bloods went to rest or converse with each other. When she would complain, they claimed that her 'bold tyrian nature' meant she deserved to be leagues ahead of all the wrigglers. Unfortunately, she was starting to find that these lessons were invaluable as the weeks went on.

Some of the violet wrigglers didn't take too kindly to her special treatment. They would speak out only to be reprimanded instantly by an adult. How she was their better and they needed to treat her as such. A couple of scrappier wrigglers would try to attack her at times, either bare fisted or with a weapon. Adults never stepped in to stop this. Instead, they would watch as Meenah, through better skill and superior strength would beat her opponents time and time again.

There were only a few times where the other trolls would nearly beat her. Where her royal blood spilled on the ground and covered their fists. How she would immediately switch to the dirty fighting tactics she had developed over the weeks just to defend herself. Sharp punches to the throat and gills floored them as they struggled to breathe usually won the fight. An open palmed smack to their earfins sent them stumbling as they wailed in agony. She even headbutted a rather large violet blood in the nose. Hard enough that she could feel it break with a sickening crunch.

It was when they fell when the adults would step in. They would reprimand them for being so foolish as to try and fight a tyrian. Only tyrians can beat tyrians. Those words had gone to her head and it wasn't long before she started to pick fights and bully some of the wrigglers who fought her and lost. After all, only a tyrian could beat her, right?

It was a strange mixture of entitlement and frustration that settled in her chest as the first month came to an end. Despite what all the adults said, about her not needing anyone as she was superior, she found herself to be quite lonely. She was dragged from lesson to combat lesson like clockwork which gave her little time to try and make any sort of friendship with the others. Even when she was given time to spend with the others, they had already formed their own friend groups. Ones that did allow her close would only do so for selfish reasons, and would drop her the second they realized being her friend didn't give them the royal treatment as well.

That's where she began to resent her blood color.

Fed up, she started to skip lessons altogether. When they would find her, she started to become more creative. She crawled through vents, under tables and even began to memorize their daily schedules. Only once was she foiled by a squeaky floor. After that, she started to make a mental map of the floor. She became so good, there were days where she was able to disappear entirely, much to her pleasure.

The high life was short lived, as more submarines arrived, some carrying tyrians of their own from different brood caverns. Many of them had been taught and trained on the ship rides here, and all of them looked as lonely as she was. Despite this, she couldn't get near any of them. A deep primal rage boiled in her chest at the sight of them. Aggression was encouraged by the scholars and military, almost as if to prove that they had found the best and toughest future leader of all the trolls.

Fights broke out among them rather frequently. Except this time, no one stepped in to stop it. Tyrian stained the floors so much that even when she closed her eyes that was all she could see. It wasn't like she closed them for long anyways. Any rest she did get was fitful and uneasy as she was unable to fully relax with the other violent tyrians around. Private lessons was her only relief, and she attended as much as possible. One small slip up and she might be the next wriggler who bled to death on the cold metal floor.

Eventually, the empress had returned from her voyage unharmed according to the scholars. Suddenly, she, along with the other tyrians, weren't the almighty leaders everyone was suppose to love and adore. Now, they were the bitey brats that had a front row ticket to greet the Empress along with the trolls that were deemed imperfect.

To say she was bitter was an understatement. Resentment boiled deep inside of her as she was treated as a pariah. The real leader was back and now they were an annoyance who were shoved away into a small room along with the disabled and unwanted trolls. Anger battled with her instincts to fight, and fortunately for her, anger won.

Meenah was careful to avoid the other tyrians as she scanned the room for a vent. Adrenaline high, she nearly ripped the grate out of the wall before she threw herself into the metal tube.

It wasn't a moment later that she heard the naval soldiers return and immediately usher out the trolls she left behind.

Curious, she followed them through the ventilation system by using the familiar sounds of the soldiers footsteps. A grand room in the center of the base was filled with gold and tyrian, at least from what she could see through the metal slats. Though she didn't spend any time appreciating the aesthetics, as the sight of an adult tyrian through the tiny vent bars chilled her to the bone.

The massive double ended trident the empress held was hurled from her hands faster than she could blink. Only as it struck the wall did she realize the deadly weapon had buried itself deep in a tyrian wrigglers chest and had effectively pinned her to the wall. Aggression still bubbled under the surface, urging her to fight an impossible fight. Instead, Meenah used this energy to escape and crawled away as quickly and quietly as she could. She only caught a glimpse of the empress rushing the cowering group with murderous intent as she raced away.

An impromptu plan of escape burst in her mind as she approached a vent grate out to the submarines. Voices of the adult trolls that cared for her over the months had finally noticed she was gone, but not in the way they intended her to go. She could hear them cursing her and calling her name as they patrolled the halls.

It was now or never. As soon as she was certain the coast was clear, she burst through the vent and dove into the sea. She ignored approaching heavy footfalls as she swam through the open port into open water. Distant splashes rang out like sirens as she swam for her life. They were coming for her.

Seaweed that had built up along the sides was used as a disguise as she swam through thick bundles and ripped it off the walls using just her adrenaline alone. Water swirled violently around her as she swam down and pressed close to the side of the base until she was at the bottom of the trench the base was built over. Earfins trembled in fear from the sounds of adult trolls cutting through the water in powerful strokes. They called her name with false kindness in their voice as they searched for her. It just left her with a growing sense of dread.

A small crevice caught her eye. An escape. With a final burst of energy, she darted into the crevice and didn't stop even when the voices faded away. It was only when the adrenaline died and her limbs felt heavier than lead when she finally stopped. The sudden drop in energy left her collapsed in a thick bushel of seaweed on the seafloor.

Ever since that day, she has vowed to never return to this horrid place. Her stomach churned as her memories tortured her better than what Mindfang could ever hope to do. The tuna she ate moments ago, once again got to see the night sky as she heaved over the edge of the ship. Her legs nearly buckled under her as her adrenaline spike dropped, leaving her dizzy.

"Meenah! Please sit! Let me help you, ok?" Vaguely she was aware of warm frantic hands as they guided her away from the rail and onto a small stool. Distressed cerulean eyes filled her vision as Aranea kneeled before her. "Breathe with me, ok? Eight seconds in and out."

Okay, she could do that. It was easier to just focus on her friend as she followed along. Slowly they breathed, in and out, until her heart no longer felt as though it was going to burst

from her chest. The squeezing sensation in her stomach remained as she dropped her head into her hands.

“I’m gonna have to go in there, aint i?” Her voice was raspy, throat sore from the burn of stomach acid from her lost lunch. She grimaced at the sound as she gently rubbed her throat in an attempt to soothe the ache.

Even with her eyes to the floor, her mind an anxious mess, she could still sense the hesitation from Aranea. Meenah glanced up at her only to see the struggle as plain as day on the first mates face. She could tell that she wanted to go against the plan that, only a moment ago, she had full confidence in. Though, as she and Mindfang had said, the information would be invaluable to their little rebellion.

“I...really wish there was another way,” The despondent tone in her friends voice did little to comfort her. Of course, she expected that to be the answer, but it didn’t mean she had to like it. “I’ll be sure we are as close as we can be to pick you up once you finish. I will keep a sharp eye out for you, I promise.”

Somehow, that promise did make her feel a little better. Knowing Aranea, she would probably stand on deck and stare out with her telescope all night if she had to. The thought alone brought a slight smile to her face. Just knowing the cerulean blood cared so much to worry about her like this made her heart feel light despite the fear that tied her stomach into knots.

“But, you could think of this as a good thing,” An arched eyebrow and humorless laugh fell from the sea dwellers lips at that. Oh yes, it was such a wonderful thing having to live for nearly an entire sweep inside those walls. “I mean it, Meenah. You spent some time around the scholars when you were a wriggler, so you should know how they acted. You’ll be able to fit in and fool them more effectively!”

Aranea’s enthusiasm actually pulled a genuine laugh from the sea dweller. Even when trying to cheer her up she would somehow make it apart of a plan. She was always so calculating and intelligent...it really was impressive. Impulsively, Meenah pulled her friend into a tight hug. She felt the first mate catch herself on her jacket by grabbing the cloth in fistfulls as she buried her face into her shoulder.

The closeness eased her nerves as she squeezed her friend gently in her arms. Somehow, even as her horrible memories came crashing down around her, she made it seem not so bad. She did have insight on the inside, maybe she could actually use that to her advantage.

“Just don’t die out here and I’ll dolphinatelly try not to die in there” She smiled into her friends shoulder as she heard her giggle from her morbid joke. “I’ve seen land dwellers swimmin and I gotta say, its the worst swimmin I’ve ever seen in my whole glubbin life.”

“Yes, well we all can’t be sea dwellers like you, Meenah. Though I will be sure that we stay out of range of their canons.” She snorted as Aranea slowly pulled away just enough so she could see her face. “But, I don’t want you worrying about what happens out here while you are in there. That is Mindfang’s job, as well as mine. I just want you to worry about yourself while you’re in there, ok?”

The concern really touched the heiress. Warmth and affection for her friend only seemed to grow and it somehow dulled the effects of her fear. Sure, she was still fearful about what awaited her inside the base, but it wasn't crippling like before. "Yeah ocray. But if this ship is all blown to a krillion pieces when I come out, I'm gonna kick yer glubbin ass for doin a shitty job."

Laughter bubbled up between the two trolls as they ignored the inevitable, for only a moment. Right now, they were just two friends in need of some comfort. That's all they needed to be for now. Until Mindfang arrived on the top deck and huffed impatiently at their embrace.

"Are you two done blubbering in the corner? It's time to put this plan into action and I can't do that while you both sit there and hold each other." Reluctantly, Meenah dropped her arms from around Aranea and slowly stood from the stool. As she faced the base once again, she felt a little more stable, though she still trembled slightly.

"There should be a ship arriving soon with some...cargo." Cargo, right. Already she could imagine all of the cargo aboard that ship. Many of them very unlucky. "If you hurry, you could make it look like you arrived with them."

"Shore." Meenah muttered as she took a shaky step towards the bow of the ship. Each step became more confident as she steeled herself for the task at hand. The sooner she got this over with, the sooner she could leave this place and continue on with her life. Besides, she survived once, she could definitely do it again, right?

"Meenah?" The heiress in question hesitated as she climbed onto the railing at the call of Aranea's voice. Meenah turned at toward the sound of light footsteps trotting towards her curiously. Slender, coat covered arms wrapped around her neck and pulled her down until she felt a pair of soft lips press against her cheek.

It was over in an instant, yet the action had the sea dweller reeling. The feeling was like an electric shock to her system. Warmth seemed to radiate from the spot where her lips met her skin. Her hand came up to gingerly touch her cheek as her heart raced in her chest.

"What...was that for?" She inquired, her eyes shimmering in delight and wonder behind her goggles at this new show of affection. It felt so nice, that it eased the waning anxiety that churned in her stomach to a barely noticeable tremor.

Aranea just smiled up at her, absolutely pleased at her reaction. She could see the reflection of her fins fluttering in the cerulean depths of her eyes before she finally spoke. "For luck of course."

Luck. Soft laughter bubbled up from the sea dwellers chest at the first mates reasoning. Of course it was for luck. Well, she could definitely go for more luck if her friend wasn't half heartedly nudging her towards the naval base. "Please be safe. I don't want to lose you."

"I will be." She reached out and gently squeezed Aranea's shoulder. With one last smile, she reluctantly pulled away and dove into the sea. Though now, she had renewed strength. She had that infamous Serket luck on her side now, no way could she mess this up.

It was easy to spot the submarine as it approached the base. The royal symbol emblazoned on the side of the ship in a rich tyrian color as it cruised towards the base. By the size of it, there had to be at least thirty wrigglers inside along with their lusii.

The submarine slowed as it approached the entrance. Meenah took advantage of this as she darted in close and pressed against the underside of the ship. Her earfins swiveled towards the base, listening closely for any scholars or military that may be waiting inside for the ship.

As soon as the ship stopped, she peered out from underneath and scanned her surroundings. There only seemed to be two scholars waiting for the new wrigglers as they stood at attention, their arms behind their backs as they waited for the new wrigglers to emerge. They didn't have to wait long as the front hatch opened and the bridge extended toward the submarine. The sounds of young trolls filled the air as they were escorted off of the submarine.

As the last of the trolls were guided off the ship, Meenah took this moment to pull herself up onto the steel landing. Her fins twitched anxiously, hidden behind her hood as she rushed after them and took up the tail end of the group. Already she recognized the corridors of the base. How she was once ushered up and down these halls for under both scholar and military supervision. It left her feeling empty and alone. For a moment, she wondered if this was how all sea dwellers felt when they came here.

As they approached the large common room the wrigglers stayed in between their lessons and mealtimes, she noticed one scholar had a clipboard. They seemed to be furiously scribbling down notes as they spoke with low tones with one of the scholars that came from the ship. The captain maybe, or possibly the troll that watched over the wrigglers the most. Honestly, she wasn't certain, but she did know she had to at least get her hands on those notes.

Aggression bubbled deep in her chest as the doors were opened and the wrigglers were led inside. There was another tyrian in here. Her eyes scanned the room, completely foregoing the clipboard until she saw her. This small wriggler with big scared eyes as she was ushered off by another troll for a private lesson no doubt.

As she was pushed out of the room, she resisted the urge to follow. Hunting down a little wriggler was a waste of time, especially when she was doomed anyways. No reason to put a mark on herself for being unable to control herself.

'She deserves to live too. Why do you get to be the only one to survive this place?' Meenah huffed as her thoughts poked and prodded at her hypocrisy. No, she wasn't going to go after her. She had a whole mission to get information and she was going to finish it, ok?

Maybe...she will get her after. The little wriggler wasn't going to get in much trouble at a private lesson anyways, right?

As she tore her eyes away from the door the small tyrian slipped through, she noticed the scholar with the clipboard was also heading out of the room. She swore under her breath as

she followed, careful to mimic the upright posture with her hands folded behind her back. Despite the discomfort of the vulnerable position, she managed to maintain it until it was only herself and the clipboard wielding scholar in the halls.

He suddenly veered off to the left at a brisk pace, deeper into the base. Soft curses were muttered under her breath as she tried to follow him at a distance. Alone in the halls, she used every trick she knew to soften her footfalls as she hurried after him. Stepping with the balls of her feet to the tip of her toes, her steps were barely audible compared to his heavy footfalls as he strode to the end of the hallway.

The second he stopped she slipped behind a steel beam on the side of the hallway. It was so abrupt that she instinctively crouched low and pulled out a small hand mirror she had stolen sweeps ago. After nearly getting caught in once by a rather furious shopkeeper when she was only five sweeps old, only to be saved by seeing his angry form storm through his shop in the reflection of the windows, she was certain to keep a small mirror around for tight situations.

Slowly she slipped the mirror out around the corner of the beam, and caught the scholar in its reflection as he activated a hidden wall panel. It slid open with a soft whoosh and revealed a dimly lit number pad.

A quick six digit code was punched into the pad, two seven four three two eight. A soft hiss of pressurized air escaping hidden valves echoed down the hall as a section of the wall sunk inwards and slid away. Before she could catch what was inside the scholar strode through the doors and resealed the door from the inside.

Meenah cursed under her breath as she slowly stood, contemplating what she should do next. If she waited, she would be trapped here far longer than she wanted. Though if she followed after, she may face a confrontation and possibly alert the entire fortress. That and she had no idea how many other trolls were in that room with the scholar.

Well, one thing she was certain about. She was not about to spend a second longer than she needed to in this damn military base. With this new resolve, she confidently strode up to the door and repeated the steps the scholar used to get in.

A small green light on the number pad flashed as the code was accepted. She shifted away from the door as it opened, hand already on the dagger hidden under her jacket. Once the door was open, she hesitated for only a moment before she rushed inside, teeth bared and fins flared threateningly.

Instead of an attack, she was met with another hallway. A darker, narrow hallway that was only wide enough to fit two trolls standing shoulder to shoulder with their arms at their sides. Whatever was down here had to be only accessible to high ranking trolls, right?

Anxiety spiked in her chest as she started down the hall, feeling incredibly claustrophobic at the lack of room or escape routes. Anyone could rush her from in front or behind and she would be helpless to avoid the attack. Her grip tightened around the hilt of the dagger at the thought, her resolve shaken only for a moment. She could do this...for Aranea.

A soft whirring sound reached her earfins as she approached the end of the hall. That was when she noticed the door just on the right of the hall. A soft bluish glow emitted from the bottom of a heavy steel door. She could hear the scholars muffled confident steps as he milled about the room along with a few random tapping sounds she was unfamiliar with.

As she squeezed the dagger hilt nervously, she slowly twisted the knob on the door in an attempt to not give herself away. An unsteady breath fell from her lips as her heart seemed to beat so loud she swore it echoed through the hall. Her heartbeat was all she could hear as she shoved the door open and raced into the room.

The scholar's back was to her as she rushed him. His vulnerable posture gave her a split second decision to release the dagger altogether as an alive victim wasn't going to be investigated as thoroughly as a dead one. A startled shout ripped its way from his lungs as she hooked her arm tight around his neck and squeezed. She squeezed her arm harder around his neck as she felt his gills flare under her arm as he gasped for breath. The struggle lasted for about a minute as he uselessly clawed and pulled at her coat covered arm. He even attempted to grab and tear at her gills, his struggle weakening until he finally stopped. As he slumped heavily in her arms, she dropped him carelessly to the floor.

Pockets were searched. Any money she found was pocketed immediately, though a pen made her hesitate. Echoes of Aranea's voice rang in her mind as she held the steel pen in her hands. 'Sea dweller pens are incredible! They can write on land and even submerged in water! Plus they are refillable, but I have yet to find any available for sale on land. If only I had one, I could finally put that old quill to rest.'

Aranea would love this. With a pleased grin on her face, she slipped the pen into an inner jacket pocket close to her heart. Already her fins were fluttering in excitement at the thought of presenting her with this gift. Though the thoughts didn't last long as the sight of the unconscious troll sobered her to her situation.

Sighing, she continued to search the scholar until she found a key card. Curious, she examined the official piece of plastic curiously. She always wondered how they worked, as many of the scholars when she was younger would take her to private areas to train and teach her how to be tyrian. Until the final day she was here when it was used to dump her in a room to await her death.

Pocketing the card, she stood and nearly shrieked as she finally saw what else was in the room. An emaciated yellow blood hung before her. Wires and tubes weaved around and through the severely atrophied arms, legs and torso of this troll creating unpleasant ridges in the waxy grey skin. If it weren't for the heart monitor next to them, she would have thought they were dead.

The subtle glow emitting from the troll made her realize that they were in fact the power source of this facility. She could remember running into yellow bloods that freely used their power to move objects and zap at bugs, but she never saw any much older than maybe six sweeps old. Was this why major naval sea dweller ships were so high tech? They had a literal living battery aboard, left to waste away as they fulfilled their orders from the empress?

Honestly, she felt sick to her stomach at this, more machine than troll that hung before her. Unable to look at the shriveled up troll any longer, she ripped her eyes away from the sickly vestige. Before her, was a computer with an incomplete text document. The notepad was beside it, and it appeared he had been transcribing the written word to the computer itself, and he was nearly done.

That's when she got an idea. Maybe she could finish it, then take the whole computer. That would work right? Sure, she didn't actually know how it worked, but it couldn't be too hard. Determined, she kneeled over the keyboard and poked at the keys with her index fingers. She cursed under her breath whenever she made a mistake and eventually she just gave up. That last sentence she attempted to write was just a mess of letters and typos with very little spacing.

Put out by her failed attempt, she resolved to take both the written information as well as what was on the computer. The problem was, how was she going to get the whole thing back with her without raising suspicion. The notepad was easy, as she just tucked it away in one of the larger inner pockets of her jacket. The computer, however, was going to have to be carried in something.

As she puzzled over the computer, she finally noticed subtle movement in the corner of the screen. Curious, she leaned in close and squinted at the moving figures, trying to make out what was happening. As she did this, she accidentally bumped the mouse and moved the cursor over to select window. As a violet box lit up around it, she shifted back and experimentally clicked on the window.

Immediately it brought up the surveillance system feed from cameras within the facility. Her eyes widened. She could see absolutely everything! The military grade duffle bags in one of the windows caught her eye. They would work perfectly, but just where were they exactly?

A soft groan alerted her of the troll she left on the floor. Right. Guess she better not leave any loose ends. As he began to stir, she kneeled down and slugged him hard in the jaw. She could feel the bone give way as he was knocked unconscious once again, his jaw immediately bruising and swelling from the break. Some spare wire was grabbed and used to tie him to one of the supporting beams in the room, his face towards the steel. Once she was certain he wouldn't be able to get away without help, she left him slumped against the metal as she returned to the computer.

As she studied the screen, she clicked the feed with the military bags. It filled the whole screen, much to her surprise. Certainly it could do more than show her this. Once again, she poked at the keyboard curiously until she hit the arrow keys, which caused the image to move.

Earfins perked, she pressed the left arrow key and watched as the whole image shifted slowly to the left. Delighted by her discovery, she used the camera to look around the room until she spotted a door and two trolls. A soldier and that little tyrian she had seen earlier.

They were training, or at least they would be if the soldier wasn't so busy scolding her. Well, that didn't matter, because she knew exactly where she needed to be. She clicked the screen

again, more confident in her computer skills, and was pleased when it zoomed back out. That way, if anyone came in here, they wouldn't know where she had been going.

Once again she was in the brightly lit halls of the base as she rushed to the private training areas. She was careful to not raise suspicion as she strode down the halls quickly, her head held high and proud like nobility. A curt nod here and there from passing scholars put her nerves at ease and even made her feel...good. They really believed she was just like them. She never felt so openly accepted before. Even Aranea didn't treat her like this when they first met.

Those thoughts left her mind she approached the room that held the military bags. Her confident stride slowed as her instincts began to build like a volcano. She could sense the little tyrian in the room, as well as hear the stern voice of a soldier through the door. Damn, she was hoping they would have been gone by now. Well, she wasn't about to wait. Irritated, she yanked the door open and strode inside. If she was able to walk the halls without raising suspicions, then she could easily walk in and grab a bag right?

The sound of a troll clearing their throat in frustration made her pause just long enough turn towards the sound. "Excuse me, but this is a private lesson. Unless this is an emergency, no one should enter this room until after this lesson is over!"

The harsh tone had her fins flaring aggressively, influenced by the aggression she was struggling to keep at bay. She was not about to be turned away when her goal was within sight. The ocean patterned bags were just on the other side of the room, and she wasn't going to leave without one.

"Yeah well, I gotta get somefin from here aight so just do yer lesson and ignore me" She waved off the soldier as she strode into the room. "Me bein here aint gonna interrupt you yellin at her."

All caution was thrown to the wind the longer she spent time in the room with the little tyrian. Being unable to express her instincts in the traditional way in fear of exposing her identity; the aggression channeled to other forms of dominance. Instead of backing off in self preservation as the violet blood stormed up to her, she stood her ground and even bore her teeth in a snarl. A sense of satisfaction filled her as the soldier hesitated for a moment upon seeing the look on her face.

"Now you listen to me. I am in charge of wriggler developmental fighting, specifically tyrian wrigglers." He gestured aggressively to the nervous little troll on the floor with big grey eyes as he spoke. Her little tyrian fins were trembling in fear. Perhaps she could sense her true nature and hopefully she would keep her mouth shut. "Which means I have ultimate say on what goes on when it involves the wrigglers here, so get out before I report you to your superior!"

A wet crack of cartilage snapping under flesh echoed in the room as Meenah's knuckles mashed into the soldier's nose. Violet blood dripped from her fist as he crumpled to the floor with a dull thud. His face was already starting to swell as two black bruises blossomed around his eyes.

A terrified shriek from the little tyrian brought Meenah's full attention to the little troll. A satisfied smirk grew on her face as she saw her fins trembling and pressed back against her head in submission and fear. It was enough for her to ignore the urge to kill this little troll, and instead dismiss her with a wave as she headed over to the bags. After all, it satisfied her basic instinct, proving she was superior to her.

"You're....not going to kill me?" A soft voice made her pause as she grabbed a large military duffle bag. She could still hear fear in her tone, but there was a hint of curiosity in her voice that really caught her attention. "But I thought....all tyrians do is kill each other."

Fear struck her as those words carelessly fell from the little sea dweller. So she did know what she was. She wheeled on the little troll, bag slung over her shoulder as she glared hard at the small sea dweller. "Now listen here, shrimp. Ya betta keep that shit to yershelf beshore I do acshelly detide to turn ya into chum."

The little tyrian shrunk away instantly, fear once again marring her innocent features as she nodded quickly. Honestly, seeing this little troll looking so scared and pitiful struck a chord in her heart. Fear so familiar to her that even her own instincts to slaughter the little troll couldn't override this new urge to help and protect her from this horrid place.

"...You aint safe here though..." She muttered as she kneeled down to be eye level with the small troll. Though she was curious. Why hadn't she gone aggressive like the other tyrian wrigglers when in the presence of another tyrian? Even she felt it as a wriggler when she saw the Empress despite knowing there was no way to beat her. She just channeled that aggression to escaping instead. "They will krill ya when they sea ya"

Cautiously the little sea dweller approached, fearful yet somewhat in awe of the tyrian in front of her. She seemed to be inspecting her face curiously, most likely her violet colored fins for a sign of her royal blood. It was endearing, her innocent wonder blossoming on her face as what she could assume were a million questions hidden behind those grey eyes.

Up close, she could see many healing scuffs and scrapes from past training sessions. Some looked to be fresh. A few, appeared to have been from an actual fight from another wriggler. A bitey one apparently from those teeth marks in her forearm. Once again, her heart ached for her. Obviously she was suffering just as she had, and this time, she was certain she wouldn't be able to escape it.

"They said I would be the leader of everyone, unless another tyrian kills me." Sadness tinged the little troll's voice as she shrunk away. "But, I don't want to kill anyone! I want us all to live together peacefully!"

Meenah snorted and shook her head with a humorless smile on her face. Poor kid was delusional. Still, the sight of the little wrigglers pout, cheeks puffed up and arms crossed tight over her chest, was just too adorable to ignore. "Don't laugh! It could happen!"

Indignation was apparently strong enough to shake this wriggler of her fear. Somehow, it made her want to protect her more than destroy her. "Whale...if ya want a chance to do that, we need to get ya outta here."

“Really?!” Without warning, a beaming tyrian lunged at her and hugged her hard around her neck. Meenah coughed as her gills were squeezed shut by her excitement. Impulsively, she shoved her away single handedly, snarling slightly as the wriggler crashed to the floor.

“Don’t fuckin do that shit!” She hissed hoarsely as she gingerly checked her gills. No damage, but they ached a little from the sudden pressure. “Fuckin shell, don’t ya know to be careful boat glubbin gills?”

“I’m sorry.” The apology was so quiet, Meenah almost didn’t hear it. A soft sniff from the little sea dweller made her hesitate. Watching her furiously scrub at her eyes only reminded her of herself when she was trapped here. Lonely and alone as the brave face she used during the day crumbled to reveal the sad, scared little troll underneath.

“Yeah...whale..I didn’t marine to push ya that hard.” Honestly, she knew that was a lie. Even with the pity for this little tyrian, it was just barely stronger than her natural instincts to kill her. Maybe the fact that she lacked these instincts as well that helped keep her safe. She was definitely going to have to get this under control if this little troll was coming with her.

Somehow her words worked, as a small smile seemed to grow on the little wriggler’s face. It was so genuine, Meenah couldn’t help but return the smile with one of her own. Now at least she seemed more restrained as she pulled herself up off the floor. “It’s ok! I won’t do it again.”

Once again she found herself shaking her head in amusement at this little optimistic troll. She didn’t know it was possible for anyone to be this positive and happy. It was definitely refreshing after spending months on a boat with Mindfang, the master cynic.

“Ya need to get in this bag aight?” Meenah dropped the duffle bag onto the floor between them and unzipped the empty bag. It was rather spacious, surely it could fit both the computer and a wriggler at the same time. “Just get in and keep quiet. I gotta pick up some otter shit beshore we leave but it aint gonna take long.”

The young troll nodded quickly as she climbed into the bag without question. The amount of trust she gave her after only knowing her for at least a few minutes boggled the older tyrian’s mind. Idly, she wondered how long it would take before the cruel world would take that innocence from her as she watched her settle into the bag.

“My names Feferi by the way,” Earfins perked at the new information. It suited her, as the name seemed to be as light and bubbly as the wriggler herself. “What’s your name?”

A moment passed between them as she zipped the little troll into the bag. She left a small gap open for air before she carefully slung it over her shoulders and stood. “Meenah. Now be quiet aight?”

Now more determined than before, she strode out of the room and down hallway as quickly as she could without raising suspicion. Idly, she wondered if it was a good idea to leave that scholar unconscious in the middle of the room. It was probably better than a straight up murder, as the discovery of a dead body may lock down the entire base. Who knows how long she would be trapped here then?

As she neared the room that held the young trolls, a line of them were led out by a rather stern soldier. Something about him felt familiar as she approached, unable to really tear her eyes away from him for long. He strongly resembled her old combat teacher, except he had deep scarring across his face that had nearly blinded one of his eyes.

She was about to dismiss these thoughts to focus on the task at hand; until his uncomfortably familiar, stern gaze landed on her as she tried to pass. "Hold it, scholar. Those bags are for military use only. What are you doing, stepping beyond your station?"

Panic bubbled in her chest like hot tar as his commanding voice brought her to a screeching halt. Apparently she wasn't the only one affected as she could feel Feferi shift and curl up in the bag as she held it tighter to herself. He was one of the few adults that didn't treat her as more, only because of his devotion to the current Empress. With every session, he made it clear he was doing this out of obligation than anything, and had little patience for tyrian wrigglers. After all, what was the point in training them if they were going to die anyway?

Before she could answer, an alarm went off in the base. Red lights flashed down the halls as the siren bellowed rhythmically. An intercom crackled to life, and it took all Meenah could to not cover her earfins as the blaring sounds assaulted her hearing. "Pirate ship identified on the border! Admiral presence is requested!"

The violet blood swore under his breath as he quickly sprinted down the hall and left the young, terrified violet blooded wrigglers behind. Not wanting to miss her chance, she rushed to the secret entryway and hurriedly activated the panel. Her fingers flew across the number pad, and she barely gave the door enough time to open before she raced in. As soon as she snagged that computer, she was going to get the hell out of here.

Even though she was grateful for the distraction, she couldn't stop the mounting worry about said identified pirate ship. Were they in the middle of riddling it with a million holes? Will they board the ship and take everyone prisoner? Was Aranea going to be ok?

Meenah raced down the narrow hallway and practically knocked the door off its hinges as she forced her way in. Blue and red glowed brightly from the yellow blood in the room, a pained look on their face as energy was forced from their emaciated body. The alarm system obviously put a severe strain on the poor troll, and honestly she didn't know how long they could last under such extreme stress. Horrified by their appearance, she averted her gaze as she rushed into the room.

Luckily, as she slid the bag off her shoulder, she remembered there was a small troll hidden inside. Gently she set it down and unzipped it. A terrified wriggler was what greeted her, as Feferi seemed to hug herself for comfort as she trembled visibly.

"Hey...clam down aight? I gotta put some otter shit in here with ya ocray, so stay still" She sighed as big grey eyes stared up at her and nodded quickly. Confident the little wriggler would stay where she was, mostly due to the fact she was paralyzed by fear, she grabbed the computer from the desk.

The wires were a little tricky, as they were coiled under the desk, and some were even screwed in. She ended up ripping those straight from the wall. After all, those wires would

still probably work despite a little collateral damage, right? The tricky part was getting the monitor and the computer to fit in the bag with the little wriggler in there. After some nudging and a few choice words, she seemed to fit her and the computer quite snug in the bag.

A generous donation of a coat from a still very unconscious scholar, coupled with the computer wires, seemed to cushion Feferi quite well. If not, well at least it was better than the actual metal and plastic jabbing into her. As she zipped up the bag, she muttered a few comforting words to the small troll. “Hang in here a while longer aight? We’re almost outta here”

Naval soldiers and scholars packed the halls as they rushed in every direction with purpose. Meenah carved through the crowd, scowling deeply as worry grew heavy in her chest. Images of fire and splintered wood filling the ocean pushed her through the crowd faster than fear had ever done before.

Only when she had made it to the docking area, did she realize she had shifted the military bag into her arms. It was clutched protectively to her chest as her thoughts went to Aranea among the wreckage. She had to get back to her, as soon as possible.

Meenah barely took the time to scope out the docking bay before she dove in. She shot off like a torpedo the second she touched the water, cursing the empress under her breath as she swam through the port out of the base. Though, the farther away from it she swam, the more she realized that something was....off.

No fire blazed from the ship. Aside from the alarms and lights that bellowed from the base, the distinct boom of fired cannons was absent. Was this more of the famous Serket luck coming into play?

Only when she reached the ship did she realize there was another ship from the base headed directly towards Mindfang’s. Alarmed, she scrambled up the side and nearly threw herself aboard just as the ship slowed a docking distance away. Seeing the captain grinning at the steel battleship only made her feel more uneasy as she searched for Aranea.

“Fuck, Serk..what the hell is happening?” Her words came out in a rush as she practically sprinted over to her side. Aranea herself seemed just smiled up at her, looking rather relieved to see her. Honestly, she could relate as the sight of her unharmed relaxed some of the tension in her chest.

“Her kismesis apparently works here.” The cerulean blood visibly hesitated, her arms jerking slightly at her sides, obviously repressing the urge to hug her. Instead, she reached out and took her hand, smiling wryly. Confused, Meenah squeezed her hand gently in return. “I guess he has decided to come and say hello.”

“...Shell whale, I got a bunch of shit from the base. Reel important shit I gotta show ya right awaves ocray?” She tugged on Aranea’s hand as she headed to her cabin when a very familiar figure came to view. His scarred face froze her in place both in disbelief and fear as she carefully shifted the bag behind her as much as possible.

Mindfang's grin only seemed to grow. "It's soooooooooo good to see you again, Dualscar."

Chapter End Notes

Hey, I hope this chapter was worth the wait!

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

A pleasant warmth never left Aranea's lips once Meenah dove into the sea. The memory of her delighted and awed smile as she delicately touched her cheek filled her chest with butterflies. Not even Mindfang's teasing could bring her down, as she was lost in her own world of beautiful sea dwelling heiresses who could make a mean rum cake.

Only once before did she feel this giddy about another troll. It had been so long since her split up with Porrim, that she had almost forgotten how nice it felt. Thoughts of the sea dwellers lightly flushed face amplified these feelings as she stared out at the base with the ghost of a smile on her face.

Though as the minutes went by, the good feelings began to wane. Worry gnawed at her heart as she stared down into the dark depths Meenah disappeared into moments ago. Never before had she seen or felt anyone react as strongly as the sea dweller had upon viewing the base. The level of fear she was struck with nearly floored her. Luckily, those meditation lessons really had paid off. More practice was needed, obviously, but it was better than nothing.

Still, they had their orders, and it would be much easier for them if they followed Mindfang's wishes. Thankfully she was able to help soothe the terror that had so violently gripped her. At the time, she was rather confident that she would succeed. After all, she spent sweeps on her own without getting caught. Surely she could easily complete this task.

Now that Meenah wasn't here, she was left with the thoughts of the base. What happened here that was so terrible that it brought her into such a panic? If only they had a sea dwellers needlegun. It's resistance to water as well as its ability to shoot spear-like bolts while submerged would have been invaluable for her. She was definitely going to try to get one next time they docked.

About ten minutes went by when the guards on the base started to become suspicious of the ship. In an attempt to distract herself from her worries, Aranea had begun to focus on the guards of the base, and sensed their growing feelings of unrest. That, coupled with the weapon systems all shifting towards them, made the wait for Meenah go from worrying to anxiety inducing.

Certainly they were too far away, otherwise they would have taken them out by now. Even with that knowledge, it was unnerving to have such deadly weapons poised and ready to take them out. For a moment, she wondered if one of those shots would kill her, or leave her to drown in the middle of the ocean. Would Meenah save her if it were the latter?

About a half hour since the mission began, a ship emerge from the port of the base and sailed straight towards them. One that appeared to be meant to transport high blooded land dwellers to the base. Surely a base of such a grand size was meant to train high blooded military, no matter if they were land or sea dwelling soldiers.

“Seems like we are about to have some company, hmm?” Aranea glanced at Mindfang, and frowned slightly at the slight smirk playing across her lips. That look certainly gotten them in trouble more than once during her service aboard her ship. A sense of dread pooled in her gut as she began devising ways to quell whatever reckless ideas had popped into her mind.

“Please, Captain. Let’s not do anything too rash to upset them. We are on a mission remember?” Surely her devotion to the rebellion would keep her focused on the big picture instead of immediate personal gain. Not like she really thought it was worth it to try anything here, as the base outgunned and outnumbered them easily.

As soon as she issued her warning, she began to notice a familiar set of royal markings decorating the front and sides of the ship. Just where had she seen these markings before? A low chuckle from Mindfang broke through her thoughtful haze. Curious, she tore her eyes away from the ship and gave her Captain her full attention. “Oh, I’m sure my kismesis would be delighted to see me here. It has been a while.”

Aranea’s eyes widened sharply as realization hit her like a ton of bricks. That ship wasn’t just any military vessel, but one of Dualscar’s envoy’s. More than likely, Mindfang will want to antagonize them just enough to draw out the grumpy troll for her to see. God, she hoped that at least this was a different envoy from last time. There was a particularly unpleasant sea dweller aboard the last one that she could have lived her whole life not knowing, and be better for it.

“Please be careful. Even though he is your kismesis, he’s also loyal to the Empress,” That pleased little smirk on Mindfang’s face worried her. With Meenah literally in one of the most dangerous places for a run away tyrian to be, she did not want to tempt fate any more than they were right now.

Mindfang just scoffed as she sauntered over to the side of her ship, her sharp eyes locked onto the approaching ship. Well, at least she can’t say she didn’t warn her. She always ended up doing whatever she wanted to do anyways. Though, she was as catty as always whenever she rebuked her warnings. “If you get to have fresh fish everyday, then I deserve to have some for myself when the opportunity comes.”

“I absolutely do not have fresh fish everyday, other than the fresh catches Meenah brings aboard to feed the crew!” The implication had Aranea bristling as she rushed after the captain. Certainly if she was going to be accused of anything like that, she would prefer that it had actually happened.

“Hm. That’s a shame, Aranea. Maybe you would loosen up a little around here if you did ride her waves once in a while,” Mindfang waived her off, much to her chagrin. “It doesn’t change the fact that I haven’t seen my kismesis in a while, so why don’t you worry about your duties instead.”

A deep scowl grew on the first mate’s flushed face as her arms crossed tight over her chest. If she didn’t want to heed her warnings then fine. Irritated, and somewhat mortified, she turned on her heel and marched away from the captain, needing some space. Let her find out on her own that a little caution should be used while they work dangerous missions like this.

As she observed the approaching ship, she sighed. Guess she couldn't fault her for missing her own kismesis. Even if he sometimes brought along some of his soldiers that were rather...insufferable. It had been at least half a sweep since they had last seen each other, maybe they could arrange a meeting after all of this is over?

"Well. If it isn't my favorite group of sexy pirates," Aranea audibly groaned as Cronus's voice cut through her thoughts. Of course it had to be him. Though, Mindfang's soured face definitely eased some of the irritation that remained from their earlier exchange. "Not that I'm complaining, but what are you doing here in these forbidden waters? Dualscar isn't gonna like this, chief."

"What is he going to do? Shoot me for sailing in unmapped waters and happening upon this fortress you sea dwellers constructed?" Mindfang gestured up at the towering naval base with a raised eyebrow. The first mate smirked, pleased to see the violet blood hesitate at that very valid question. "Surely, you are all aware that someone would eventually sail here and find this stagnant structure just sticking out of the sea like an unsightly tumor."

"Is that how you sweet talk Dualscar when he talks about his primary stations?" Cronus made a good show of looking offended. The captain was decidedly, unamused. "Usually patrol ships keep nosy trolls like you out. Ones that make it past, well our mortar has never missed,"

Intrigued, Aranea peered over the edge into the dark depths of the ocean. Who knows how many trolls drowned here as their ship and belongings were dragged down with them to their watery grave. "Actually, it would have happened to you too, if this ship wasn't just out of range. Definitely a good thing, considering two beautiful babes would be gone from the world otherwise."

Already, she was weary of his constant flirting as a heavy sigh fell from her lips. Just how long would they have to endure this? "Yes, well...good to hear we aren't going to be blasted out of the water. Now that you know it's us, do you have any other reason to be out here besides stating the obvious?"

"Well originally I was tasked with finding out who you were, what you were doing here, and bring you in for questioning after sinking your ship," Both cerulean blooded trolls tensed at that. Mindfang's hand slid to her pistol as her eyes narrowed on the young sea dweller. "But since I see it's just you two, I could always just let Dualscar know you're here and maybe he will let you go instead."

"Why don't you," Mindfang began with a tight, menacing grin. It seemed to have the effect she was hoping for as Cronus and a few low ranked naval soldiers seemed to shift away from her, clearly intimidated. "Wouldn't want to embarrass you and your sorry crew in front of your entire base now would we?"

Feeling the spike of anxiety from the young sea dweller was rather satisfying. Especially when the amused snickers of Mindfang's crew seemed to increase their panic as they leered down at the soldiers. Aranea couldn't help but smirk in satisfaction, fangs flashing dangerously as she watched Cronus attempt to regain his composure.

“Whatever..just stay here and I’ll let him know you’re waiting for him,” He response was curt as he quickly motioned for the helmsman to return to the base. To his credit, he was better at keeping an even, somewhat commanding tone when he was obviously distressed. Though she would always remember his first encounter with her Captain, as he appeared to have nearly wet himself as he scrambled away from her. Dualscar really knew how to pick out some rather unique recruits.

The satisfaction of watching him sail back with his metaphorical tail between his legs faded rather quickly as her thoughts returned to the mission. Worried eyes fell to the waters around the base with hope that she would catch sight of her favorite sea dweller. With the base obviously agitated by their presence, how much would this affect her progress inside?

“Don’t worry, Aranea.” The first mate started at the sound of Mindfang’s voice. A firm, yet comforting hand rested against her shoulder and steadied her nerves. “I’m sure they’re more worried about us unwanted land dwellers sticking our noses where they don’t belong, than the possibility of one of their own sea dwellers actually being a spy for some pirates.”

Well, she did have a point. Aranea’s shoulders sagged slowly with a sense of relief. At least, until an alarm started to blare from the base. Her fingers practically dug into carved wooden railings of the ship as she searched the sea waters once more for her friend.

Mindfang must have felt the same, for the once comforting hand now gripped her shoulder urgently. Reluctantly, she tore her eyes away from the sea and turned towards her captain, who had a rather grim look on her face. “ Whatever happens, we cannot let them know we have any affiliation with her if she’s caught within those walls. Even if she makes it back, be discreet and treat her as though she is just a crewmember and nothing more. It’s for our own safety, as well as hers. Do you understand?”

Heart aching, she nodded. Of course she understood. Their whole way of life could be compromised if they ever revealed themselves for doing more than just pirating. The Empress must have found them to be a minor inconvenience at most. To find a sea dweller spy on their side stealing royal secrets would expose them as being more than pirates. Attention like that could get them all killed rather quickly.

Aranea steeled herself as another, much larger ship left the inner docks of the base and sailed towards them. Dualscar’s symbol was visible on the largest sail of his ship, the violet practically glowing against the black leather of the sails. She always wondered why he insisted on sails when he had a steel, mechanical ship, though she could assume it was to conserve energy. After all, the yellow bloods lasted much longer when not under a constant strain of powering a ship.

Mindfang was once again sporting a pleased grin as the ship approached. At least someone was able to find something to like about this development. She would have felt bitter about it if a familiar, somewhat panicked voice didn’t reach her ears. Her heart felt a little lighter as she turned towards the sound of Meenah’s voice and saw the tall troll rush through the crowd just to be by her side.

Just seeing her unharmed and standing before her made it almost impossible not hug her close and take her as far away from this terrible place as possible. Holding her hand would

have to suffice. She allowed herself to be dragged off as her eyes returned to the now docked ship as Dualscar himself emerged.

All movement suddenly stopped. Aranea nearly crashed into Meenah's side as she stumbled next to her. Before she could question her, she felt her hand tighten around her own. She squeezed it in return in hopes of calming her nerves as the violet blood approached the edge of his ship, as close to Mindfang as possible.

"Serk....you gotta help me get this in yer cabin beshore he notices me," Meenah's tone was hushed yet rather urgent as she nudged Aranea with her elbow. The cerulean blood glanced down at the obviously stolen and rather bulky duffle bag. "He saw me inside beshore the whole glubbin alarm went off. Demandin me to give back the bag and to explain myshellf."

Oh this definitely was not good. Who knows what would happen if they were discovered. It would be nearly impossible to escape from this place unscathed. Cautiously, the first mate glanced back to Mindfang and her kismesis, pleased to see they were still rather caught up in each other. Seems he was unaware of an actual theft yet and may be more interested in his kismesis than anything.

"Come on. Let's get back to my cabin, ok?" As she glanced around at some curious crewmembers, she subtly gestured to the stolen items. Many caught on to the silent order, and immediately began to subtly move and place themselves conveniently between Dualscar and Meenah's stolen goods. Descritely they began to sneak back to her cabin, her heart pounding every time she saw a flash of violet eyes flash in her direction.

"Hey! When did one of MY scholars get on your ship, Mindfang?" His voice bellowed loudly as they froze literally only a few feet from Aranea's cabin. His eyes had locked onto the sea dweller next to her, his accusing glare pinning her in place. She bit her lip anxiously as she felt the tight grip around her hand become a little painful from Meenah's own barely subdued anxiety.

"Oh pleeeeeeease, Dualscar. You do realize that not every sea dweller is going to be an uptight military barkbeast or some snooty scholar, right?" Mindfang countered evenly, easing some of the fear that grew in Aranea's chest. "Of course they would take advantage of their status and make themselves look like the Empress's little barkbeast minions. Are you telling me that you cannot tell the difference between your own sea dwellers and a pirate? That's incredibly sad."

The first mate could practically feel the devilish sneer that curled up on her Captain's face after that brutal jab. It left Dualscar spluttering indignantly, his attention easily diverted back to his kismesis. Relieved, she gently nudged Meenah the rest of the way to her cabin. "Just drop it in quick, it will be suspicious if you disappear right away."

"I...can't just drop it," The urgency in the sea dwellers voice, combined with the strange growing feeling of fear coming from that military bag of all places, stopped her dead in her tracks. Realization of what she 'stole' hit her like a speeding train. There was just...no way.

"Meenah...you do realize Mindfang was joking when she said that, right?" She whispered urgently as her eyes snapped over to the bickering kismesis couple. Thankfully, they were too

wrapped up in each other to pay much attention to them. “Just...leave the bag in here. It’s safer in here than out with us.”

A slight pout tugged on her friends lips. It was rather adorable seeing her lower lip puff out. Idly, she wondered what it would be like to kiss it away. No, now was not the time for those thoughts. She shook her head in an attempt to refocus and gently nudged her friend inside. “Take a quick moment to calm whomever you have in that bag and come out. It’s for their own good.”

Relieved to see Meenah perk up at the plan, she returned her attention to the fight, only to see Cronus decide to join them. Fantastic. At least he seemed to be too preoccupied to notice what they were up to, but who really knew with him.

As she waited for Meenah to return, she could feel a hostile energy blossom inside her cabin, before being quashed by strong protective feelings. Who could blame her, as the strongest emotions coming from her cabin was blatant fear from whomever she snatched from the base. Considering the size of the bag her friend dragged aboard, the little wriggler couldn’t have been very old.

“Hey, Doll,” Preoccupied with what was going on in her cabin, Aranea hadn’t realized Cronus had approached her until he was just barely a foot away. A rather undignified yelp fell from her lips as she leaped away from the violet blood. His sleazy grin only seemed to grow as she scowled in return. “Now that Mindfang is busy with Dualscar, why don’t we take this time to get to know each other, one on one?”

“Excuse you, but I am far too busy to deal with any pointless banter from you,” Her terse reply seemed to do little to deter him, much to her chagrin. Unfortunately for her, he had also gotten rather good at brushing off her blatant rejection.

“Pitch flirting is cool with me, doll. I’m sure we would make the perfect kismesis couple.” Cronus flirted easily as he combed his fingers through his well kept hair, his confident grin never wavered. If he had any ounce of charm and wasn’t so incredibly irritating, then maybe she would consider it. Just the thought of being in a kismesis relationship with him sounded exhausting and tedious.

“I’m thinkin maybe you shoald get the fuck outta here beshore I show ya how good I am with a knife” A strong, protective hand gripped Aranea’s shoulder and startled the poor cerulean blood. Though it was nothing compared to the absolute shock and alarm that flashed across the violet blooded sea dwellers face.

A smug little smirk quirked on her lips as she shifted back into the owner of that strong hand on her shoulder, subtly leaning against her. It wasn’t often that she got to see him lose his smarmy smile twice in one meeting. “As I was saying, Cronus. I am terribly busy and do not have time to humor you with your unwanted requests. Have a nice night.”

Cronus looked as though he had been slapped in the face by her sharp words. Though it didn’t last for long as his attention was pulled back to Meenah. His normal cocky grin was

replaced by a furrowed brow. As if he were trying to recollect something he had forgotten long ago. "Haven't I...seen you somewhere before?"

The hand on the first mate's shoulder tightened and squeezed her almost painfully. It took everything she had to keep herself from flinching away. Cautiously, she glanced up at Meenah and could see the muscles in her jaw flex as she clenched her teeth tightly together. Whatever this was, she was certain didn't bode well for her friend.

"Something about your pretty face seems familiar," A scowl tugged on her cerulean lips as nervous tension started to build from the heiress. Reflexively, she shifted into a more defensive stance in front of her, her hand hovering descriptively over her own pistol.

"Wherever I saw you, I'm sure it was in my dreams because you are one fine sea dweller," What? Aranea's arm hung limply at her side, completely blindsided by the sudden flirtatious advance. Whatever was stewing in his mind for so long, he must have dropped it.

The relaxed grip on her shoulder signified Meenah's own relief, though she was certain it was replaced with plenty of other emotions. She could feel confusion and irritation seep through her carefully earned mental barrier just from the audacity of this troll and his relentless flirting. "Whale waterebber dream that was, it betta been a good view of me leavin after stealin all yer glubbin valuables and sucka punchin you in the face."

A muffled crash from her cabin halted whatever corny reply Cronus came up with. As his attention shifted to her cabin, she could practically feel a shift in the mood. Tension rolled off of her friend in waves as she moved from behind her to block the door.

"I'm thinkin ya betta turn round and head back home lil guppy beshore I make ya go home," The intensity and authority in Meenah's voice drew an involuntary shiver down her spine. Flared fins and an aggressive snarl was directed at their uninvited guest. If it wasn't for the goggles, Aranea was certain a piercing glare only a tyrian would have would have froze him in place.

"Yeah...sure whatever, chief," Cronus muttered quickly as he backed away, eyes wide like a kicked puppy. Clearly he was shaken by her words as his own fins drooped submissively. After shuffling back a few paces, he turned and rushed back onto Dualscar's ship, his metaphorical tail between his legs. Guess it was possible to scare away someone as hard headed as Cronus.

"Admiral Dualscar!" A lanky soldier rushed up to the bickering couple, effectively interrupting the two most dangerous trolls aboard the ship. The soldier must have known he was treading on thin ice as Aranea could feel his anxiety roll off him in waves as he approached. "The base just radioed in. We have precious cargo missing."

"What?!" Instantly he tore away from Mindfang, his own teeth bared in frustration. Dualscar's voice boomed with authority and anger as he stormed onto his ship. "Don't just stand here. Search the area! Interrogate those in charge of the cargo! We will not lose another one."

“My my, I did not realize your base was full of incompetent trolls. Is that why you’re in charge?” The admiral visibly bristled at Mindfang’s snarky jab, clearly fuming from her antagonizing comment. However, the pirate Captain looked quite pleased with herself.

“This reunion is over. I have far more important matters to attend to than some arrogant pirate who thinks she’s higher up on the caste than she really is,” A hint of irritation tugged at the corners of the captain’s face as Dualscar left her ship. “Get the hell out of here and maybe none of my troops will sink your sorry little ship.”

Aranea could practically see the steam billowing from her captain’s ears from that rather insulting comment on her prized ship. An incredibly strained smile barely masked her displeasure, as she was too proud to show he had gotten to her. “It’s always a pleasure to see you bumbling about like the fool that you are, Dualscar.”

Without turning around, the Admiral flipped her off with a fluid yet precise motion. Other than that, it was as if he had ignored every word that came from her captain’s mouth. Yet another thing that really got on her nerves, as she could see Mindfang’s hands clench at her sides as his ship sailed away.

“Let’s get the hell out of here.” The captain roared as she stormed up to the upper deck, her fangs bared irritably. Guess she didn’t expect to lose the upper hand and would more than likely be short with anyone for the rest of the evening. Unfortunately, they wouldn’t be able to steer clear of her once they were back in open waters.

Meenah seemed to sense this as she spun on her heel and headed back into Aranea’s cabin. The fear radiating from the cabin from whomever her friend nabbed was almost too much for her to ignore. With the way Mindfang was barking orders, surely she wouldn’t have a chance to see just who the sea dweller dragged aboard. Well...maybe she could afford a quick peek.

A quick glance up to the captain, just to make sure she wasn’t urgently needed, left her rooted to the spot. Sharp cerulean eyes gazed down at her, looking away only to glance at her cabin before returning to the first mate. A silent order that she knew better than waste time on. With a sharp nod, she whipped around to her cabin entrance with a new sense of urgency.

“Meenah!” Aranea called as she pushed open her door. “We need to bring what you’ve taken to Mindfang’s cabin. She wants to-”

Her words died on her lips as she stared down at the terrified little tyrian. Small, brightly colored tyrian fins gave her away, as her eyes were still the cool steely grey of wrigglerhood. They were sweeps away from filling in with her blood color to mark her growth into a fully grown troll. Currently, she was trying to hide from her behind Meenah’s hunched form, tiny fins trembling anxiously as she stared up at her.

“You.....really did it,” Aranea almost couldn’t believe her own eyes as she slowly knelt down before the little tyrian. Two tyrians inhabiting the same room peacefully was the biggest living oxymoron she had ever seen in her life. At this level though, she noticed a few fresh bruises that blossomed on the little troll’s skin. Surely from whatever else had to be in that bag as it was rather oddly shaped. A wriggler certainly wouldn’t make a rectangular outline in the bag.

“Yeah yeah, Serk. I got ya. Gimme a sec to get her back in the bag so I can bring her over aight? Aint trust nofin round here until we aint see that glubbin base no more” As she spoke, Meenah gently shoved the little troll by the small of her back towards the duffle bag. The little wriggler yelped in surprise, but otherwise did as she was told and slipped into the bag without question.

As Meenah zipped up the bag, Aranea returned to her feet, now all the more anxious to return to Mindfang’s cabin. With cargo this precious, they urgently needed to alert the captain. Once they discover which wriggler is missing, they may have a massive target painted on all their backs.

Without warning, the sirens from the base began to blare once more. She swore under her breath as she yanked open her door. Distant explosions from the mortar surrounding the walls of the base filled the air. A long string of curses spewed from her at the sight of the blazing metal screaming towards them. Had they drifted closer to the base while Dualscar was aboard without realizing? She had been so focused on Cronus and the Admiral, she hadn’t even considered how the waves possibly pushed the ship into range of the deadly mortar.

The water exploded just behind the stern of the ship, easing her fears for a moment even as she was sprayed with the salty sea water. They were just out of range. Their luck hadn’t run out quite yet, but it was still too close for comfort.

“Hurry! Everything will be safer in the Captain’s quarters!” Aranea grabbed Meenah’s wrist, who had begun to clutch the bag in her arms rather protectively. Her touch snapped the heiress out of her shocked daze as she immediately ran full sprint towards the cabin. She ended up dragging the first mate along with her with how fast she was moving.

As she stumbled inside, her cerulean eyes widened as Mindfang’s grand windows gave her the perfect view of a fleet of ten battleships that emerged from the base. Seems like they won’t be getting off as scott free as they hoped. “We need to prepare for battle, Meenah! Stash that bag somewhere safe and get going, ok?”

The order barely left Aranea’s lips as the sea dweller raced across the room to the Captain’s resting platform. Carefully she stuffed the military bag under the bed. The sound of a zipper caught her attention as she noticed Meenah was speaking in a hurried, hushed tone to the little wriggler. Straining her ears, she heard soft reassurances and demands for her to stay hidden until she returned.

“Meenah, please,” Aranea pleaded as the booming sounds of cannon fire began to fill the air. Touching as this was, their lives were at stake. “We will come back, but only after we stop this assault!”

The heiress’s fins twitched irritably as she stood from side of the bed. She whipped around and stormed out of the cabin faster than the first mate had ever seen her move. Quick on her heels, she was out on the deck, screaming her usual orders for the cannons as Mindfang’s voice echoed above them, guiding the ship away from the danger.

“Bring up the mortar ammunition!” The Captain bellowed as she ripped away the burlap covering over one of her mortar cannons. The edge in her voice chilled the first mate to the

bone. This urgency only proved that their usual tactics would not cut it this time around. Not with the royal navy after them.

Usually, they would use mortar on powerful ships, such as the deadly man o' war, with their dozens of cannons that could easily demolish their ship in seconds if they were unable to attack at a distance. For smaller battleships, they would either try to outrun them, or pick them off if any approached cannon distance. No need to waste such expensive ammo on a swarm of tiny ships, right?

Except, these weren't just any tiny ships. These were the royal navy ships. Ones that were known for taking down other ruthless pirates should they ever cross paths with them. Mindfang wasn't going to underestimate them in the slightest. Being kismesis with the naval Admiral gave her enough insight to know better than to take this attack as anything less than serious.

Meenah practically dove down to the lower deck, where all their ammo was securely stored. The sense of urgency Aranea had never seen from the sea dweller was nearly overwhelming. Hardly a second seemed pass before she re-emerged from below deck. A large crate filled to the brim with mortar shells were clutched tight in her arms as she sprinted up the stairs and up to the upper deck.

"Ships ahead!" Aranea wheeled around, heart racing as two more ships emblazoned with the royal symbol raced towards them. Dread filled her chest like molten lead as the odds stacked against them grew even larger. They needed to attack before they are surrounded by hostile ships.

"Ready the front cannons! Carpenters below deck!" Her voice rang out among the commotion, pirates scrambling to their stations just as their mortar shells exploded from their ship. "Fire when ready! Make them regret threatening Mindfang's crew!"

The piercing sounds of mortar fire and splintering wood filled the air as they made their daring escape. Only a moment after, the front canons boomed, sending a volley of cannon shells towards the closest ship. Three of the four cannonballs struck the ship, sending it rocking forwards as water rushed into the gaping holes they left behind.

A blast from the second approaching ship sent two of the several cannonballs through the hull of their ship. The impact nearly toppled Aranea as she braced the mast for impact. The sheer distance saved them from the full blast, which she was thankful for as the sounds of panicked carpenters rushed to repair the damage.

"Aim for the damaged ship!" Her voice held a barely concealed edge of fear as she directed the next shot. Sinking that ship would even their odds of only a little. It was better to have sunk one approaching enemy ship than have two damaged enemy ships taking turns as they riddled their ship with holes. "Fire!"

As the cannons rang out, she took a moment to glance up at the mortars. Mindfang was absolutely livid as she aggressively jabbed her finger towards their targets and shouted her orders to fire. The pirates scrambled to comply with their captain, not wanting to be included on the receiving end of her wrath.

Meenah somehow managed to grab her ranseur spear during the commotion. The forked spear was strapped to her back with a thin piece of rope the pirate she won it from had tied to it to free up their hands during critical situations such as this.

Mindfang wheeled on the sea dweller, a deep scowl on her face until her eyes landed on the weapon. A wicked grin immediately spread along her face, which only served to make Aranea's already cool blood run cold. Whatever plan blossomed in her head had to be horribly dangerous for all involved, and she was just crazy enough to do it.

She swallowed down her fear as best as she could as her Captain clapped Meenah on the shoulder and gestured out at the attacking ships. Edging closer, she strained her ears as best as she could over the boom of their own cannons. "Swim out there and kill any that try to swim to us. Stop them from fixing their ships while you're at it."

A horrified gasp ripped its way from Aranea's lungs as she whirled around on her heel towards the two trolls. Unfortunately, the sight she was greeted with was Meenah racing towards the edge of the ship and leaping over the rail in a graceful dive. Venomously, she cursed the ships and her Captain under her breath as she tore her eyes away from Mindfang's grinning face. The sooner they sink these ships, the sooner she would be back.

"Aim for their mast with the chain shot!" She practically snarled, choosing to take out her frustration at Meenah's predicament on the enemy ships. After all, if they didn't attack, then Mindfang wouldn't have had her horrendous idea to send her favorite sea dweller overboard into the hands of the enemy.

"Fire!" Several more cannonballs whizzed through the air. One in particular split in half, pulling the chain that held the two ends together tight as it spun dangerously through the air towards its target. The chain hit the mast with such force that it practically ripped it off its barings as the two ends came together and smashed into the broken mast, irreparably destroying it as it fell. Most likely crushing some of its crew as it ripped down the rigging from secondary masts on the ship.

"Reload!" She cried as she rushed to the edge of the ship, her eyes narrowed in furious concentration as her mind reached for the crew aboard the ship. Panicked by the sinking vessel of their mutilated ship, their minds were easy to capture and influence into attacking their own men.

As the second ship rushed in for another attack, the slowly sinking ships crew set off a barrage of cannon blasts along the side of their ally's ship. The proximity of the blast nearly split the ship in two as it was riddled with solid iron. A fireball burst from below deck as their explosives were struck, effectively severing her concentration as fire rained down upon the first ship.

Dazed by the sudden disconnect, she leaned against the wooden railings as she reoriented herself. Unfortunately, she hadn't noticed the final boom of a cannonball from the sinking ship until it was almost too late. Adrenaline spiked as she shoved herself away from the railing, only seconds before the iron shell smashed the polished wood into a million splinters. The floor crumbled beneath her feet and she found herself tumbling into the salty sea.

Air was forced from her lungs as she splashed hard into the water. Disoriented, she spun in the water as debris followed after her, churning the water around her as she struggled to find the surface. Salty sea water burned her nasal passage down to her lungs as her body demanded she breathe as she floundered about, panic slowly taking over despite her best efforts.

Cerulean eyes stung painfully as Aranea attempted to reorient herself with her vision. Blurry shapes surrounded her. One in particular seemed to be rushing straight towards her. Thinking it was more falling debris, she rushed to paddle away. The effort seemed to be in vain as the object closed in. Already she was starting to lose consciousness, the water that filled her lungs taking a large toll on the drowning land dweller as it slowly suffocated her. As her vision faded to darkness, she barely registered the strong arms encircling her waist.

Moments later she found herself on the deck of Mindfang's ship, water spewing from her mouth as a cool hand thumped against her back. Painful and desperate gasps of air filled her lungs as she came to, her mind somewhat foggy as her body emptied itself of the salty water. It took her a moment to realize she was seated on the deck between Meenah's legs, tilted forwards a little on her knee with one arm wrapped around her chest to support her weight.

Gratitude filled her as she leaned heavily into the sea dwellers chest as her coughing slowly died down. Comforted by her presence, her fingers slowly entangled themselves in her friends clothing as she passively watched the ships carpenters scramble to repair the damage to the ship as they fled the base. They were definitely going to have to go to port for a repair.

As her breathing steadied, she realized that the boom of cannon fire no longer deafened her with each blast. Instead, it was a faint noise in the distance, as though they hadn't just been directly involved in this fight. She could still smell fire and ash in the air from burning ships and gunpowder. Had they escaped?

"When I pulled ya aboard, the Captain did some kinda mind shit on the otter ships. Said she could feel some weak minded suckas aboard to get them to krill each otter instead." Aranea nodded weakly as she closed her eyes and just breathed for a moment. Her lungs ached from the water, and though the air stung a little, she was feeling more like herself with each breath. Being held in Meenah's strong arms definitely made this whole nearly drowning ordeal not too bad, though she would rather not have a repeat performance.

Mindfang's silhouette caught her eye as her eyes opened at the sound of cursing. It appeared she was attempting to keep the link for as long as she could as they fled. Her arms trembled slightly as she pressed her fingertips to her temples, focusing hard on the distant targets. One day, she hoped to be just as good or possibly even better than she was.

Though, it was strange how they were unfamiliar with Mindfang's handiwork considering how their Admiral was her kismesis, though she wasn't complaining. The pirate captain didn't usually use that trick unless the situation was dire as it usually drained her energy if she did it for too long. Either way, her Captain wasn't going to let this attack slide either. Dualscar will have to watch his back.

“Hey..you gonna be aight? Ya aint said nofin yet...are you broke?” Aranea shifted in her friends arms, pulling away just enough so her horns wouldn’t catch her in the face as she turned to look at her. She snorted, shaking her head in mild amusement at the furrowed brow and concerned frown on Meenah’s face. Of course she would think that just because she hadn’t said anything yet.

“Yes, I will be ok. I just needed to catch my breath is all,” The relief that washed over the sea dwellers face easily drew a smile onto her own. Affection for her friend, her now savior, blossomed in her chest as she fully turned towards her.

“Thank you, for saving me,” Aranea’s voice was but a whisper as both of her hands gently cupped the heiresses face. Cerulean eyes flickered down to dark full lips. They looked so inviting and soft, she could barely hold back from her urge to just kiss her in front of everyone aboard. She didn’t want to frighten her, after all she nearly fell into the sea from a simple kiss on the cheek. “I would love to show my appreciation.”

“Yeah?” Meenah’s voice was soft, filled with curiosity and anticipation. Licking her lips, she tore her eyes away from her friends mouth her gaze drifting up to her goggles. Oh how she wished she could see those deep tyrian eyes looking back at her.

Aranea inched closer, nodding as her eyes flickered back to those soft lips she had been dying to feel against her own. Her heart skipped a beat as she felt cool hands rest on her hips, subtly pulling her in. They were barely an inch apart, her eyes slowly fluttering shut as she felt Meenah’s cool breath ghost against her lips.

“Hey! You two can suck face on your own time,” Mindfang’s voice boomed over them, jolting her away from Meenah’s embrace. Her hands flew back, just catching herself before she fell flat on her back on the wooden deck. The Captain was towering over them, arms crossed tight over her chest with a deep scowl on her face.

“I need to see what exactly was taken for my kismesis to forget who exactly he’s dealing with,” The angry growl sent a shiver of fear down her spine as she scrambled to her feet. Aranea was quick to follow their Captain as she stomped her way to her cabin, hoping to avoid any anger she may redirect towards her. Meenah was hot on her heels, most likely with the same thoughts in mind.

Mindfang practically ripped her door open and froze, nearly causing the first mate to crash into her. Slowly she turned to face Meenah, her irritated scowl replaced with an incredibly pleased grin. Peering over her Captain’s shoulder curiously, she spotted the little wriggler cowering under the main table in the cabin. She must have torn her way out of the bag, as she could see a large hole in the side of the bag that had been partially dragged out from under the resting platform.

“Well well, looks like Dualscar really did have a good reason to lose his mind after all.”

Sorry for taking so long. Holiday things and some rough life events happened that prevented me from getting this done sooner. I hope it was worth the wait!

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