

No one stays long in a pirate's jail.

Most of the time they can't really afford to keep you and the other part is that they don't want to. Still, chatting up the wrong tree had ended Locke into and swiftly out of the last port stop jail, delaying the captain's departure. Which had landed his sorry ass on nighttime lookout duty with some minor tidying chores.

How was it his fault not knowing another ship's captain was happily married? She'd chatted him up! And his smooth talking had him ended up with a nasty bruise to the face and a bartender blaming him so as not to get on the surprise-married captain's bad side. Even now his cheek still ached at the memory. Broom in hand he looked over the side of the ship at the dark waters. The moon still held some light over the water casting rippled reflections.

Maybe it was good he'd landed himself here, maybe no one else would have seen the debris in the water. Or the figure floating looking half dead clutching wood that threatened to sink beneath the dark waves.

"Man overboard!"

The crew flew through the shout to get the ship near enough and Locke along with the others eventually got the waterlogged person aboard. He was surprised to see short and stark blond hair, it wasn't common around where they were. They had a collection of face piercings and pale skin. Faint tattoo outlines could be seen through the wet white shirt they wore.

Locke didn't see much more of them as other crewmates hauled them off to a spare bunk and some emergency care. They didn't have much for a doctor aboard, it would be a kindness if they survived with minimal injury. The captain had commended him for locating the blond in the water, and without much else everything settled back into the usual nighttime routine. Tomorrow, after things had calmed down and Locke was off his tasks, he would see if they lived or died.

They wouldn't have to wait till then. Gossip traveled quicker than time on a boat like theirs, any new bit of information was golden and it flowed like wine. They were alive. Captain had gone in to talk with them. No one else except the Captain's personal confidants are allowed with them. Why so secretive? Did the Captain know them?

Too many rumors and suspected ideas for Locke to really fixate on one or another. Part of why Locke didn't have to wait for his answer was when they served lunch the next morning he was out on deck when the Captain walked out with the blond. Walking and very Not Dead. Looked like shit, but not dead. He didn't have to wait to talk to them either since the pair found and strode up to him immediately.

"This one's Locke. They're the one who found you out there and to thank, for saving you."

Being put on the spot like that made him feel a slight but anxious so of course charm and wit were the first two weapons he held, “It was more than just me who pulled them outta the sea Captain. You’re looking much better than last night.”

“...thank you.” The blond had a cool toned voice, low and raw, probably pitched that way from the salt water.

“Sure, sure.” Locke waved a hand with ease. But the Captain stayed and Locke quirked an eyebrow. “Hope you recover quickly.”

“Since you spotted them and we’re weeks away from our destination I figure I can let you off extra night duties.” Locke blinked as the Captain continued to speak, that was generous. Then came the next words, “Instead I’ll have you show London about the ship. Get them acquainted with the old girl for the next few days and be their contact. We can call that equal for your ass making us late even getting out here.”

London nodded and shook the Captain’s hand who seemed satisfied, wrapping things up, “We’ve reached an arrangement on our end as well for passage.” With that the Captain called it good enough and left leaving both standing awkwardly on the deck.

London shifted as Locke awkwardly turned to finish their task of looping rope. “Sorry for the inconvenience,” they said and Locke shrugged.

“It’s fine. Come here and I’ll show you what I’m doing.”

Surprisingly for Locke, London fell into step with them fairly easily. It was clear the blond didn’t have the rough hands of someone who worked all day on ships. That surprised him, just who was this person? What happened at that wreck? Normally he wouldn’t think twice about asking but every night after working London would go to the Captain’s quarters to discuss things over dinner. And during work they seemed too focused on learning. After three of work Locke noticed the rawness on their hands.

“There’s some medical stuff in a spare chest in one of the sleeping spots. We don’t have a fancy doc or anything but I think I saw the last one put some stuff on a guy’s bleeding hands.” It was awkward but it caught London’s attention.

“Is that so?” She said, “Good to know it’s there.”

“Why’s that?? You are going to use it right?” It sounded like London was dismissing the medicine.

They smiled and it was small, a thin line, “I will if I need to. These aren’t too bad, just forming blisters. They feel and look extra raw because of the salt from the sea and air. Besides, I’m not

working with you doing these basic things forever. Just need to know what to do here during emergencies.”

“Oh.” Locke seemed dumbfounded. He thought London was supposed to be learning deckhand stuff. Normal stuff. “Why...?”

She smiled for real and Locke blinked at the difference. It was a little wider than the small one to where the shape of their lips was more pronounced. Someone had given them a bit of dark paint for their lips. It seemed to suit them much better than without, when they’d been brought aboard after near drowning their face had been washed out and their lips much too pale. They could have been described more like a wraith than a living person.

“You’re not one of those ship gossips are you Locke?” London tipped their head and Locke returned the smile with their own easy one.

“Me? Of course not?” Absolutely he enjoyed gossip but sharing it came sparingly. He was willing to let something slip for extra alcohol or a good few puffs off someone’s smoke rope. He supposed depending on the gossip he wasn’t one.

London seemed to catch something in how he spoke and shook their head. “I’m not one to spill the Captain’s announcement. But I’ll tell you I’ve got a different job here for the next few weeks till the next port of call. I’m not officially on the crew by any means. We’ve only got a few more days of this together but your Captain should make the announcement soon.”

“New job? There’s not really any vacancies... Haven’t seen you with anyone else but me.”

“Mm, that’s true. Oh don’t panic, I’m not replacing you remember? What I’m doing is temporary.”

Locke still looked confused.

London sighed but looked like they expected this. They reached forward and grabbed Locke’s hand, turning it over. It had happened quickly but Locke didn’t mind. “You’re a good person Locke.”

“You can tell that much by looking at my hand?” He responded jovially. “Captain’s got you as a psychic?”

“If I could read fortunes I probably wouldn’t have ended up here on this ship. Or gotten the chance to meet you.”

Locke felt his ears burn a little at it and pulled his hand back. There was a slight mischievous glance London gave them. In the few days being with the blond Locke realized they were quiet but found ways to poke and prod other crew members even in the short time they’d lived with

everyone. There were more than a few sailors suspicious of their presence but no one had outright bothered London.

“Let’s have dinner later Locke. That way I can get your reaction firsthand.”

Dinner that evening was fine. Crew ate in shifts but during the largest one was when the Captain spoke to the whole crew. Locke was sitting with London as requested and there had been more than a few jabs at Locke throughout the ship about his new Mate. All of which he’d waved off.

“Hey all yall, shut up and listen!” The first mate called the room to attention. Locke tore off a piece of hard bread as the announcement started. It was a pretty plain announcement speech and so far nothing to do with London. Really? Nothing special? Which had Locke looking on in confusion until the specific announcement hit.

“You all know we’ve been out without a doc for a while. You can thank Locke over there for fishing one out of the ocean!” The rest of the crew laughed and cheered. Locke’s face burned with the attention as various members came over to roughhouse with not only them but London as well. “Doc Grey will be with us till we reach Trent, the next main port stop. Till then they’ll be doin some routine shit, don’t give em *too* hard of a time alright?”

Locke could hardly maintain a neutral look among all the frivolity. People started asking about celebrating and tossing around a few drinks and soon everyone caved and within the hour a party was in full swing. Locke could barely get a word in to London as crew member after crew member came by to congratulate, ache or berate some illness or well wish. The man finally gave up deciding to enjoy the party.

The blond of the hour found him later, deep into a third cup of rum leaning with their back to the sturdy wood of the port side of the ship edge. They too held a cup and lifted it. “Ship doc,” Locke said, “I would have never guessed that.”

“It’s not like it’s an easily spotted profession outside of an emergency.” London said and went to stand next to them, brushing against Locke’s shoulder. “But yes, where I’m from I know my physick and apothecaries.”

“That’s pretty damn wild.” Locke took another drink from his mug. “So...why were you out there on the waves? What happened?”

London looked out at the crew dancing and moving to torchlight on the deck. “Pirate attack, but not yours of course.” They took in a breath and drank from their own cup. “I don’t blame them necessarily, you’d think I would. They didn’t know I was a doctor either, else I’d be on someone else’s ship. Maybe being ransomed off. There were a lot of people on that ship that would fetch a good ransom price for what the ship was.” The way they talked every word dropped like they were just stating the obvious. And they in fact were but still.

Locke leaned over and with one hand turned London's face, pressing their lips together in the next motion. It was quick and there was a tiny bit of surprise on the blond's face that Locke tucked away for themselves, a secret expression no one else had seen. "Look, I know how other pirates are but give me a chance to show you one pirate who isn't so bad?" He grinned and held his arms open.

And then London laughed. A light one, small, and drained their cup. "Bold. Careful pirate, I might just take you apart in ways you aren't expecting."

"I've been around all kinds, doctor." Locke said and turned to face them, all charm and warm drink flooding his veins.

"All the more reason I should check you out." They matched his candor and Locke felt his arm being tugged as London led him out onto the deck.

Fire danced, catching the stars just overhead. The world moved from the deck to the stairs and tumbling into a corner and then a hammock. Privacy was nonexistent but neither cared. The next morning Locke sat up in his hammock bleary eyed as he looked around. London was nearby, already awake with a few bruises stark against the pale skin of their neck. Turning to see Locke was awake they reached out and smoothed his long hair.

"Your endurance is pretty good, pirate." They smiled, "Hope your ego can stand the teasing for the next few weeks." There was a note of knowing as they headed out of the sleeping area to go above deck.

A snicker from behind them caused Locke to turn, seeing a few more crewmates looking pointedly at him as a blush crept up his neck. It was going to be a very interesting next couple of weeks.

[I'VE GOT AN IDEA FOR A SECOND/THIRD PART BUT IT WAS GETTING A LITTLE LONG TO FINISH IN TIME THE WAY I WANT IT WRITTEN SO STAY TUNED.

HAPPY VALENTINES KAYLA!!! 