

Wedding Night Woes - Test

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EXT. THE PRAGMANAUT DECK

The first thing I can feel as I wake up is the pounding headache, but the claustrophobia is a close second.

SCARLETTE
(thinking)
The ship..!

I remembered our passenger ship being boarded, the sounds of fighting... But after that? Cursing my luck, I cautiously lift the lid of the barrel I'd taken refuge in.

I'm greeted, not by the desperate people or the rancid smells of the ferry, but by a magnificent and pristine vessel easily ten times its size. My heart starts racing as I imagine rough, extravagant pirates and my fate should they find me.

To my surprise, a man in a stately, well-groomed uniform passes nearby. A naval officer of some kind, I surmise. At least that rules out being murdered by pirates... My relief is short-lived.

CAPTAIN LAPACHE
Crack open each one. Itemize
everything that was taken before we
return by nightfall!

I hazard a quick look. The captain is a swarthy, stout man who looks like he could carry a horse while briskly jogging. His unkempt beard covers the whole of his face.

There are maybe two or three barrels in front of mine. Not enough time to think of a good escape plan. Before I can properly panic, my heart freezes. I spot Valtice standing confidently next to the captain. Of all the horrid luck..! Maybe pirates wasn't the worst option.

SCARLETTE
(thinking)
What's **he** doing here?!

I lower the lid as several deckhands begin prying open the barrels on either side of mine. Will Valtice even recognize me dressed as a man? Does it matter? Before I can decide if being an unwilling bride is preferable to death, the deckhands shout.

DECKHAND 1
Wine over here, milord!

DECKHAND 2

Wine here too!

There's a momentary pause in the shuffling as I hear a set of heavy feet firmly approach my tenuous hiding place. Another pause and then a small sipping sound.

VALTICE

Exquisite. Boy- bring a couple of these to my quarters. Captain, would you like to join me for a drink?

CAPTAIN LAPACHE

I apologize, my lord, but I must interrogate a few of the new prisoners before we return to the capitol.

My heart is pounding. I close my eyes and try to calm my breathing, but before I can steady myself, the barrel lifts into the air. As I brace myself against its walls, the barrel flips onto its side, leaving me disoriented.

SCARLETTE

(thinking)

This is not the kind of manhandling I'd dreamt of in my youth!

I already feel undignified, and the barrel's jostling doesn't help. Fortunately, I'm placed upright after a short walk down some stairs. I can hear another barrel placed down nearby before two sets of feet exit the cabin. Then... silence.

INT. VALTICE'S CABIN

I push on the lid until it dislodges again, tentatively examining the room. A lone lantern hangs from the ceiling above a massive desk, casting a gentle, flickering light across an otherwise ostentatious room.

Seeing no one, I stand, feeling the pervasive aches of an extended stay in such a confined space. While I stretch, I take in the room's furnishings, slowly realizing just how out of place I am in my torn and dirty male clothing.

SCARLETTE

(awestruck)

Wow...

A grand bed sits in one corner of the room, adorned with the finest furs and silks I've ever seen. Near it rests a vast, mahogany wardrobe.

The desk is littered with maps and missives, I glance closer - one is signed by my father! I turn the parchment around on the desk to get a better look.

It's... the terms of my arranged marriage to Valtice! The surprise leaves me winded, but my curiosity was insatiable. Father hadn't been willing to discuss the topic after springing it so suddenly. I scanned the document quickly.

SCARLETTE (CONT'D)

(low and angrily)

Th-that coward..! He bartered me
away for the *promise* that Valtice
wouldn't invade us?

The word of a tyrant offering a treaty. That's what I was worth. I grit my teeth in rage, hot tears flowing down my cheeks as I read on. Father was groveling. He proposed trinkets, baubles, and *my very life* all in the same breath. As if I was nothing but a toy... He'd never understood me, but this was appalling.

In my fury, I hadn't noticed that I was no longer alone. The frigid steel of a cutlass lay pressed against my bare neck. The shock made every hair on my body stand, and I uttered a short gasp. The missive fell from my hands onto the desk.

VALTICE

A stowaway? And you thought to come
to my quarters?

His voice was commanding... His mere presence was almost overpowering. I couldn't find the strength to respond.

VALTICE (CONT'D)

In that case, you're not a very
smart stowaway, are you? Turn
around slowly.

No other options coming to mind, I comply. My voice catches as I face him. He exuded a baffling amount of power. He's statuesque. Firm, unwavering, stoic, and dignified. I'm reminded of my disguise as a low-born man in disheveled, ripped clothes and a dirt-stained hat. I offer Valtice my most defiant glare.

He seems unimpressed. Disappointed even. He lowers the cutlass lightly. A flintlock pistol hangs from a holster near his chest. If I can get to it...

SCARLETTE

(fake deep voice)

I was on the passenger ship and got caught in one of the barrels. This is just a misunderstanding.

VALTICE

Your words don't match that fierce stare... You want me dead, don't you?

SCARLETTE

(thinking)

Shite.

VALTICE

A pirate? Assassin? No... Maybe a spy? But I caught you so easily!

Valtice booms a laugh. Now's my chance! I leap past him, grabbing the pistol from its holster and rolling as I hit the ground. Not a maneuver I'd practiced enough, as I exit the somersault rather clumsily, but with the gun pointed at Valtice. His surprise is palpable, and I couldn't help but offer a smug smile.

VALTICE (CONT'D)

Scarlette?

My hat must have fallen off when I rolled! I can feel my long hair against my shoulders, betraying my identity. My heart sinks again. I tighten my grip on the pistol.

VALTICE (CONT'D)

What on earth are you doing here?

SCARLETTE

(angrily)

I was fleeing the country when you attacked the ship.

My finger shakes. I'd love to shoot him now, but if I fire, the crew will be on me in seconds...

Valtice looks momentarily confused, but bellows another laugh, his hard features softening. He doesn't see me as a threat at all!

VALTICE

I didn't attack your vessel! It was attacked by pirates! We were scouting the area nearby and happened to spot the calamity.

(MORE)

VALTICE (CONT'D)

Unfortunately, the ship sank and we had to send most of its passengers back to your country on rafts after we brought down those brigands.

SCARLETTE

(thinking)

Is he lying? It doesn't seem like it, but...

SCARLETTE (CONT'D)

Either way, I was trying to escape and live *my* life; I'm not marrying you!

The words came out before I realized what I was saying. There's no way he'll let me live now...

Valtice sheathes his cutlass and sits in a nearby chair. It groans under his massive frame. He seems troubled; an enormous weight suddenly bearing down on him.

VALTICE

I had just sent your father a letter. I was going to call off the proposal for now anyway. My responsibilities to the kingdom are too great, and I cannot waste time entertaining a pampered noble lady. Once we reach shore, you'll be released and sent home.

I continue to stare, the pistol held firm in my hands. The years of private tutelage with firearms drilled into my head. If I lower it for even a second, I would lose whatever small advantage I had.

SCARLETTE

(defiantly)

I will not be returning. My father made it clear that I am nothing more than a possession to be sold.

His eyes shifted slightly. Is that pity, or..? Valtice stands, towering over me. I only just now realized how very small I was next to him.

VALTICE

I've no time to--

The door slams open. Valtice's body has me concealed, but there's no way for me to get out now!

Valtice turns, keeping me in his shadow. Is he... hiding me?

VALTICE (CONT'D)
Captain? What's the meaning of--

CAPTAIN LAPACHE
My lord, The Kathikon has sent word- the enemy fleet is on the move. We must make haste if we're to intercept them before they escape.

Valtice makes a noise of irritation.

VALTICE
Change course. Head for the fleet.
I'll be out momentarily.

The captain salutes, though I can't see much of him behind Valtice. The door closes.

Valtice sighs. He turns to face me again, the pistol still pointed at his heart. The lantern sways behind me, cascading him with soft light. He looks me over once, a piercing stare that examines my core. It's at once unnerving and exhilarating.

VALTICE (CONT'D)
It seems we don't have time to head to shore anymore.

SCARLETTE
What are you going to do with me?

Valtice gestures at the gun in my hand.

VALTICE
I can tell you've more experience with that than I do. Keep it. If you can hold your own against our enemies, you'll have won your freedom.

SCARLETTE
Your... enemies?

Valtice looks coldly toward the wall. His impassive stare can't hide the burden he feels.

VALTICE
When my father died and I inherited the throne, our neighbors across the sea started amassing a fleet... I hoped I was being too cautious...

Valtice turns to head out of the room, all the rigidity returning to his stance. Stunned, I slowly lower my hands.

VALTICE (CONT'D)
You'll want to keep the disguise
on. Best to avoid scrutiny. And...
Welcome to the Pragmanaut.