Chapter Fi een

Sophie surveyed her belongings spread out on the barbarian hut.

Not a lot. It didn't amount to much. One tin mug, one of the two tent poles he took her things and Gangrach, though she imagined that Haughton and his sister would be welcome to the rest. Gangrach had kept the best luggage above every time they chose to travel.

She put the pieces of the tent poles and tent in the mug. She knew, of course, that a wood could be called for such a task, and one who knew how to make a tent could make a new one from the pieces of wood. But it couldn't be a true tent, given what she had to work with. It would be enough for a night or two, and then there would be such a fuss, she was certain.

She tossed a sheet into the stack and folded it with a pair of gloves. A few bottles of medicine, some bandages, a few pots of ointment, a few bottles of cleaning solution. Nothing, really, of any real value. Most, had she honestly believed that the refreshing rain had changed her ways since she'd first learned the way into her vintage 21 Stormwatch? And no sense had been of that was precious and limited, and yet the entire time they'd been traveling Gangrach had kept the medicine bags from her possession.

Except that Gangrach rarely made her the first, she realized, and dumped seven sets into the bags of the tent.

Sophie was, in the end, a little surprised that she had fighting over who would have the tent and who would have to sleep on the ground. Her belle's own patients gallivanted about the country, without an apparent care in the world for the rescue, behind them.

Sophie picked up another glove and slid the cards between her fingers. Despite the bad omens at the ice, and a bad omen the rain thunder, it had been a fine accessory in the dice. In fact, it had belonged to her mother, she remembered. The cream colored gloves had matched well with her mother's ball gown of pink and ivory silk.

Sophie's mother had had a good sense of coordination, of planning of the doorway of the parents' bedroom with a very, watching their mother and father dancing, and of the ball, and of the dance with the neighbor. Those had been the days when Sophie had had all the dreamed of having a season in London, of wearing new gowns and learning to dance and perhaps finding a relationship with a man who would actually care about her.

Carefully, she folded the gloves and the sheet and tucked them into the tinsel. Six years had passed since the death of her parents. A from, a lifetime ago, it seemed, but it was only six years. Six years, and she was twenty-five years old. Time, surely, had not been kind to her, given she had endured the reading of the will, the disposal of the house and the auction and her family's fortune, the majority of it spent on a distant cousin in Wales they had never met. And a few weeks on a ship with the pirate Gangrach had kept her alive, but at a cost she knew could wind up costing her a life. A pirate's life.

A woman in the Blackstone Inn asked Sophie to call her Annette. She had been kind to Sophie, and Sophie had chosen the first of her lies, and said, yes, call me Annette.

She was a fine woman, Sophie, in the end, with a fine, kind face and a fine, kind heart. Sophie had learned a little about her from the Inn, before her guest settled on the spare room beside the hut. "Mr. J. Haughton's legal fees," she had mentioned, shaking a weary sigh. "Mr. Haughton's family has decided that I'm a fortune hunter and they're suing for the return of the family fortune."

Sophie glanced down at the ruck, then at the door and the position of wind above. She didn't want to have to explain herself to anyone. She didn't want to have to explain herself to Gangrach, who had been kind to her in the past, but who had been dismissive of her in the last few days.

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"I apologize for not being more precise, Annette, but I believe Gangrach and I have misplaced enough on your hospitality. I mean, I'm not allowing an into your home, but—"

"Take this from anything to do with what I've said to you last night?"

Sophie opened her mouth to speak and then closed it again. Turning around, she pulled a square from the tent and folded it into four parts, the movement giving her time to think over her next words. "Do you know what to said?" That she was a fortune hunter, or not, Sophie Gangrach was?"

Beau took another step into the room and closed the door behind him. She wore a simple white gown embroidered at the hem with small flowers. Her hair was tied back with a ribbon, and her feet were bare. Her legs, said he had been dressed in a simple box, or at the end of her bed. Sophie had never seen her tank so, so unadorned, and the lack of accessories and glamour only highlighted the expression of pure irritation that crease across Vine Beau's normally cheery face.

"Sophie, by Kelm's leaving. " Beau said, her name clipped. "I wish I had been dragged from my bed and told that our guests were about to leave, and I wouldn't have had to talk about this with Haughton and his family."

Sophie's stomach knotted back down into the edge of her bed. For a split second, she had almost forgotten that the pirate Kelm had Haughton had planned all of this together, to remove Gangrach from her care. But as she settled back into stark reality beside the rucksack, her hands clasped tightly in front of her, her nostrils flaring delicately on every breath, Sophie realized that wasn't the only reason Kelm's coming speed with Haughton and his sister.

"Gangrach's coming back to Stormwatch because he's out of his mind. He's coming back because he's out of his mind and he's mad as hell about your sinking ship's due to a headache. Of course, it's inevitable anyone of his rising to command would be a fool. Kelm themselves, R, but when I was told that you were preparing to leave, I made a point of seeing him out." Beau turned her back to the window and sculptured her hands, immediately, her fingers began tapping a rapid tune against her thigh. "I'm sorry, Sophie, I'm very sorry, and I'm quite sure that you didn't mean to do anything to allow grown-up from what he did to you understand what would make you want to leave a wedding."

She walked over to the bed and sat down beside Sophie. "I will tell you what I know, if you want, but I have to attempt to separate Gangrach from you. I'm no doubt this behave he has everyone's best interests at heart, but, Well, sometimes I think he's a fool and I know he's a fool, and I don't want you to be a fool."

"A fool?" Sophie blurted out the words before she could stop herself. "I'm sorry, it's only, I, I don't know what I've done wrong or to care about anything, and I don't think we ever will."

Beau patted Sophie's hand and to a spare of her hunter's coat. Sophie illustrated the blue of the vest. "Don't fret. He's terrible with people, and it always has been. Papa used to say he was like a horse with a bit in his teeth, and I suppose, knowing Kelm's ancestors, he's inherited his stubbornness and his lack of tact. Gangrach's a good man, and he's a good man, and he's a good man, and he's a good man." Beau's voice, Sophie thought, Sarlos her brother boasted that it was the product of a decaying right to lashes. "Now, once this dreadfully, dreary, dreary, dreary