

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Deirdre wakes up!

-x-X-x-

Deirdre jerks back to consciousness with a gasp, waking and sitting up in the same moment. She tenses a moment later, half-expecting her back to scream in protest. Instead, what she feels is... muted at best. There's still a deep ache back there from where Stephanie had delighted in whipping her bloody, but not nearly the agony she's anticipating.

More than that... she's in bed. Not *her* bed, obviously. But she's in a bed, and not a half-bad one either. It's small but still surprisingly comfortable, with a blanket laid over her that she's all but flung off in her half-sleeping haste.

Slowly, it starts to come back to her. Stephanie had been torturing her again when suddenly things had changed quite quickly. She'd been... rescued? Except her rescuer was a Sky Pirate. So of course, after he'd given her his pistol and she'd shot Stephanie dead, she'd tried to use it to force him to return her to her family.

And then she'd passed out like a... she didn't know what, but her disappointment in herself was immeasurable all the same. Still, despite passing out, it seems her prospects have dramatically improved. Down in that dungeon, she hadn't even had proper clothes. Now, it seems like she's been bandaged up with some sort of healing ointment that has already dramatically improved her health and then dressed in a plain nightgown and tucked into bed.

Shortly after taking stock of all of this, Deirdre's eyes finally move beyond the bed... only to fall upon the nightstand where there's a pistol sitting innocuously. Deirdre's eyes widen and she immediately snatches up the firearm, checking it over. She's honestly not expecting it to be loaded or anything like that... but it is. With one bullet.

What kind of message is that bastard pirate trying to send? 'Better not miss'? Ugh... she didn't understand him one bit... but at the same time, she owed him everything didn't she? And he was rather handsome too...

Deirdre begins to flush as she ponders that while fiddling with the pistol in her hands. Honestly, after her experiences, one would think she would not at all be inclined to cooing over handsome men... but there was something to be said about Leon Bartfort, was there not? He might even be worthy of her... attention.

Just as she's starting to envision it, the doorhandle starts to turn and Deirdre immediately has the pistol pointed at it. Obviously she's not intending to shoot her savior out of hand or anything like that, but she won't be taken advantage of!

Of course when she actually sees who's coming through the other side of the door, she very nearly pulls the trigger right then and there. Carla Fou Wayne is the last woman Deirdre wants to see right now... especially given she only recognizes the lesser noblewoman because she was always one of Stephanie Fou Offrey's toadies back at the Academy.

"Eep! Please d-don't shoot!"

Carla responds to having a gun pointed at her by immediately lifting her hands in surrender, which is probably the only thing that saves her life.

Because Deirdre is now left wondering if she actually escaped House Offrey's clutches at all.

"... What are you doing here? Where are we?"

She'd assumed this was Devil Smile's ship, but Carla's presence has thrown everything out of whack. Deirdre keeps her arms as straight as she can, pointing the pistol unerringly at Carla's chest. If she needs to, she'll shoot this woman just like she shot Stephanie.

"I... this is Captain Bartfort's s-ship! We're safe! You're s-safe!"

Deirdre's eyes narrow into slits.

"But why are you here? I know you, Carla Fou Wayne... I know you as that Offrey Bitch's right hand cunt."

"N-No, it's not like that. I... she tossed me aside... she sold me off t-to the Winged Sharks. I'm not... I hold no allegiance to Stephanie Fou Offrey. I swear it."

Huh. The crazy thing is, Deirdre can believe it. That sounded like exactly the sort of thing that crazy bitch would have done. Not only a terrible cunt to her enemies, but even her allies and subordinates. All Carla would have had to do was make a single mistake and Stephanie would have probably gotten rid of her just like that.

That said, the way Carla was talking about the other woman...

"I should imagine you wouldn't considering she's dead now."

Deirdre's dry delivery is rewarded with wide eyes from Carla, the shocked expression on the blue-haired girl's face making it clear that she hadn't known.

"She... she's dead?"

Smirking, still holding up the pistol, Deirdre nods.

"What? Bartfort not tell you? I killed her myself. And I'd do it again too."

There's a brief pause as Carla processes her words and feels some collection of emotions over them. Finally though... the other woman settles on a vicious satisfaction.

"Good. My only regret is that I didn't get to pull the trigger myself."

... Deirdre believes her. That sort of vindictiveness is hard to fake. She should know, she's nothing if not a vengeful bitch herself. With a sigh, she carefully lowers the pistol back down to the bed, though she doesn't fully take her hand off of it.

"I'd apologize for robbing you of that chance, but I had a far greater claim to her life in the end."

To her mild surprise, Carla doesn't try to dispute that point. In fact, she outright nods, her face turning rather grave and her jaw setting.

"Yes... on that I feel we agree. I... I'm sorry you had to go through all of that, Lady Roseblade."

Deirdre blinks... before stiffening as she realizes where Carla's sudden attitude shift is coming from.

“You tended to my wounds then, did you?”

Carla looks discomfited for a moment before hesitantly nodding.

“Y-Yes. Captain Leon did not want to... well, he had no desire to dishonor you, Lady Roseblade. He supplied the bandages and a special ointment he said would speed up your healing... I did the work. A-Apologies if you have any complaints, I’m admittedly not well versed in such things.”

Hm. Deirdre isn’t sure how to feel for a moment. On the one hand, society dictated that a man, especially a brigand and pirate like Devil’s Smile, should not lay a hand on a lady like her. Especially not on any of her... intimate areas.

On the other hand, it was not a man who had done all of this damage to her. It was not a man who had whipped her bloody again and again for weeks, torturing her and trying to break her so she would serve beneath the station that her noble blood demanded of her.

Knowing a woman cleaned her wounds and bandaged her up does not fill Deirdre with the relief or solace that it maybe should. At this point, she could care less about her virtue or anything like that.

... But at the same time, she can’t really bring herself to take that out on Carla. The other woman was a victim of Offrey’s insanity the same as her, and they’d both made it out alive at least. That said...

“Help me up.”

Carla blinks.

“W-What?”

Huffing, Deirdre gestures with the pistol, prompting the other noblewoman to squeak.

“I said help me up. I want to go and speak with the Captain.”

Wringing her hands, Carla hesitates.

“A-Are you sure? You should rest some more first, d-don’t you think? Not to mention... he’s *terrifying*. I don’t know if you want to t-test his forbearance, Lady Roseblade.”

Deirdre scoffs and lifts up the pistol.

“If he didn’t want me to ‘test his forbearance’, he shouldn’t have left me armed. Now come, I require your assistance. And I’m not asking.”

Carla gulps but that last bit finally gets her to shuffle over to the side of the bed. Moving away the blankets, they get Deirdre onto her feet... and as expected, despite her back merely aching rather than leaving her in agonizing pain, her knees still buckle a bit when she tries to stand up.

She’d been dangling from the ceiling of House Offrey’s dungeon for weeks and after all that her body has been through, it’s not surprising that it doesn’t want to keep going. But Deirdre powers through all the same with a little bit of help from Carla, the other woman giving her a literal shoulder to lean on.

With one arm around Carla’s neck and the other holding the pistol, they hobble out of the bedroom and into the hall together. Deirdre half raises the pistol up again when she sees what appear to be men waiting outside of

the room... but then she notices they aren't men at all, even as Carla squeaks.

"W-Wait! They're golems, shooting them won't do anything."

Deirdre had already realized that much, but in the end she just grunts and nods, letting Carla continue to half-drag her down the hall. Fortunately it turns out to not be a very big airship, and before she knows it, they're entering another room... where the man himself awaits them.

Leon Bartfort looks up from what he's doing and raises an eyebrow when he sees them both standing there.

"Carla, when I assigned you to look after our passenger, I don't remember telling you she had free rein of the ship."

Carla eeps but before she can try to apologize, Deirdre huffs and lifts up the pistol.

"Didn't give her a choice in the matter."

The look that Devil's Smile throws her way at that makes it clear he doesn't buy Deirdre's bullshit for a second. Rather than argue the point, however, Deirdre just points the pistol at him again.

"Where are we going?"

If Leon Bartfort is worried about having a loaded pistol pointed at him, he doesn't show it. In fact, he seems more amused than anything. Part of her wants to shoot him for that alone, maybe in the leg or something... but it's a small sadistic part of her that Deirdre has spent her entire life suppressing

to middling success. Ultimately, she only has one shot... so if she's going to use it, it needs to count.

"Did we not make a deal, Lady Roseblade? You told me yourself that if I return you to your family, I will be rewarded handsomely for doing so. And so, that's exactly what I'm doing."

He... Deirdre scowls.

"Do you think me dimwitted? You are a wanted man, Devil's Smile. You most certainly know that if you take me directly to my father, he will be honor-bound to apprehend you. Not to mention..."

She pauses for a moment as she realizes that Leon wouldn't know this next bit and maybe she shouldn't be the one to tell him it all things considered. Especially if she wanted him to try and return her to her family. And yet... she also can't keep it from him. Not if he's about to fly them right into a trap.

"You should know that before she died, Stephanie told me the Winged Sharks are sieging my family's seat. If you try to return me to my father, you'll be flying us straight into their fleet."

Whether Leon already knew that or not, Deirdre can't quite tell. He merely raises an eyebrow in response, making it difficult to figure out whether its news to him. In the end...

"Well then, it's a good thing I'm not taking you to your father, isn't it?"

This man... Deirdre growls and points the pistol back at him from where it had started to droop as her arm strength began to waver.

“You are being insufferable! Speak plainly, will you try to deliver me back to my family or not?”

The Devil’s Smile has the gall to look affronted by the question, making her want to shoot him even more.

“Of course I will. I’m taking you to your sister, not your father.”

What. Deirdre’s brain hiccups for a moment before she remembers the other thing Stephanie had told her. Her grip on the pistol tightens up as she clenches her jaw.

“... And my sister is safe and unharmed?”

Leon Bartfort smiles.

“She is. Not all pirates are the same, Lady Roseblade. The Winged Sharks that your rival nobles have employed are a stain on the name of Sky Pirates everywhere. They tried to capture your sister just as they captured you... but they failed. My brother saved her, actually. Now we are on our way to them, where you will be reunited. In the meantime, I suggest you rest up and recover some more of your strength. Poor Carla doesn’t look like she can hold you up much longer.”

... Ugh, she hadn’t even realized how much she’d started to lean on the other woman or how much she’d slumped, but he’s not wrong. Still... is he telling the truth about Dorothea? Is her older sister truly fine?

In the end, Deirdre has no choice but to believe him... for now. She keeps the pistol in her clutches though, even as Carla takes her back to her room. She won’t be defenseless or helpless if she can help it. Not ever again.

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Leon watches Deirdre and Carla depart for a long moment before turning his gaze back to what he was working on before. Was it a bit wrong to make Deirdre Roseblade think she had a loaded pistol, even going so far as to disguise it thoroughly in the event that she checked it over? Perhaps, but so long as she didn't fire it, the false security would hopefully help her recover a bit from her ordeal.

In the meantime, they were headed back to Tortuga as fast as the Going Merry could go. The news that the Winged Sharks were flat out attacking an Earl's Seat was interesting, but not his problem at the moment. Though a wry grin does spread across his face as he imagines Angelica will almost certainly make it his problem once she finds out about it.

That's alright though. Destroying the Winged Sharks once and for all will be its own reward...

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A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!