

# Chapter 1: The Gargoyle

**F**or weeks now, similar dreams had plagued Cadell's sleep, and each time, he awoke with a start, drenched in sweat. Today was no exception as he groaned and rolled out of bed. The dream was still vivid in his mind.

*Rain hammered at his face. Through a blur, he could see her. Were those tears or just raindrops running down her cheeks? He tried to scream, but the wind carried his voice away. "No! No!" he yelled. The sea and the storm drowned out his voice. He couldn't help her. The arms of his enemy wrapped around her, the other captain staring back at him with that ever present smirk. That smug look of victory. Cadell felt the sea swallow his feet, his body. His ship was sinking somewhere behind him. He sank beneath the surface, too weak to hang on. Each time, toward the end of the dream, Cadell reached out his hand in a last attempt at fighting the waves trying to swallow him, and then it all slipped into black.*

Cadell shook his head to clear his mind and stumbled into the water closet. He bent over the sink and hoped the cold water, which he splashed on his face, would help. He knew the dream was a memory, but despite his efforts, he couldn't remember anything about the events leading up to the moment of his sinking below the surface of the waves.

As he moved about his room, getting ready for the day, he glanced out of the window beside his bed.

Light glimmered off the waves which crashed on the Orlesce coast and Cadell knew nearby was Port Drelle, commonly visited by pirates, merchants, and all kinds of travelers. It was nearing the turn of the seventeenth century, though only the poor suffered from inhibitions. In the world of Aseath, piracy was as common as peasants, and humans, fae, vampire, and other races all struggled against each other.

Cadell knew he had once been a pirate, a captain at that. He remembered long days as a boy aboard his father's ship, sailing to and from various ports. A well-known and respected merchant trader, his father had been able to afford him some education. Still, though well-taught, Cadell rarely let it show. What graces he had learned remained in much of his mannerisms, but was subtle. After a few years as captain of his own ship, pirates began their attacks for his merchandise. Cadell and his crew fought back, and eventually, he discovered it was profitable to trade with pirates. He quickly grew a reputation as a fearsome captain not to be trifled with on the seas.

Still, for all of this knowledge, the cause of his downfall escaped him. Cadell only knew he had woken up aboard a passing merchant ship. Its crew had saved his life. They had found him washed up on the beach of Amioh Oiil Isle, halfway across Aseath from Orlesce, and barely alive. All he had on were tattered britches and two rings, one on each index finger. One ring featured a simple dagger, surrounded by a circle on a gold band. It was the symbol of his father's ship. The other ring bore a hooded figure wielding a scythe.

Aboard the ship they had given him a loose pale sailor's shirt and a new pair of dark pants. Once he had been nursed back to health with a full stomach and plenty of water, Cadell had been able to talk with the captain, who had told him he recognized the symbol of his father, and had saved him only because of a debt he had owed his father before his passing. The captain had had otherwise little interest in helping a pirate. Which was fair, perhaps.

Still, Cadell had been grateful. They had been traveling to Port Drelle at the time, and on arrival, Cadell had decided to stay. He had tried his hand at success on land and had set himself

up as a trader in the local markets. He had even built somewhat of a name for himself among the locals. Yet deep down, Cadell could not help the feeling of longing. A part of him was missing the desire to be once more sailing on the seas as part of a crew.

A few hours later, thoughts of his dream and what memories he had were still circling Cadell's mind as he approached a well-known pub near the docks.

Cadell approached the bar and sat down on one of the tall, round wooden seats. The pub, *Skull's Mark*, was a popular hangout for pirates. Local authorities knew they could easily find notorious figures lounging inside the pub, but they left it alone, for fear of the violent reaction they would receive and the blood which would stain the streets.

As he entered, Cadell took a moment to watch the few others going about their business. It was early afternoon and the pub was somewhat quiet, though it would grow loud as evening fell and more pirates filtered in and became drunken and animated. Still, there were more than usual present for this time of day, though they paid Cadell little mind. They were all busy in their own affairs.

*Skull's Mark* was spacious with several long oval tables in the main room and a stairway along the back wall. Beyond the bar were three doors. One led to a backroom and kitchen area used for storage of goods and food preparation. The other two doors hid large rooms featuring long tables and were used for meetings between pirate captains concerning important affairs or if allies joined to discuss strategies against their enemies. Occasionally, trades that pirates wished to keep discreet were also made in those large rooms.

The main room was dimly lit from the sunlight filtering in through the windows near the entrance. As time went on, candlelit lanterns hanging from poles around the room would be lit by the keep.

Over the past few months, Cadell had begun searching for a crew to join. He had even gotten several interviews, some with merchant ships, some with passenger ships, and even some with pirate ships. He had also received several invitations to join; none of them had felt quite right.

Cadell remained confident. Today would be the day, he thought. Or at least, his gut told him so. Perhaps it was wistful thinking. His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a rough voice.

"What'll ya have?" The barmaid was a large, rough looking woman. She could easily have been mistaken for a bartender except for her huge bosom and lack of a beard.

Cadell's gaze turned toward the woman behind the counter. "Get me an ale," he responded gruffly. He hadn't spoken much since he had got out of bed.

A roar of laughter exploded from a table across the room and Cadell turned out of curiosity. Around the table were five people; a woman at the head and two men on either side. He noted the skullcap around the woman's head, which was tilted back. Her cap featured a gargoyle's face with two silver daggers crossed behind it.

Cadell turned his full attention on the woman and her group. It was not difficult for him to hear their conversation, even from across the room. Cadell had a well-kept secret of vampiric abilities which allowed him heightened senses, though he hardly used them. He actively avoided the temptation of bloodlust. He was not a vampire, merely carried some of the race's blood in his veins. Most thought he was merely human.

He couldn't help himself as his eyes traced over the woman's figure. Her dark eggplant ringlets bounced with her laughter and tumbled down her back. Her ears were long and finely pointed, and were pierced in their entirety with many silver hoops. As she laughed, he caught a glimpse of two pointed fangs. Clearly, she was not human, although, the men around her seemed

as much. On first instinct, someone might think she were a vampire, although Cadell knew better. From her features, he suspected she was fae, instead of vampire, though there was no way he could be completely sure. Still, he'd spent a great deal of his childhood among the fae-folk when his father had traded with them.

Fae was short for faerie, dark faerie in particular. Many people at one point had thought that fae-folk were the sweet innocent kind that bestowed gifts. How cruel the irony was. The fae were a rough folk. And proud. Very proud. Though it was not so commonly known, they harbored magic, and they did enjoy the taste of blood... like vampires, though it was more for pleasure with a mate, or to absorb an enemy's power in death. Blood was hardly a need for any of them.

Cadell remembered long days as a boy in some of the fae-markets. He would run and play with fae-children while his father spent his time trading with the fae-merchants.

He remembered listening to old stories of conquest from fae-women, when the fae had struggled against other races, mostly humans, and had developed their cruel reputation. They spoke of themselves as superior, and carried themselves strait, shoulders back, heads high. Even those on the docks.

Cadell also remembered their roadways had been paved with gemstones and though he had never been told directly, he remembered rumors that the fae had a special access to the magic flowing through the world.

Something about this particular fae-woman in the pub was different. Yet similar. The woman's men all wore dark clothes with short or no sleeves, showing the same insignia as her skull cap branded onto their arms. As she calmed down, almond-shaped eyes opened to reveal golden irises. She tipped her mug to her reddened lips, taking a deep sip and setting it back down on the table. She looked at her clean shaven companions with a grin.

"My lads," the woman sighed with a chuckle, "you sure know how to make a girl laugh."

"Anything for you, Cap'n," the man sitting on her left responded around a mouthful of food.

"I hope our new crew members will be as good as you all," she said.

*Her crew, eh?* Cadell thought. She was a pirate captain then. Could it be that this was the famous captain of the *Gargoyle*, he wondered? The *Gargoyle* was a ship feared on the seas for its captain's reputation. She was known for random fits of bloodlust and a lack of interest in treasure. But also, she was reputed as a great captain with a crew that would defend its own with fierce loyalty.

Cadell's attention was brought back to the counter as the barmaid roughly put his ale down.

He grabbed the mug without comment and sipped its contents. His focus returned to this female captain.

He noted she was dressed in a white pirate's shirt, loose over her shoulders, but it did not fail to outline her distinct womanly figure. She wore dark pants and leather boots that reached halfway up her calves.

After setting the empty mug on the dirty counter, Cadell moved toward the group with the fascinating woman. She intrigued him, this female captain who demanded such a fierce reputation. There was something about her, and he felt a desire to know more. His shadow loomed over them, and he folded his arms across his chest.

"Guess you're the captain of this crew?" Cadell asked, speaking directly to the woman at the table's head. He paused, waiting to get her attention.

With Cadell's approach, all merriment ceased, the men's hands automatically going to their sides and the weapons there as they prepared to stand. They stopped only when the woman held up a hand.

When he saw she was listening, Cadell asked, "Ye' don't mind me joining yer crew there, lass, do ye?"

"Ye think ye have what it takes to be a part of the *Gargoyle*?" she questioned, leaning back slightly and looking up at him. She spoke the same way he did; it wasn't surprising. Most used such common speech, especially pirates who were not always very educated. Even if a pirate did know more proper language, he or she would often not use it in order to present a certain image toward others. Especially in public settings.

Her question confirmed his suspicions. This was indeed the very captain of the *Gargoyle*. Cadell was silent a moment, gazing back at her firmly. He hoped she could tell the answer to her question by his direct approach. Of course Cadell thought he had what it took.

Her golden gaze traced over his figure briefly, taking in his features. Cadell wondered how he looked through her eyes. Finally, she turned her gaze toward the table nonchalantly and responded, "Remove the gold and the beard, and perhaps I'll consider ye. Come down to the docks when the sun is just touching the horizon. Someone will be waiting. Ye'll come aboard my ship, convince me that ye should be a part of my crew, and I'll think 'bout hiring ye." She grabbed a bottle of rum from the table and filled the goblet in front of her.

Cadell was a little surprised at her response, and the gold hoops in his ears jingled slightly as he raised a finger to touch them. Perhaps he had caught her at the right moment, or perhaps in the right mood. Perhaps his luck was finally looking up. Whatever the case, he was glad for the chance.

Cadell briefly glanced at the rings on his fingers. He would not be so eager to part with them, but he would do as he must. He had also noticed from his previous observations the clean shaven faces of her crew, and he was curious, though did not ask. A smirk flickered across his lips, and he gave a slight nod in response. "Alright," Cadell muttered.

He turned to leave, thinking there was nothing left for him to say. Then, he paused and turned back slightly. Cadell glanced at her through the few locks of hair that had escaped the short bundle tied loosely behind his head. "Consider yerself with a new crew member," he said simply. He wanted her to know that he was confident and bold. He didn't wait to see her response.

Cadell left, glad to finally be getting back on the seas, or so he hoped. Yes, everyone knew of the *Gargoyle* and many men tried and failed to become a member of the crew. He'd have better luck, he was sure.

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The thud of Cadell's boots as he walked down the docks echoed in the air. There weren't many people here; it was near sundown. Cadell ran a hand through his hair. When he had left *Skull's Mark*, it had been in a short bundle. His hair now hung loosely over his neck, barely long enough for the ends to touch his shoulders; he had cut it along with shaving his beard for his interview. He let his hand fall to his side. Moving forward, he looked for the woman he had seen previously. His gait was confident, ready for anything.

There was another man standing near one of the lamp posts, hands stuffed in his pockets. It was one of the men from the woman's table. He was tall, and somewhat lean, with defined

features. When Cadell approached, the man waiting looked up and smirked. "Good. You can follow instructions." He motioned for Cadell to follow.

Cadell's fingers rose only briefly to touch his now smooth chin. Scowling, he looked around a moment to see the ship from the outside, though he had seen it before. Aye, it was a beauty.

The man led him down the docks, getting into darker areas. Suddenly, he stopped and went down one of the sides of the dock, heading up a plank. Especially in the moonlight, the *Gargoyle* looked eerie. It was clearly named for the carved figurehead, grinning wickedly at the town below from the prow of the ship. While it remained as still as stone, the face of a lion, eyes fierce, glared downward, daring any unwanted company to come closer and test fate. Two horns jutted from its brow and sharp teeth gleamed in the pale moonlight, as if it might devour any passersby.

As he followed the other man aboard, Cadell couldn't help staring upward at the ship. It was a frigate, a ship with two full decks and three square rigged masts. The hull was deep brown in color and the sails pale. Though raised, he swore he caught a glimpse of pale green and grey as the sea wind caused the sails to ripple.

On first approach, Cadell had not failed to glimpse the dark spaces below the main deck where he knew cannons lay waiting. From what he had been able to see he had counted at least sixteen holes, but he knew there were many more. A slight chill ran down his back as he realized this ship was far more deadly than even the stories about her described.

There were only a few torches lit and some crewmembers were finishing up their duties. The man Cadell followed led him across the main deck toward the stern where a short stairway led downward, past the gun deck and to the lower deck. This was where all the men's cabins would be. The man went down a couple of steps and spoke quietly with another man who allowed them entrance to a brightly light room. Cadell paused, and then he moved into the room.

Cadell was shocked when he saw the female captain, sitting in a bolted chair behind a simple wooden desk. A rather burly looking man held one of her hands, carving at her nails with a small piece of wood that had been flattened and smoothed.

For one, Cadell had expected his interview to be held in the captain's quarters on the deck above this one. Secondly, it was unheard of for a pirate to be given such luxury. Cadell was intrigued, curious, but of course did not ask. This woman grew more fascinating the more he learned. She definitely hadn't grown up in common life, he thought. It was only a suspicion... but even the arrogant fae he had known as a child were not so privy to being pampered.

As soon as the large man finished tending to the woman's nails, she waved him away. After grabbing a silver goblet with a gargoyle clutching the cup, he felt her golden eyes focus on him. "Please," she said, "take a seat." She gestured to another chair that faced hers. "What is your name?" she questioned, speaking with proper grammar and inspecting him closely. Her voice was silvery, soft, and pleasant.

Cadell looked around the room briefly, memorizing it. Even if this were not the captain's quarters, an assumption he made based on the room's location, he figured he wouldn't get to come here often. If she was like most captains he had spoken to, such a private meeting with the captain had to be for a very specific reason. He wondered what sort of captain he had once been... Still, he nodded, taking the seat. "Cadell. Just Cadell."

He noted her proper speech, which only raised even more questions, and again caused the thoughts of her past to echo in his mind. Aye, she was no commoner. He silently argued with himself whether or not he should respond in kind. He also had learned how to speak well in his

childhood, but had only done so in interactions with the fae-kind. Otherwise, he had always used common language in order to better blend in.

Finally he asked, "I'm curious if you'll be testing me, or merely asking questions?" He was now quite sure she was fae; that fact alone caused him to want to accommodate her speech. If nothing else, perhaps it might help this interview.

"I'll do whatever I please to deem if you're worthy to be a part of my ship," the woman replied calmly. Despite the softness in her voice, Cadell noticed her shoulders tense briefly when he mentioned his name, though she forcefully relaxed them and sat back. Was she trying to hide it? He silently tucked this piece of information away. Would she have recognized him, he wondered? It was a possibility... from the memories which evaded him. But other than the brief motion, she otherwise seemed to have no recognition. Maybe he had imagined it.

She took another sip of her goblet, beckoning one of the crewmembers over; he started to rub her shoulders and she visibly relaxed, sinking back into her chair.

After a moment of silence, she asked her next question. "So, Cadell, what makes you think that you can be a part of my crew? Why mine, and what stories have you heard of me?" He noticed a slight gleam rise in her golden eyes and a smirk tug at the edge of her lip. He wondered if she were merely recalling a particularly pleasant memory, or if she were eager to hear what he had to say. Perhaps both. Her reputation *was* a bloody one.

"Where to start? I could tell of the tales and legends I've heard, that the Gargoyle is run by no common woman. From what I've heard, she's run by a vampire. But I suppose that's to be debated." Cadell paused, knowing he should get to the point.

She laughed lightly at the vampire remark. "I am *not* a vampire. Let me lay that myth to rest. I am of the... fae-folk."

"Really now? A fae..." He said it slowly, as if he were surprised. He quickly moved past it and toward the point; he still needed to answer her last question.

"One myth, most intriguing, is of your ship here and a sea monster, at least in the tale. You weren't on the seas for long back then. It was you and a small crew pulled together to man the ship. There's different versions, but they all give the same idea. You, defeating that monster almost single handedly... your ship almost being sunk to the bottom. Those hideous roars... the crash of the sea... How I'd give anything to of been there..." He droned off slightly, yet quickly snapped back to attention. "The tale set your reputation."

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Amethyst listened as Cadell spoke, remembering everything quite clearly. Her eyes closed as the memory of their encounter with a sea monster came back. Or at least, a monster in her own mind. The scumbag had had it coming. They had not been sailing for two months when the battle had taken place. What most didn't know was that she had been searching for him herself, hoping to bring him down. Some were curious about her cruelty, which was a mixture of revenge against those who had wronged her or her kind as well as her mental illness.

She remembered being consumed by bloodlust after the battle, and her crew knew it well. Not even other pirates acted the way she did. They did not kill and not touch the treasure, just letting the ship full of rotting bodies drift off. But she did. Perhaps part of it was her fae nature, her thirst for blood and conquest. But it was more than that. In many ways, she was neither fae nor pirate in behavior.

Amethyst relaxed into her seat as her massage continued, enjoying her glass of rum. This Cadell intrigued her greatly, and she was briefly imagining him being on her crew. He would make a fine addition. He was handsome enough, for one, with his tousled dark hair and piercing black eyes. And with his broad shoulders and strong arms he looked like he could take a lot of work. She briefly remembered eyeing him at his first approach in the pub. Despite his loose clothing, she had been able to note distinct muscles beneath his shirt.

The room had grown silent for a moment after Cadell finished recounting the tale for her. But not for long. She listened as his voice resumed, her eyes still closed. There was something about his voice which was smooth, calming.

"Well, to answer your question... concerning my worthiness for this ship..." he said. Cadell was silent for another moment, and she wondered what he was thinking. "I once was a captain myself. Before that..." he stopped, "Storm," he finished, his voice growing lower with his last word.

Amethyst opened her eyes as he mentioned his days as a captain. "Did you now, Mister Cadell?" She couldn't help but smirk. "It must have been a nasty affair for such a man as yourself to have been stripped of his position?" Amethyst paused, watching for his reaction.

She noted as briefly, his eyes grew darker, a slight frown coming to his lips at the mention of his little tragedy. "Aye," Cadell muttered, his voice that same low tone it had grown to at the mention of the storm.

Amethyst was silent a moment longer, simply staring at him. Aside from the things he had already mentioned, this very piece of knowledge was what sold him. As a previous captain, he would know his way around at least and would not need to be trained. Besides, she couldn't help thinking there was something about him which she wanted to learn more of.

"Very well," Amethyst stated. "I will hire you on and see how I like you. If I don't, I'll just throw you overboard with a cannonball tied to your feet!" she laughed heartily.

"Now, the rules. I am Captain Amethyst, and nothing more or less to you. No woman is *ever* allowed on my ship. Accept whatever payment you get without complaint and stay clean shaven at all times. Otherwise," she paused to rest her chin in her palm as she leaned forward for dramatic effect, "I'll hold you down and shave you myself. If in town, don't bother anyone without my order. I've got a reputation to upkeep. Mutiny equals torture, no gold allowed," she paused, examining her nails. "Oh yea, rules can change without notice. Think you got it?"

"Of course..." Cadell said, tapping his head slightly. "So, what're my orders, Captain Amethyst?" She noticed a slight smirk cross his lips as he spoke her name. He looked eager.

"First things first, you've got to get a brand," she said.

Amethyst snapped her fingers and the man rubbing her shoulders stopped and exited. A few moments later, he came back with an older man carrying some items, one which included a metal rod with an image formed at the end of it. It was the same as the insignia on her skull cap, the gargoyle with two silver daggers. The older man set up by the fireplace, poking the hot coals and resting the metal on top of it.

"Of course..." Amethyst heard Cadell mutter as a faint scowl now crossed his handsome features.

"Where do ye want it? It mus' be visible at all times," the man who would be branding him said as he looked at Cadell expectantly.

As the men prepared to mark Cadell as a member of her crew, Amethyst stood and leaned against the windowsill, watching as fog crept across the water and onto land. She gave a slight hiccup, putting more of her weight on the window.

Despite staring out the window, she listened to everything going on, still very much aware. She heard Cadell release his breath. "My forearm... where else?" she heard him say. In the reflection of the window glass, she saw him hold out his arm, glaring at the wall while waiting. As the branding iron seared the mark into his skin, he grunted, though she could tell he did his best not to reveal signs of pain. She smirked slightly to herself. Good.

"Go ahead and shove off," Amethyst commanded sleepily, letting out a wide yawn. She felt so tired all of a sudden. "You'll be under First Mate Darien. He's upstairs. Not hard to miss. He'll give you orders," she told Cadell, setting her goblet down on the windowsill as she moved toward the stairway leading into the room. "As for me, I am retiring to my cabin. Good evening to you." As she started up the stairs, the orders to set sail could be heard above and the ship started to sway lightly as they set sail.

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*'I guess that means now,'* Cadell thought, watching as the captain left. "G'night... Captain Amethyst," he muttered to her back. He raised his arm, glaring briefly at the still burning mark on his forearm. Soon, he left and quickly found the stairs Amethyst had mentioned. After climbing the stairs, Cadell spotted two men speaking together and approached. He wondered if he should uphold the speech he had used with Amethyst, or return to the common speech. He had no clue what being on board the *Gargoyle* was like and he figured much of the crew was more common than whatever origins Amethyst came from. "I'm new, an' was told to speak to Darien. Will ye' point me in the right direction?"

The man Cadell had asked grunted, moving from his position and forward toward one of the upper cabins. He knocked on the door. "Sir, there's another new member to tha crew. Cap'n sent him to ya." Cadell simply stood there and waited, arms hanging at his sides. He was eager to sleep and thus felt somewhat impatient to get this meeting over with. While he, the newest crewmember, knew the necessity of respecting the first mate, he also knew the hardest part was over.

"The door is unlocked lad. Come on in," a soft voice called out to him.

At the voice, Cadell turned the knob and entered, unsure of whether or not to close the door behind him. He simply closed it partially and stepped forward.

In the room was a simple study. Behind the desk sat a man with dark navy hair, silver eyes flashing as they looked up. "Ah. Mister Cadell. Welcome to the *Gargoyle*. I am First Mate Darien, as you already know. Let me first say congratulations on making it to the crew. It isn't very often when we hire people on." He was extremely soft-spoken, but just as proper as Amethyst, Cadell noted. He decided then and there he would not speak so commonly on board as a member of the *Gargoyle's* crew. He had a feeling it might raise his position faster among the rest of the crew.

Cadell glanced around the room briefly before his gaze fell on the one so-called Darien again. First mate... he was more than he seemed. When Darien said congrats, Cadell felt a faint smirk come to the corner of his lips. He gave a slight nod, "Yea, so I heard... thanks."

"Your brand is to be visible at all times, but I'm sure you know that from your past as captain of the *Reaper's Scythe*." Darien looked back down, writing on the paper on his desk with a feather quill. Finally he stood. "I will give you a small tour of the ship, give you your duties and release you." Darien headed toward the door rather quickly.



As Darien spoke again, Cadell felt surprise come over him that this Darien knew so much so quickly, but then again he knew how well word got around when any newcomer was on a ship, and first mate always got first news. The name of the ship Darien mentioned; however, caught Cadell off guard. *The Reaper's Scythe*? While he almost hadn't remembered the name of his ship, he certainly hadn't mentioned it to anyone. Nevertheless it did strike him as a thought on the tip of his tongue. Still, he didn't let it get the better of him. For now, he pushed it aside. He nodded in recognition that he understood and turned, following Darien out the door. "Aye," Cadell muttered. Though he didn't admit it, he was excited about touring the ship, much like a young lad.

The ship was further out to seas now. "Drop anchor!" Darien commanded once they had moved far enough from port. Afterwards, Darien led Cadell around the ship, only showing him the kitchen, the dining room, the wash room, and the cabins, which were situated on the third level of the ship, the lower deck. The first mate finally stopped in front of one of the cabins, opening the door. It was plain inside. Two beds were on opposite sides with two small wardrobes. A desk sat near the window, full of dust. He pointed to one bed that already had a pair of brown pants and a white sleeveless shirt. Boots and socks lay at the floor.

Cadell silently observed the different rooms and finally his own. He stepped in. It would do. His eyes fell on the clothing. He preferred his own clothes but he would make good use of them.

"This isn't a required uniform, but rather a small gift. You will be responsible for your own clothes to be washed," Darien stated.

Cadell nodded that he understood and muttered a brief, "Aye."

"For now you do not have a roommate, so enjoy it while it lasts. Your first job will be to polish all weapons. Come to my study tomorrow at dawn and I will tell you where to go," Darien instructed, "any questions?"

Cadell only shook his head and gave a brief smile. "I'll be fine. Just inform me on anything new such as getting a mate if it happens." He paused, "Suppose I'll see you in the morning." Once Darien left, Cadell closed the door and set about going to bed. He thought about his happiness at finally being out at sea and drifted off to sleep.

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The crew of the ship were already busy early the next morning, just as the sun was rising over the watery horizon. Below deck, Cadell had been up an hour or so before sunrise, dressed and prepared for the day. Even so, he had felt no need to move about until closer to dawn. Cadell now easily climbed toward the main deck.

Amethyst was leaning against the rail, with a mug in hand. Steam rose over the edge of the mug and he noted a faint, pleasant smile on his captain's lips as she sipped its contents. Her gaze was fixed on the sunrise. Suddenly, her mouth stretched into a wide grin and she began waving at something in the ocean. He saw what she was waving at jump from the ocean surface; it was dolphins. She then began giggling gleefully.

Cadell was surprised, though slightly amused. He'd heard she was crazy... but he'd never really believed it. Even now, he wondered if perhaps she was simply drinking something which made her more carefree. He approached Darien, who was standing near the middle of the deck, eyes on Amethyst and a soft smile on his own lips.

"Mornin'," Cadell said shortly, "What's first?"

Before Darien could respond, Amethyst whirled and moved excitedly toward them, a bounce in her step. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "I missed you yesterday, lovely!" Clearly, she was talking to Darien as she planted a kiss on her first mate's cheek and handed him her mug. "How are you this morning? Have you had breakfast yet?"

Darien shook his head, his smile having widened into a grin. The first mate still was silent.

Cadell was entirely unsure how to react as he watched the two. It seemed Amethyst wanted to leave him as shocked as possible: she grasped Cadell's hand and pulled him toward the side of the ship.

"You must see the dolphins," she told him excitedly, pointing toward the water as the dolphins emerged and sank beneath the surface. "Aren't they lovely?" the captain asked with a sigh.

Cadell folded his arms across and let his elbows rest on the side of the ship, watching the dolphins and he nodded. "Aye, they are," he said slowly. This was hardly what he had imagined aboard the *Gargoyle*. Maybe she really was crazy... One thing did cause a wave of relief in him: it wasn't all work. They were here to enjoy the sea in all of its pleasures, which satisfied him.

"Oh, yes. They're so lovely. And so friendly!" Amethyst responded and waved a couple more times. Finally, she turned her gaze toward her first mate. "Darien, stop the ship please," she requested.

"Aye, aye, captain," Darien responded. A bit later the vessel was stopped.

"Thank you, lovely!" Amethyst said as she smiled at him, removing her skullcap. The captain started for her shirt, but as Darien grasped her hand, she stopped.

"Not in front of the new man, Captain," Darien warned.

Amethyst blinked, and the look she gave Darien reminded Cadell of a small questioning child. "No?" Amethyst asked.

"No, Captain. Not right now," Darien stated firmly.

"Alright," she agreed with a childish pout. She sat down and took off her boots and socks. "Come look for me in an hour," she said, climbing onto the side of the ship. Standing up, she looked around before diving into the sea, surfacing a few moments later.

Darien only laughed, turning back to Cadell. "Are you hungry, Cadell?" he questioned.

Cadell nodded in agreement, glancing at Darien, then out toward the sea once again. "Yea..." he responded, baffled. Despite his confusion, Cadell suddenly felt an attachment to their captain. He desperately wanted to know more about her.

"You'll have to excuse the captain. She likes to go swimming every now and again. She doesn't like the weight of wet clothes, so she often goes without them." Darien watched as Amethyst swam near one of the dolphins. "Sometimes she acts like a child. But she is certainly not to be taken lightly. She is still this ship's captain and each of us would do anything for her. She deserves whatever she wishes at this point."

The first mate sighed, "If you would, join me in my office for a chat and a bit of breakfast before you start working." After shouting orders to the lookout to watch Amethyst, Darien started toward his quarters. They were right beside the captain's quarters, just below the main deck, though they used the same stairway he had first descended before his interview; they stopped on the second level, the gun deck, instead of climbing all the way down.

"I see," Cadell murmured as he followed the first mate. Amethyst's antics were good to know, and was also a good reminder that no matter how laid back everything seemed, he couldn't be too careful.

When they entered Darien's office, a breakfast of steaming food was set out on the first mate's desk, along with two plates and two goblets of juice. "Please, take a seat," Darien gestured. He took a seat himself followed by a sip of his drink, and finally he looked at Cadell.

Cadell obeyed. "So what did you want to talk about?" he questioned slowly, hiding the fact he was a bit eager to eat. He wondered why he was being given breakfast with the first mate instead of eating with the rest of the crew.

"How much do you really know about the Captain? I mean, besides her pirate life." Darien asked as he ate a bit of ham.

Cadell drank some of his juice. It was freshly squeezed. At first, he was taken aback at Darien's question, although he now knew why he was not dining with the crew. This must be some sort of assurance he was not here to carry out any devious plots against the captain. He pondered a moment at Darien's question and finally answered slowly. "Very little. From stories and legends, I'm seeing more of it's true than I'd expect, but who wouldn't know of her? She drives one of the fiercest ships at sea."

Cadell paused, taking another sip of his drink and beginning to chew on a biscuit followed by some eggs. "For her personal life, I've heard of a son and her alliance with his father. The *Golden Lion*... met the captain of that ship before. He's a strange lad. Good captain though."

Darien nodded, "Yes, he'll be turning five this year, her son I mean." He paused, and seemed to observe Cadell for a moment. At last, Darien spoke clearly. "You know the *Golden Lion*'s captain was just one of the many men Amethyst has taken to her bed. She can be rather promiscuous." He stabbed his eggs and chewed thoughtfully on them, letting what he had said and all it implied sink in.

Cadell was not really surprised to hear such information about his captain. He'd heard she tended to be a bit like that. But even so, he felt a strange feeling of disappointment and also jealousy flit through him.

"I hope it goes without saying how you will be expected to respond if she asks..." Darien said softly.

Cadell hesitated before giving a slight nod, showing he at least understood. "Anything else I should know?"

Darien shook his head.

Before he could stop himself, an unexpected question tumbled from Cadell's mouth. "Tell me... has she ever had one man in her life?"

Darien sighed, appearing as though he were not at all surprised by the question. "Twice. The first is the reason for everything that happened to her in the beginning. Her ex-husband... He was with her right before she became a pirate. Sometimes I think to myself, what would've happened to her if I had not been there. No one would've rescued her. He abused her, in more than imaginable ways. In fact, it wasn't until four or five years of being in the open sea for her to even consider bringing a man to her bed. The one she had been with had ruined that experience.

When she realized that this could be very... fun," Darien paused, appearing to be in thought for a moment, "she became addicted to the pleasure, like her rum. Of course, she's calmed down over the many years she's been sailing." Darien stopped, eating more of his food.

Cadell nodded slowly, replying only with, "Suppose she owes you a lot then, in a way." He didn't mean that she should owe anything; he was simply saying he was glad of Darien if he had rescued her from such a man. Cadell glanced off for a moment before turning his attention toward Darien once more.

"The second... well, a tragic tale." Cadell's and Darien's eyes met, briefly, and Cadell felt as though Darien were trying to read him. Finally, the first mate bit into a piece of toast. Apparently he didn't want to elaborate on this tragic tale. "It wasn't until five years ago, when she met up with the captain of the *Golden Lion*, that she seriously started to consider her relationship with him. Of course, she still has trouble with it, especially when she comes into her season," Darien finished. Afterward, he smiled. "The rest of her story is not mine to tell just yet, and that is enough for now. You still have work to do," he said.

"Aye, I do, and I shouldn't waste too much time talking. But..." another pause, "What sort of attention does the Gargoyle typically draw?" Cadell needed to know so he'd be prepared for any attacks... or so he thought.

"It can go either way. Sometimes people come to us, but we go to them as well. Especially when the captain gets into one of her moods," Darien said with a shrug. "I just hope you don't mind killing even without reason sometimes." The first mate took another bite of breakfast. "Anyway, lunch is when the sun is highest, unless otherwise stated. Dinner is announced, usually. We don't care where you eat breakfast and lunch as long as you clean up afterwards. But everyone eats dinner together. Also, you are to report to me when you have completed your tasks or need help. When the alarm bell rings, you drop anything you're doing and you assemble at the bow of the boat. Understand?" Darien asked, looking intently at Cadell.

Cadell nodded, "Shouldn't be a problem." He flashed a grin slightly, "understood." He didn't want to just up and leave, so he asked, "Should I be off then?"

"Yes, go ahead and go on," Darien stated politely, picking up a piece of an iced pastry. "If you need anything, just ask anyone around the ship and they'll be glad to help you. Don't forget to come to me when you're done so I can assign you another job."

Cadell nodded, "Aye..." he turned, hesitating a moment, then walked out, closing the door behind him. He looked up at the sky that was turning bluer and smiled before moving forward once again. Swiftly, he reached his destination.

All the weapons lay piled up in the weapons room before Cadell, dirty and in dire need of cleaning. Polish and cloths lay to the side, patiently waiting for him to use them.

Cadell began working on polishing and cleaning the pile of weapons before him. He hadn't been responsible for polishing in a while, he thought, and yet he had done it in the past enough to know exactly what he was doing. The task wouldn't take too long. Now and then, he glanced off, thinking of the captain. He could understand why so many wanted to sleep with her... but still, he had to admit, she did seem quite crazy.