

excerpt from:

walk the plank, eyes wide open

an ongoing One Piece OC fanfiction

Fic Summary:

Death meets girl, boy meets death. The end. The beginning.

or: Portgas D. Ace discovers dying isn't the end of the line, yet — unfortunately, he's now in dire need of someone who can see him. All Lana wanted was everything *but* to be dragged off on some quest she's got no interest in.

or: People die. But this is not the story of their death - this is about things left behind.

Premise:

Ace, after dying, finds himself a ghost unable to move on. He figures his only unresolved business is with Sabo, who he realized might actually be alive, and finds the user of the spirit fruit to help him find his brother. Ghosts are imperceptible to the living except for the spirit fruit user, who they can interact with as if they were alive. Together with the child ghost Remi, they make their way through South Blue and back into the Grand Line. The story explores themes of responsibility, identity, grief and all the fun choices of living and dying.

Arc/chapter premise:

The following is an excerpt from the "Baterilla Arc" where Ace and company shipwreck on an island that has a complicated haunted history with Rouge and what happened 22 years ago during the hunt for the "Pirate King's son". While Remi went exploring, Ace got Lana captured by the resident Marines and she is being brought to their base.

excerpt from chapter 2, PART II ("Baterilla Arc"): ca. 1.3k

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PART II (*who stops your bones from wondering just who you are*)

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(...)

The courtyard opens before them, greeting them with clouds looming above and hot-and-cold, tense air. Something else that greets them is a body literally thrown right into the group and through the two Marines in front, bowling Lana over and into her captors. Across the way two people are locked in furious combat, another person whose face is in the process of rearranging its bone structure back into order, hiding a little blue-haired girl half behind her — a girl who brightens and yells: "Hey Ace! Lana! I found some friends!"

"Portgas D. Ace!?"

And in the following minutes, all hell breaks loose.

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(Listen, Portgas D. Ace is aware that he is a very important person across all seas. He was a world-renowned pirate with a *five hundred fifty million beli bounty*. His scheduled execution started a war that killed hundreds, maybe thousands, that destabilized the world order and started another wave of piracy. *He knows*. Countless encounters since have taught him very well exactly how many deaths are placed on his shoulders, the shoulders of someone they really identify as Gol D. Ace. He has been recognized and ambushed enough times to settle into a routine:)

His grin shows entirely too many teeth to be friendly. "Who's asking?"

"Commander da Costa," growls the taller of the two previously locked in combat, all wild black curls and gnashing teeth, "*And you are a dead man!*"

Ace laughs. *That's almost funny*. "True. What do you want?"

"It's you," the woman in front of Remi murmurs, steps forward, her face twisted in an entirely different manner than before, "You're the reason. Bluebird, why didn't you tell us?" Her hand strokes Remi's hair. "He's no friend to anyone here."

Something in Ace begins to boil, spill over, and he has the ghost trying to sneak up behind him hanging in his fist by the throat in a second. It's the one that flew into their group of escorting marines, he notes, regarding her with a smile he doesn't feel. "Hey there," he says pleasantly, vaguely registering Remi's protests in the background. The woman in his grip meets his gaze unflinchingly over his fingers, eyes full of distaste, as if he was just something nasty sticking to the sole of her shoe rather than in the process of strangling her. In the corner of his eyes, he watches da Costa seething, the woman with Remi shaking, da Costa's opponent stalking to her side, stony face in Ace's direction. All of them are closing in on him, slowly, loathing dripping from every pore.

"Want to explain your problem with me, or is it the usual?" Ace thinks he's heard it all, from blame for the war or the root of piracy, has listened to insults thrown at him and the names of his family cursed. Some of those will accelerate the situation more than others, and feeling the stabbing fear and rage permeating the air, just like down in the town, he suspects—

"The *Pirate Prince*," the woman in his grip purrs, "He finally graces us with his presence. Did you miss your mommy? Too bad, **the whore is not here.**"

Ace's vision goes red.

—(He woke up on a battlefield among rubble, the stench of blood still in the air and iron and dust on his lips, between his teeth – already knowing, with utter certainty, that he was dead. He'd known even before stumbling straight through the first of the marines who were working cleanup, shivering in an unnatural cold. What he didn't know was—

"What are you doing here." Ace looked up, almost flinched at the black hatred pouring from the eyes of the other ghost, his coat blazing with the letters for justice. "You do not get to be here, just like the other pirates. *But especially you.*"

His tongue felt like lead. "My brother— Luffy."

"If you don't disappear right now, I and the others will do what we've done to the ones who woke before you and did not leave at once."

The air seemed to press against his head, his lungs. "What— who? I don't know—"

"Leave."

And Ace finally snapped, shook himself. "How?! I just died! Give me a second!"

The Marine smiled, utterly devoid of joy. "It's been days. You don't have it."

They did not care that Portgas D. Ace hadn't wanted a war, hadn't asked anyone to die for him. That every pirate knew what they signed up for, just as every marine should know the same. They and theirs were the ones having called for his execution in the first place, knowing full well what it could mean, had prepared for it, what *right* did they have—

Ace died another six times before he figured out how to get off the god-forsaken island, and he never went down without a fight. Afterwards, he was quick to learn how to keep the ghosts from reforming for longer periods, what needed to be done to prevent them from trying again.

It is, after all, quite handy that he got to keep his devil fruit in the afterlife.)—

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Years ago, people died, and stayed. It was not a pleasant affair; deaths rarely are. A husband fought for his wife, a wife shielded her unprotected middle. A commander was betrayed, a lieutenant failed to save him. There's others, but they know better than to get into the middle of this.

Children were crying in the distance; they could do nothing else.

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(...)

Ace spends the night on the floor, his back leaning against the bed and facing the window. The kid is snuggled into Lana's side, pretending to sleep, even though they both know she can't.

"I am sorry," Ace says into the silence. "I don't like doing— I'm not proud of it. It's terrible, you're right, kid."

The quiet stretches, Lana's deep and regular breaths are the only sound, assuring them that she's fine. He almost thinks there won't be an answer, until a quiet voice ventures, "Why did you do it?"

"I'm," Ace hesitates, then sighs. "I'm a very famous pirate who died in a war some time ago. A lot of ghosts think their deaths and others' are my fault. They are so angry and hate me so much that— in a nutshell, they do to me what I did to them. Me doing it first stops them from trying it again."

"Is it?" Remi asks, cautious. "Your fault, I mean."

"No." It isn't. He can't— he isn't responsible for other people's choices. If they were there, then they knew what they signed up for. He never— he's not responsible for goddamn *piracy*. Isn't that the whole idea of being a pirate — that you only have yourself to answer both for and to?

Remi shuffles around and Ace turns his head to see her looking at him in the darkness.

"Then why do they blame you?"

His breath hitches, because it all comes down to one thing. He tries to smile. "Because the man that— my f—" he grimaces, but he has to, or Remi won't understand what he means, "because my father was a very bad, very famous pirate, and a lot of people hated him and are out for revenge for the things he did and caused. I'm the son of a monster, so I'm a monster."

Remi hums and settles back in. "That's silly."

"What is?"

"Hating you because of your dad. Burning Rosa and Corin and the others was all you and still horrible. Everyone's their own person. Hating you for your dad is stupid."

She doesn't understand. Ace winces, disappointment clogging his throat. He turns his head back around and looks out the window, watching the moon and swallowing his first instinctive retort. *He's not my dad*. "Is it really?"

The night breathes, and doesn't respond.

(...)

Read the full fic on <https://archiveofourown.org/works/15464688/chapters/35899509>