

## 79. Fate of the Death's Consort

I'd thought that carracks were the worst ship left on the seas when it came to maneuverability and speed. It seems I was wrong: whatever the Final Internment made up for in durability, it had lost in maneuverability. I considered it a credit to her former crew that they had managed to make any headway with her, and if they hadn't been okay with shutting in 'less-desirables' below her decks than I would have regretted the removal of their expertise from the world.

Even capitalizing on the currents that only I and Davy Jones could, it took three weeks longer to make our stops than it should have. That was with my own 19 levels of seamanship plotting courses and manning the helm, and with a summoned crew of constructs with a journeyman aptitude of about level 10. I'd dare say that I could sail any ship on the seas, but the hulk I was managing vexed me. If I'd needed any excuse for disposing of the ship besides the thrice-inconvenient perk 'Bloodied Meeting Ground' than I had it now.

If we had encountered a ship capable of carrying so many people, I would have captured it and made the change the same day. Unfortunately, while the Median Ocean was filled with patrolling ships the belly of the Passive Ocean that we'd just crossed had been nearly empty of them. There was a single galleon that could have sufficed, and it was a merchant ship I refused to take.

\*\*\* The first day of travel was done without claiming the Internment, we instead saw everything of value transferred over from the Roc's Eye and I submerged the faithful little cutter before leaving her behind. That gave me more time to establish relationships within the crew before they soured thanks to the Internment's inconvenient perk.

My new alchemist Mouse oversaw the dissection of the kraken remains with my blessing. When I'd sailed with whaling boats we'd brought extra containers with us in the holds to be assembled and filled at sea. The Internment had no such supplies, so I terrified the prisoners by repurposing other barrels and containers the hulk did have. Why were they terrified? Because they didn't know that any ship of mine had unending barrels of fresh water and hardtack included, and pouring fresh water on the decks would be a sin on any other vessel.

Despite my time harvesting whales and other monsters, I had no skill with dissection or knowledge on the value of different parts. I was a sailor and had only served as manual labor at that part of the chore. Mouse, on the other hand, seem to have a vision ability that let him gauge a components usefulness at a glance. Gerald had no such ability, but didn't miss the opportunity to save as much Kraken meat as he could justify to experiment with.

The orcs were already all about eating mighty foes, and after Gerald's creative descriptions of what he could do with fillets of Kraken meat there was no need for Mouse to convince anyone else to get smelly.

Drese finally got his promised rest, and slept for over a day and spent the better part of a week recovering. During that time – to my surprise – he found a kindred spirit in Marcus Renshaw. I'd have thought the effusive generalist wouldn't get along with the reserved life master, but I was dead wrong. They both had a passion for studying magical aspects and debating theory, Marcus had simply studied broadly while Drese had honed a single discipline.

I also had a suspicion that as my magical mentors they had commonality in discussing me, but I never caught either of them even hinting at such talks so my paranoia remained unfounded.

Hali and I finally had the opportunity to catch up, and our dynamic was ... surprising. Reflecting on it, I realized that we had become friends – to the point where she trusted me with her life and I credited her with the hopes that had planted the seeds of redemption – without ever truly getting to know each other.

Our time together had been on the Wind Runner. She had first been pressured by Michaels to make awkward inquiries into my loyalties. I had in turn uncovered her as a spy instead of a sailor, and instead of being celebrated had been sternly warned by Michaels to keep my trap shut.

Thus had our unlikely link been forged.

We hadn't started sharing all about ourselves, though, and now continued to surprise each other with revelations of our true selves. Hali had a habit of being circumspect and coy, but several times stopped herself and repeated "I am not a spy for the king any more" before giving me a straight answer. She was learning to unmask herself with me like I'd learned to do with Marcus – the difference being I'd been wearing my cover identity for a short time while she'd never known anything else.

Even her name was one she chose to keep since it's what I knew her by. Apparently she'd been born with the name 'Desdemona' but had used it so infrequently that she now had the ability to change her name at will – as opposed to me needing a significant event to rename myself.

She shared of her imprisonment reluctantly, and only after I'd shared some of my own harsher memories. She had never intended to use the communications device she'd given me, it had only ever been the gift she'd said. However, when she discovered what was awaiting her, her resolve fled and the communications orb with me was her only chance. She was surrendered by the king, called on to perform the sacrifice of service included in the oath she'd sworn as a girl. It seemed that all nations – even allies – spied on each other, and these spies being discovered ranged from being a faux-pas to a cause for battle. The difficulty with the spy was being caught in the middle, as after all the things Hali had done in service to the crown she'd been forced into a position where the crown's best option was to do away with her.

Handing her over to a foreign power was a risk, but Hali had an ally in the former princess – now queen of Oorkom – who intervened on her behalf. It was arguable that an execution in

Andros was a kinder fate, but the queen's intervention with her father had allowed Domenic to rescue her.

That in itself was a sticky part for us. They knew Hali had signaled me – painful interrogation combined with her oath had wrung everything from her – but they hadn't seemed sure of how much stock to place in our relationship. With a superficial analysis of our history, we wouldn't have gotten along if not for my inexplicable crush on her aboard the Wind Runner followed by her intervention in the Broken Isles. What kind of assets should they put towards the unlikely event I tried to save her?

Especially when I was showing myself highly adept at picking off any military ship outside of a convoy.

Hali didn't know how they'd tried to trap me until I told her of the vampires, they didn't discuss the details of the trap with the bait. Apparently the vampire clan on Antarus had a debt to the royal family. So long as the debt was in place, they were limited in their feeding and expansion. Since the king had promised them he'd hold the debt fulfilled if they killed me, the vampires jumped at the chance. The king would have opened his shores to vampiric activity, but the nation saw me as a threat to their much-vaunted naval control at a time when that naval might was the only thing keeping them from being swallowed by Makam.

I was learning all about how the empire of Makam really was the unseen boogeyman in everyone's closet, dismissed until it had its hands around your throat.

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After three weeks, my unwanted human passengers were dropped off on the coast of Andros. Or at least, what was once Andros. Hali educated me on some of the more recent war news while we sailed. The nation of Andros had been regarded as something of a puppet state for months, but had recently become an official vassal of the empire of Makam.

In the world at large, that made the other nations of the human confederacy very nervous, as the empire wasn't being very subtle about its desires to 'reintegrate' the 'lost colonies'. Oorkom actually had to stop burning Nilfheim's countryside long enough to bolster its southern borders. Antarus was more worried about Makam taking over their trade monopolies. The jarls of the Broken Isles didn't care about any nations or empires so long as they reigned supreme over their own islands.

Here, off the coasts of the state of Andros (name changes were still being argued over) we passed three ships belonging to the coast guard and one presumed smuggler ship: the opposite ratio I'd grown to expect. The pirates of Tulisang had always been at least half-revolutionaries, but pirate and revolutionary alike were being smothered as Makam colors reinforced the coast in their bid for expansion.

My deposit of former criminals and slave-fodder would have their chance at life. Some had even waved back at the Final Internment as they slipped into the coastal jungle, though most had soured on me because of the relationship debuff non-allies and I shared. They didn't have as many humans as they'd set sail with; I'd recruited a handful, but more I'd had executed for their crimes. Really, they should have faced the headsman back on Antarus, and I could only imagine someone's pockets had been lined to start sending criminals to the slave auctions since the blend of rapists and serial killers I'd found were detested by every society I'd encountered.

Further north we required the cover of darkness to make our second stop. The nation of Carr had been pacified and was under human occupation, the native chortin living as non-citizens. The battlefield had moved further north to the grand forests where the elven strategists had once again stymied further expansion with their mix of guerilla tactics and darkening the skies with arrow storms.

The elves might help the non-human passengers I carried, but then they might not. I let the group vote on location and the majority carried it: Carr would be their destination, occupied or not. There weren't many places that would be hospitable to them left, and they were exclusively on the other side of the ocean. I was willing to carry and free them, but not to wherever they wanted to go.

The band of non-humans that Gnar escorted to shore was also smaller than they'd started out with, though this time it was because I'd found more to recruit. Gnar had – through days of consecutive battles and creative strategies – incorporated the orcs from other tribes under his banner. He'd also branched out and recruited other races, which had almost caused him problems until he pointed at me and said they already had a human warlord. Now I had a set of Madu archers, a pair of chortin duelist brothers, and the halfling Tarzor Stoutfoot – nicknamed Tarball after a self-inflicted 'incident'.

Most of the Chortin who'd been imprisoned wanted to leave to their homeland, but most of the Madu had wanted to stay. The trouble had been I wouldn't take just anyone, and they had to have skills to offer me. I fudged my standards for a few exceptions and called it 'room for growth' such as the boy who'd provided for Hali and who she'd begged me to take on, but there were many I sent into Carr to brave their own path despite their requests. I couldn't manage them all.

With the personnel pared down, I set my eyes on the next goal. By design, they were close.

The Death's Consort had been out of my hands for too long.

Death's Consort (Cursed)	
Ship Class	Carrack

Captain	Burdette/Rhistel
Ship Durability	15,205/34,000
Ship level	2
Cursed Status:	Voice of the Crew
	From Nothing
	Blood Payment

Besides losing some durability, my fleet interface told me that nothing had changed aboard my wayward ship. The stalemate between Burdette and Rhistel was unresolved. It was time I resumed control.

I thought long and hard about how I would return, and had equally long discussions about it with the others. The fact was that I had abused those aboard the Consort, but just like I carried my responsibility instead of foisting it on Jones, so too must they. The fact that they had been in strife with each other ever since ousting me did not speak well of their prospects. They needed me to intervene.

And intervene I would.

We tracked them down to the leeward side of an island at the edge of the Broken Isles where they were depending on the remoteness and the stealth field I'd left with the Consort to avoid detection. All my crew could sense the ship when they left it, but they didn't have the same knowledge I had of where anyone in the crew was, else they would have been expecting us.

The Death's Consort looked like a derelict – she'd been battered before I ever left and hadn't improved since. On top of that, the crew had consigned themselves to living on board out of necessity and arranged for shelters however they wished: the sails made a canopy of shade over the deck and scavenged branches from the island made crude huts placed haphazardly.

There was a delineating line across the beam of the ship where no one built a shelter, and that appeared to be the line that divided the two camps on board. On one hand, Burdette and his followers. On the other, Rhistel and his.

I couldn't imagine that Rhistel led an equal piece of the martial strength on board, but we sailed over the real reason as we approached.

"Hello Cherry," I said, sensing the young Charybdis below with my Domain. She seemed intrigued and confused by the Internment's approach, likely because the Consort was the only ship she'd ever sensed sail underwater. Rhistel's friendship with her would be the reason there was a stalemate. She could annihilate the Consort, but they needed the ship to survive more than 24 hours.

I'd planned how I wanted to come aboard as well as how I wanted to pass my judgment of Burdette – that backstabbing conniver. Yet as I scanned the Death's Consort with my Domain I came across something very troubling, something that should not be: there were cursed people on board who were not my cursed people.

A few potential scenarios went through my head, all of which angered me. So rather than the cool, composed yet stern Captain I'd spent so much time forcing my mindset into, as we surfaced alongside to shouts of alarm the Captain they saw coming home was the picture of judgment.

I extended my will over all of theirs, and with my improved Domain it was a simple thing to yank their own willpower away from them like a parent taking a dangerous toy. They froze or collapsed wherever they were, and I leapt from the rising deck of the Final Internment to the cluttered deck of the Death's Consort, Gnar flanking me with a trio of burly orcs.

"CAPTAIN ON DECK!" my lieutenant bellowed.

I immediately strode towards the Captains cabin; just outside of it were a trio of humans, a middle-aged woman, a young woman and a young man. They all had a metal collar around their necks and a chain connecting them to a ring embedded in the deck. They did not freeze like all of my crew did as I had no control over them, but they cowered away from me.

I knelt and gently extended a hand. The young woman slapped at it. I saw other marks along her arm when she did.

"Guard them," I ordered Gnar as I stood. I meant to break down the door to the Captain's cabin directly but a surging presence in my Domain made me sigh in exasperation and turn on my heel.

\*\*\*I slipped past hovels and familiar faces until I came to the familiar face I was looking for. "Hello Rhistel," I said. "Before I commence with cleaning house, tell Cherry to take a break. I don't want to test my hulk's durability against her."

Even as I spoke, the young Charybdis stationed herself under the Final Internment. My ship had protection against bludgeoning damage that I'd pit even against her, but she also had a maw of teeth that would do a better job of shredding the keel than a Kraken's beak could ever

do. Also, any XP I spent restoring the Internment's durability was XP wasted, since I couldn't recoup my losses by slaying her.

I released my hold over Rhistel and the elf immediately bolted to the gunwale, where one of Cherry's tentacles slowly extended as she abandoned her attack. After a minute of silent communication between the two, Cherry withdrew slightly and Rhistel straightened, squared his shoulders, and turned to face me.

"Captain Seaborn," he said crisply. "Cherry has backed down, but she senses your dominion and my fear, and is still waiting under us. I swear on my life that it is her decision, and I am unable to convince her to remove herself further."

I accepted Rhistel's oath. I knew his profession was one tied to befriending animals rather than controlling them, and that there was little he could do if Cherry decided to act out.

"Rhistel," I said, my voice controlled. "Explain to me the condition of this ship. Start with those three." I pointed at the trio who should not be.

Rhistel's face clouded and he bared his teeth. "That one has been experimenting. He tries to create new crew; he tries to dabble with curses and earn his own profession of the deep like yours."

I could infer who 'that one' was. I added it to his tally of crimes. "And these camps? This disarray?"

"We split into two factions," Rhistel explained. "Those who wanted power, control, or whatever else that one convinced them of followed him. The others who wanted to isolate themselves or just hated that one followed me."

"And how would you place those numbers?"

"My faction is smaller," Rhistel admitted. "Cherry is the only reason that one doesn't rule – that and he's been unable to update his profession. I have roughly thirty under my protection, that one has the rest." My anger flared at how many of my crew were backing Burdette. Seeing this, Rhistel hurried on.

"To get a better idea, it would be wiser to add a third camp: those who simply want their freedom. That one has the spearman Zander under him and uses him as one would a rabid beast, convincing many they're better off following him. They have nothing to gain by following me. I can only resist. They just want their freedom; that's all any of us want!"

There was more accusation in those words than I think even he meant to let slip. I had returned with a clear grudge against Burdette, most would be toadying up to me and talking about how they'd stymied Burdette while I was gone.

Not Rhistel. He was too straightforward, too honest. I had no doubt how he described things was how they were. To top it off, the blame he laid at my feet was blame deserved. I might be returning like an avenging spirit, but that didn't mean I'd left innocent.

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"Stay," I ordered him. "You will hear my verdict soon." Then I marched back to the Captain's cabin. I could feel the men inside. I could feel how they railed against my control, fighting to be free for even a moment so they could fight back.

I didn't need to kick the door in, I could have taken care of it other ways. Stopping to practice my lockpicking didn't satisfy me, though. No method brought the message crashing down on the men inside that they'd messed up and their time was coming to an end like the door breaking in.

I stood in the doorway and let my impressions wash over me as my presence washed over them. Burdette was sitting on the edge of his bed, dice still clutched in his hands. Thaddeus the huntsman sat across from him, and Zander the half-mad spearman stood by the door.

I ignored Zander for the moment and strode across the room, kicked the playing table aside and smacked Burdette's hand. He dropped the dice, and pair of snake-eyes stared up at him from the floor where they laid.

Grabbing him by his collar, I hauled Burdette to his feet and dragged him from the cabin. I pulled off his coat and stripped his nine fingers of their rings, throwing the jewelry on the deck. He shook. He couldn't fight my control or take back his own movement, but still he shook with impotent rage.

I shoved him into the arms of an orc. "Hold him."

\*\*\*Then, I walked the decks. I pulled every person from their hiding or resting place, I noted which side of the ship they were on ... I noted how they were doing.

Abner, the carpenter, I pulled from a rats nest of tools and hoarded supplies. When I gave him the chance to speak, he only pleaded with me to let him be.

Willy, the Bosun, standing at the helm like he might yet sail away from this nightmare. He asked if I was going to make them raid again – the brokenness in his tone hit me like an arrow.

Myota, the surgeon, was tucked away in his cabin. He started to lecture about how whatever I did today would only cause future problems, and how the route to true cooperation and peace was through passive noncompliance of things we disagreed with. I allowed him a minute to rant before pulling him up too.



Varinya, the leonid, was guarding a group she saw as her own. She said nothing, only flexing her claws as though pondering whether I was an enemy to defend against or an ally to fight with.

Phillip, the warrior I'd pushed too far, was forcing a man away from antagonizing Varinya. His words hit me like a gut-punch:

"Don't make me kill again. I just found my strength again, I can protect people ... but I can't draw a blade on an innocent soul! I swear that I'll kill myself first!"

To most I only said that they'd hear what was to come soon, or else promise them they were safe. To Phillip, I grabbed his shoulders and looked him in the eye. "You will never draw innocent blood in my service again. I swear it on my life." Overwhelmed tears were flooding his face while I brought him up from the bilges.

Joash, the sailor, started apologizing for ever turning on me and begging forgiveness.

Will, the young lad who'd volunteered to serve me and whose journal inspired me to have the whole crew share their story, gave a lazy smile and quipped about how it was about time things spiced up around here.

Arznaith, the half-elf boy I'd tried to take under my wing, tried to swear eternal service if I only took him away and treated him the way I had before.

Each and every member of the crew I pulled from wherever they were and most I gave a chance to speak. The number of people meant that I was flexing my control over them for over an hour as I worked. Gnar asked if I wanted anyone from the Final Internment to help, but this was something I needed to do personally. Each person here was a reminder of things I'd done, people I'd let suffer. This was my penance – but it was also restitution. I was personally intervening in the lives of every person, letting them know that they were not forgotten.

Going through the artillery deck, I found Sadeo, the kitsune artillerist.

When I saw Sadeo standing next to a scorpion with one of his former pupils – obviously in the midst of a serious talking to rather than a friendly lesson – I couldn't help the tears that burned my eyes. I dropped the restrictions on him and he turned his wide brown eyes towards me.

"I'm sorry, Sadeo," I whispered, finally losing my hold on my emotions. "I'm so sorry!"

He leaped for me and wrapped his arms around my middle, his face pressed into the folds of my coat. "I'm the sorry one, Dom! I never should have turned my back! I should have talked to you, I should have done it straight ..."

We apologized over each other and I stroked his fur as he broke down. "I tried to aim the young pups true; but I had no hope to offer them! For years I kept my spine straight easily, no matter

what foreign place I found myself in. But here I found myself giving in and I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry!"

"You were always my friend, and I should have relied on you." Thinking of what Sadeo had said to me when I'd bought his freedom I said, "What you've done here, trying to carry on and giving hope to my crew while I couldn't – that's a work that should earn your freedom in your own culture too."

I didn't expect the furry hand to slap my face.

"Great battles!" He exclaimed, his voice suddenly firm despite the great watery tears still in his brown eyes. "My debt was formed through defeat, and it is only victory that can erase it! No, none of this 'moral victory' or 'hard effort' will cut it. I'm still with you, and you owe me those battles!" More subdued, he added "But I might be claiming a bit more discernment in the targeting ..."

"You will be one of my officers," I proclaimed, the announcement diminished by the huskiness in my voice. "And you, along with my other friends and advisors, will help keep me on a true heading."

"Now that sounds like a good battle plan," he said with a similar huskiness while extending his small hand for a shake.

I led him topside along with the others, but didn't restrict him again like I had most everyone else.

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When I had everyone on deck, I called over to the *Internment* and had them marshal on the main deck of the hulk as well. Then I spoke to them all – friends and enemies alike.

"When I first took control of the Death's Consort, I did it out of fear. I did it because there were sirens swarming all over, and I refused to lose everyone to them! But I didn't master my fear. I was still scared when we ran off to save the hydra. I was terrified when we sailed for the Broken Isles.

"In my fear and my turmoil and my anger I failed all of you. I failed you first, because as the Captain it was my responsibility to care for you all. You were my responsibility.

"You still are my responsibility! And so today I come back to you, the Captain you mutinied against. I come to fulfill my oath, and I come to pronounce judgement! Once, long ago, I promised you all that I would free you from the curse I laid on you. I didn't know how to do that then, but I've learned since then. I am going to free you, and I am going to see you put ashore as I promised you.

“All but two of you.”

I could sense what people thought, that there were two I was going to punish for stepping into my place. They were only half right. Burdette would get what was coming to him, and Rhistel would have his own punishment, but they were to be very different.

“Zander,” I said stepping to the spearman. Even now he had a feverish light in his eyes, like he hoped I would turn to him again to serve death.

I would not trust Zander again. All of the times I’d unleashed him like a weapon and all the times I’d held him back from savagery ... even as the most talented warrior I’d passed responsibility for the fighters onto others who had better judgement. I recalled looking at him aboard the Mockingbird and ordering him to stand down – how he looked to Burdette instead, and with the approval of one who condoned his killing, ignored my orders.

I’d executed the prisoners on the Final Internment who’d murdered for XP. Of course I would mete out justice amongst my own crew.

“I do not harbor any hate or anger against you,” I said, looking Zander in the eyes and making sure he understood me. “You are like a mad dog in the streets. You don’t rally a public outcry against a mad dog – you put it down.”

I pressed one of Jorgagu’s cursed blades against Zander’s throat. He went wide eyed but couldn’t struggle, he could only bleed. His Constitution resisted the damage of the knife but I would smoothly, inexorably draw it across his throat again.

“Die in peace – but die now.”

Cutting the arteries in the neck creates an exsanguinating bleed, and Zander’s body soon failed him. He collapsed on the deck, eyes staring up, his blood absorbed by the greedy decks.

“Now,” I said, turning in anger towards Burdette. “First we are going to try and rectify the atrocity you have made in those three,” I pointed at the trio chained outside his door. “And may the sea have mercy on you if they can’t be saved!”

From his belt I pulled the whip Promise of Misery, the disciplinary weapon that undergone its own metamorphosis when the ship was cursed.

*Promise of Misery (whip): 0-1 HP damage. High chance of causing increased pain effects. Has a 0.5% chance for each cut to inflict the victim with a curse.*

“Drese!” I yelled, calling the master life mage over from the Internment. Meanwhile I held the whip under Burdette’s nose. “This was your grand plan? Whip people with a cursed item until they’re afflicted and hope that made you eligible for Captain of the Deep?” I hurled the whip at his feet. “Pathetic!” I snapped.

“Captain?” Drese said, the image of decorum. Knowing him as well as I did, I could see the coldness in his eyes.

I pointed towards the trio of traumatized unfortunates. “Do we need him to undo the curse over them?”

Drese analyzed them and glanced at the whip at Burdette’s feet. “I assume this inflicted their status?”

“They have the whip marks all over them, but let’s not jump to conclusions. Let’s hear it straight from the accused’s own mouth.”

I returned Burdette’s will, and he flexed against the brawny orc behind him before discovering his strength stat was outmatched. Then he hurled invectives at me.

“You return now? With a new ship of unfortunates you dare to pretend that anything is different? You’ll never be any more than the whipped boy too angsty to realize how he’s lost his own crew! You ...”

His tirade ended with a satisfying smack as the pommel of my sword impacted the side of his face. I tossed the weapon back into my bag – I’d pull a bigger one out if it proved necessary.

“You’re wrong, Burdette. I know exactly how I lost my crew. You’ll pay for your role in it, but first we have to tend to these unfortunates. As I see it, this is your one opportunity to help mitigate your sentence, because my mercy for you burned up the day you drew your blade on me!”

His eye was swelling but I’d left his jaw unbroken, so his silence was born out of defiance and spite. I let the flash of rage he brought up in me stoke the long-kindled fires I’d harbored in my heart for him.

To avoid striking him again, I turned towards the trio and consulted with Drese. “Well? They aren’t part of my curse.”

“That is likely a positive,” Drese said. “If they were inflicted with a curse as comprehensive as yours it would require someone with your control and expertise to manage it. That weapon,” he flicked his fingers dismissively at the whip. “Is a tool. As horrendous as it is, there is no deeper purpose in it. It is simple, and the curse it inflicted is simple.”

“Can you undo it?”

“I likely could, however I believe you certainly can. This would best come from you.”

I slowly nodded. “This will take all my concentration.” I turned and gave the command “Kneel!” and all my old crew did so except Burdette. Then I had Gnar bring over his marines and they stood over those kneeling before I finally released my hold over my crews’ will.

I'll admit there was something satisfying in having my old crew kneel after they'd risen against me, but I wasn't a tyrant trying to lord it over them. I wanted them kneeling because it made it easy to keep them all pacified – I didn't trust all of them anymore.

Then I turned my focus to the three, took off my hat, and sat on the deck beside them. "Hi there, my name is Domenic. I'm the true Captain here, and I am going to save you. Tell me your name?"

Drese stood over me and nodded imperceptibly as I coaxed the first of the three out of their fear into sharing their story. There was nothing there I didn't expect, they'd been randomly abducted. They hadn't been the only ones but the older ones had been discarded already, thrown to the sea where they died. There had been a fight on board the day they were brought back, Burdette has mocked the others but Cherry had appeared, forcing him to withdraw with them.

Where he had lashed them dozens and dozens of times until the cursed effect took hold.

I made them retell their story and tried to be a voice of comfort during it but I was frightening in my own aspect. Still, personalization was often important in any curse.

When I manifested my life magic their curse – tasted – different. Yet it also carried many similarities to my own curse and the one shared by my crew. The young woman closest to me was the first cleansed, as the cursed status vanished from her. The other two were quickly cleansed after that, as I had a better understanding of it.

They all huddled together again once more, but this time they were drawing strength from each other. Done; there was a crises averted. My actions or not, I knew that these three would haunt me if I wasn't able to restore them.

I returned to Burdette, and the hateful look he gave me was matched only by my own towards him. He worked up a wad of saliva and spat on me. Wiping it away, I spoke up.

"So that all may hear and know exactly what kind of man you are, I give you one more chance to speak before I pronounce your doom."

"My doom will haunt you," he hissed. "It will haunt you all! You think I won't go straight to Davy Jones? One year, ten, or a hundred, you will see me again and rue this day!"

"Davy Jones," I said. "Is a being with an agenda, plots, and strategies. I called him chaotic to his face and he took me to task for it. Cruel and uncaring? Yes, he is that and more. In that way you can emulate him, Burdette. But Davy Jones is a man of the sea. His passion is brighter than his greed – and that's why he is feared and you are petty."

He snarled and tried to say something more, but he'd had his chance and I wasn't going to bandy words with him all afternoon.

“You claim that you will haunt us? No, Burdette, but you will haunt the deep.” I let the flames of anger and bitterness I’d felt towards my former first mate surge within me. I’d recently practiced undoing curses, now I flipped the script. “Burdette, I curse you as a traitor! I curse you as a vile, cruel slaver! May you feel the weight of the chains that you have forced others into! May you suffer the same agonies as those you’ve wronged until their bitterness has become a buried memory!”

The orc holding Burdette dropped him as spectral chains crashed down on him, forcing the man to his knees. Burdette howled like he felt a hundred brands upon his skin. His flesh seemed to writhe with phantom blows.

“May you be cursed, Burdette,” I proclaimed. “And may your suffering be long.”

With a heavy kick from my boot, I sent Burdette backwards. He flipped over the gunwale and crashed into the sea below, the weight of his own transgressions dragging him to the bottom.

Drese was at my side, watching the ripples disappear with me. “That wasn’t the judgement you’d planned, Captain.”

“It was the judgement he deserved.” I said, straightening my coat. Then I turned back to the rest of my crew.

All of my crew – for the first time in a long time, they were all right here.