

Moonlight glittered the waters as *The Ispilu* floated on the waves. It was early night and the moon hung low and shy, keeping her face hidden behind the clouds that smudged the sky. Up in the nest, Percy had dozed off after we'd furled the sails and Captain Cornelius retired to his cabin. This ship kept a smaller crew than I was used to, so we often only sailed during daylight, saving the nights for rest and recovery with just a few men keeping eye as we bobbed on the water.

I was meant to be keeping watch over the rear portside but had fallen asleep next to a pile of sailcloth needing mending. I'd closed my eyes for what felt like nothing more than a breath or two when I woke to Percy yelling "Sails! Sails ahead Captain!".

I glanced up and saw Percy pointing starboard. I leaped up, sprinting across the deck, and leaned as far out over the taffrail as my body would let me. It was dark. Dark as pitch without the moon, but in the breaks of the clouds I could clearly see a ship coming up alongside ours, sailing the same direction in which we were set. She couldn't have been more than a stone's throw away.

She moved so slow, as though it were possible to crawl atop the sea. As she eased by I glanced about the stern and drew a quick breath as I read the read words that were scribed there: *The Ulipsi*. I eyed the ship over again, bow to stern, and couldn't help notice how she must've come from our own motherland as she was built just like our Ispilu, carried the same colors, and even seemed to boast the same cargo.

I was eyeing the rigging, the main and foresails, and it was all identical. Even the rusted horseshoe hanging from the mast - Captain's superstition to ward away storms - they had one too. It wasn't until my gaze rested upon the sailor leaning over the rails of our sister ship that I realized we may be more similar than I thought.

He was dressed in the same ragged outfit as I, holes in the same places, the same rope keeping the same oversized britches from falling to the floor. I raised a hand to him, and at the exact same moment, his arm raised to me as well.

His blonde hair billowed in the wind, mirroring mine. I waved my hand in the air, wiggled my fingers, held my arm straight to one side, then the other, and watched in confusion as the man across the sea did the *exact* same.

Was I being tricked? Was he just very apt at mimicking my movements and the dim light of the intermittent moon made it seem as though something more supernatural was at play?

I cupped my hands to my mouth and watched as he did the same. I wanted to yell to him, knowing it would be impossible for him to match my words the same way he had my movements, but to my horror, it was as though his voice was speaking almost before mine this time, shouting the words at the exact same moment I was.

Our lips moved together, and though the lapping of waves and creaks and groans of our ships were loud in the night, I heard him call to me just as clear as I heard myself call to him.

“Ahoy, mate! Fine night for sailing, aye?” As our hands dropped, his head quickly cocked to the side as his eyes opened wide and a grin spread across his face. It was the first time his movements didn’t match mine, and that was somehow worse.

What was more horrifying was that he didn’t seem as confused as I did. I stumbled back, nearly tripping over some rope laying in wait at my feet before scrambling up and running to the Captain’s cabin.

“Cap’n! Cap’n Cornelius, sir!” The Captain was already outside, leaned against the helm as he twirled his knife in his fingers.

“I know boy, calm yourself.” He seemed unconcerned as he gazed at the other ship. His eyes were narrowed and focused as if he was admiring his next acquisition.

“Captain, surely you don’t mean to try and take her?” I turned my gaze to the other vessel and watched as the other me stood next to his Captain Cornelius, both of them smiling wide, the corners of their mouths nearly splitting their faces in two.

“No boy, we’re going to let her pass and not interfere. Sorry if no one enlightened you as to why this ship runs with but a skeleton crew. ‘Tis not for the fever, or the harsh love of the sea.” He cleared his throat and turned his gaze to me, gray eyes shining against the sporadic light of the moon.

“‘Tis the Curse of the Ispilu Ulipsi I’m afraid, and many seaworthy men know of it so they stay far away. The lot we run with either have a death wish or their curiosity outweighs their wits. I’m sorry no one told you, but if we just leave them be, no harm will come. Back to bed now, Percy will make sure they pass.”

As I walked back to my spot on the deck near the pile of sailcloth, I watched as the other me did the same; kneeling down, leaning back, nestling in. We kept eyes on each other until we couldn’t, until The Ulipsi disappeared from our view and I imagine we disappeared from hers.