Sail

by EllanaSan

Summary

"Port Capitol was ablaze. Fires had broken everywhere, the night was loud with the screams of the town’s inhabitants and everywhere her eyes darted people were falling either pierced by a sword or knocked down in the mad rush of other’s people for safety. Effie swallowed hard, frozen in place." Pirate AU!

Notes

Well, hello again ! And welcome to the hayffie pirate AU ! I must say straight out that if you want historical accuracy this story is not meant for you. This is mostly crack. With pirates. First chapter is more like a prologue of sort which is why it might seem short. There will be 8 chapters in all so it’s not a very long story altogether.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

Effie’s favorite dress was made of the finest pink silk directly imported from China and was cut to what she had been assured was the latest fashion in London. The upper part hugged her chest so tightly it seemed to act as a second corset and she felt as if her cleavage, although on the small side, was ready to spill; the sleeves covered her arms up to the elbow where they ended up in a lovely overflow of lace; as for the lower part of the dress, it was puffy since fashion favored volumes, and the numerous layers of her petticoat hindered her every step.

In short, the dress was lovely and suited her figure perfectly.

The only problem was, it wasn’t meant to be run in.

And at the moment, Effie badly needed to be able to run.

Panic and terror were giving her wings and she increased her speed – or tried to increase her speed, the shoes weren’t helping matters – her mind focused on a single objective: reaching the garrison alive.

A task easier said than done, it seemed.

Port Capitol was the biggest British settlement in that corner of the Caribbean sea. It was prosperous, promising to become a key asset of the Empire and, above all, it was rumored undefeatable.

Clearly, she thought as she took in the state of the town in front of her, that was a grand exaggeration.

Port Capitol was ablaze. Fires had broken everywhere, the night was loud with the screams of the town’s inhabitants and everywhere her eyes darted people were falling either pierced by a sword or knocked down in the mad rush of other’s people for safety. Effie swallowed hard, frozen in place.

She had seen pirates before, of course, but those pirates had been either hanging from a noose or on their way there. The pirates currently pillaging Port Capitol were nothing like the men she had seen being brought up to justice. They were neither starved nor weaken by their stay in the cells, they were all muscular and feral looking, they laughed too loud and seemed bafflingly unafraid of death.

She wondered if Governor Snow had managed to reach the fort, she hoped he had. She could hear the faint boom of the canons in the distance which meant the garrison was still secure, if her godfather was indeed there then he would be safe and he would be able to offer his protection to her.

Governor Snow would scold her for leaving her house. He was always an attentive godfather and wished for nothing but her well-being. She would have to explain that folly, naturally. Running out in the middle of a pirate raid! How mad of her...

“Here!” a voice boomed behind her. It was an ugly voice as far as voices could be ugly, all hoarse and deep. The man would have been handsome if he hadn’t been so filthy – and if she hadn’t seen him kill her butler just a few minutes earlier. “Grab her!”

The order sent her running downhill again in a desperate dash for the fort looming in the distance. The pirates had broken into her house, had killed her staff, had tried to capture her... She had run away. What else could she have done? She was only grateful she hadn’t yet retired for the night. Worse than being chased by barbarians in the dead of night would have been running through Port Capitol in nothing but her night clothes. They had seemed amused by her attempts to escape them at
first but it hadn’t lasted long. She had smashed a chair on one of the men’s head and they had stopped laughing after he had collapsed.

She ran and ran along the narrow streets, cursing her godfather to hell and back for not having them paved like he had promised to do months earlier. She kept stumbling, kept pulling herself up by sheer force of will... Her corset was too tight, she couldn’t breathe properly, she was sure she would faint. She bypassed pirates setting houses afire, she avoided colliding with citizens just as panicked as she was... Some of them reached for her, some of them called out fearful “Miss Trinket!”, “Miss Euphemia!” or “Lady Trinket!” as if she could grant them protection or salvation. She could do neither, simply avoid the fires and try to outrun her pursuers.

It was fortunate she knew Port Capitol like the back of her hand. She had been fifteen when she had arrived on the island, following her father to what had been, to her childish self, the end of the world. Her father had been a great man, a lord knighted by the King himself, sent on a mission to the Caribbean on His Majesty’s order to assess the situation. He had left no other heir but her after his death and had entrusted her to his friend’s care : Governor Coriolanus Snow. Effie had never lacked anything and had enjoyed being mistress of her own wealth – something that wasn’t to be taken for granted when you were a woman – and thus had never married, unwilling to lose her fortune to a husband’s clutch. At twenty-five, despite many inconsequential flirts, she was quite the spinster and, in that mad dash from death – or worse – she wondered if she hadn’t missed something. A husband would have certainly come in handy right now.

Her favorite dress was lovely.

But it wasn’t meant for running.

It was a miracle she arrived that far, she mused as she fell, hitting the ground so hard it knocked the air out of her lungs. She rolled in the dust and the soot, disoriented by the ashes that were falling around her like snow – she had been living under the sun for so long she had almost forgotten what snow was – and realized she wasn’t even halfway to the fort. A glance behind her shoulder told her the pirates chasing her were closing in on her but she didn’t have the strength to move. She was heaving, unable to get enough oxygen in her lungs with the corset wrapped around her torso like one of those snakes who suffocated their prey to better eat them.

“Miss Effie!” someone shouted with a familiarity only few people dared use and then she was hauled up to her feet. A young face caked with soot and dirt stared back at her, a mop of blond hair, familiar blue eyes... The baker’s boy, her mind whispered, his name escaped her. He spotted the three pirates and pushed her in direction of the fort again. “Run!”

She wanted to. Oh, how much she wanted to... Black spots were dancing in front of her eyes, her legs were made of jelly, she took two steps and collapsed again.

“Peeta!” someone screeched somewhere on their left. It was followed by a terrified scream and disgusting laughter from a man.

Peeta was his name, she remembered suddenly. Peeta made her favorite pastries and she always made sure to give him a good tip because the boy was lovely and his mother was a harpy.

“Delly!” the boy screamed. “Let her go, you dickhead!”

Peeta grabbed a piece of wood on his way and left Effie to her fate. The pirates didn’t even bother to run anymore, they simply walked their way to her, snickering like a bunch of stupid monkeys. She tried to crawl in the direction of the garrison, as hopeless as it was... Why hadn’t the soldiers gone out yet? Why did they keep to the fort? The fort needed to be protected at all cost, she understood...
that, but so did the people living there...

“Well, you led us on a merry dance, didn’t you?” one of the pirates mocked, kicking her in the stomach.

Effie was shocked to realize it was a woman. She didn’t know what she found more disturbing: the fact that a woman would go into piracy or that she was dressed like a man. How improper.

“Take her to the Captain.” she ordered, flicking her blonde hair over her shoulder.

“But, Cashmere...” one of the men argued. Or rather, Effie decided he was hardly more than a boy.

“Shut up, Cato.” the woman snapped. “The Captain wants her on the ship, you take her to the ship.”

She tried to struggle but she was too weak, she was tossed over the young man’s shoulder like she weighed nothing. Some people tried to help her, she saw that clearly, the baker’s boy, Peeta, once certain that his friend was safe attempted to come to her rescue. She had always liked that boy...

In a last hopeless effort to free herself, she kicked the boy who was carrying her with her feet and her fists. He dropped her with a curse that was so foul she didn’t even understand it. The backslap that followed was so hard she collapsed again and, this time, didn’t resist when she was tossed over his shoulder once more. She was barely conscious. She heard the surrounding horrified screams and shouts that the pirates had killed Lady Trinket... She wanted to protest, reassure them, but there was nothing to it.

The town was still ablaze when they reached the docks and she was thrown into a small boat. They rowed her to a huge ship that had dropped anchor in the bay. Even in the dark, she could glimpse the black flag barred with a skull and bones floating atop of the highest mast. She saw the name as the boat slid silently past the hull: The Career.

She tried to remember if Governor Snow had mentioned that particular ship but if he had she couldn’t recall. She didn’t always listen when he talked politics and the pirates were a plague anyway, there were hundreds of them out there. She closed her eyes and tried not to panic as the boat was hauled on board.

She was pushed and shoved until she fell on the deck on her knees, shivering in the cold of the night.

“What did you bring her back for?” someone asked. Another woman she couldn’t help but notice – how many were there in the piracy business? – but this one was less beautiful than the first. She looked feral and her teeth... The chill that ran down her spine had nothing to do with the cold. The pirate’s teeth had been filed into fangs.

“Captain’s orders, Ma’am.” the Cato boy replied. “Cashmere said so.”

“You’ve got her?” someone bellowed from the upper deck. That man was massive with an impressive hat and a dark blue jacket. “Bring her to my cabin.”

She yelled and struggled but the woman’s grip was iron and she was dragged kicking and screaming to what had to be the captain’s cabin. The room was more spacious than she had thought it would be, there was enough space for a large bed, a huge wardrobe, a cluttered desk, a table and four chairs, and an empty wooden bathtub.

“We should just kill her now. Finish the job.” the woman argued. “Drop her body in the bay for them to find in the morning.”
“I have money.” she sputtered suddenly, not even caring that she was begging. Begging for her life seemed a smart course of action at that moment. “You can ask for a ransom. I have a lot of money. I am the Governor’s godchild. My life has value. I can make you rich.”

She was ignored.

“We’ve been paid.” the Captain shrugged. “It would be a shame to lose money. Any idea how much someone like her is worth in slaver’s bay? We’ll sell her with the others.”

“Please!” Effie panicked. “Please! I can give you money. Just ask my godfather... Ask anyone... I...”

“You’re going to shut up or I’m going to decide you’re not worth protecting from the crew.” the Captain spat. “Maybe you would like traveling in the brig with the other prisoners better?”

Her mouth snapped shut and she folded her arms over her chest, hugging herself to fight the growing despair.

Apparently satisfied, the man turned back to whom she supposed to be his second. “Call the men back, be sure they’ve got enough prisoners. We sail in fifteen minutes. And make it clear, the girl isn’t to be touched. She won’t be worth as much otherwise.” He glanced back at Effie, already dismissing her. “You’re going to stay here if you don’t want to get mauled out there. I don’t need to tie you up, you will be a good girl, right?”

What else could she do but nod?

She made sure to keep her chin high and her attitude regal.

It was only once the Captain was gone and the door audibly locked that she collapsed in tears.
Life on a pirate ship was boring.

Somehow, it was almost disappointing.

Effie had been the personal captive of Captain Brutus for five days and, so far, she rather thought him to be a bore. He might have been by far the most muscular pirate on board but what he had in strength he lacked in brains. He wasn’t unkind for a pirate. She had been terrified of being forced into abominable things but Captain Brutus had neither touched her nor truly looked at her ever since the night of the attack. She was living huddled in a corner of his cabin but he went about his business as usual – assuming it was usual for him to lock his door when he went out.

The real danger was his second, the woman with the teeth shaped as fangs: Enobaria. She was mean and never passed on an occasion to suggest the pirates should simply slit her throat and toss her corpse to the sea. She seemed to have something personal against her.

The third and only pirate left to have approached her during those five days of sailing was the other pirate woman. Cashmere wasn’t as bad as Enobaria but she was certainly not kind either. She brought her food once a day – disgusting food: stale bread and salty water, but Effie was so starved she would have eaten literally anything – and taunted her about what would happen once they would reach slavers bay.

Cashmere was talkative though.

And Effie was determined to learn everything she could about the ship and its crew so she would be able to testify against all of them once they would be caught. She was confident in the upcoming intervention of the Royal Navy. She was Governor Snow’s godchild. You simply didn’t attack the godchild of a Governor. That was something the Empire frowned deeply upon.

*The Career* was, according to Cashmere, the deadliest ship on the ocean. It had no rival and remained undefeated. Cashmere had a brother named Gloss who was also a pirate on board although, still according to her, a lesser pirate than she was and that was why he had been left behind to command the small crew guarding their treasure on their secret island. There were prisoners in the ship’s belly, some came from Port Capitol, some from elsewhere: men and women who would be sold alongside her. It would take another week to reach the bay.

Effie was eagerly waiting for the rescue.

She refused to be cowed and was determined to face the situation with all the class and dignity a English Lady should always show in everything. After five days of meager meals and no access to hot water though, her countenance was starting to falter. Her dress, once lovely, was now damaged beyond repairs. It was hot on the ship, hotter than she thought a ship would be, and she was sweating in a very disgusting way that made her dress not only smelly but also dirty. She sat on the floor more often than not and the cabin wasn’t that clean to begin with so the pink silk had turned dark in some spots. She must have smelt absolutely horrible and she must have looked even worse. The powder on her face was long gone, she had no lipstick on hand and her hair, no matter her efforts, kept tumbling down from their pins. She still tried to keep up appearances though. Everyday she dedicated a full hour to trying to fix her dress and hair. She knew the second she gave up on that she
would become mad with panic but as long as she maintained appearances she could believe in a rescue. She was doing alright, all things considered, she decided.

Still, she was greatly relieved when, on the sixth day after her capture, she heard the boom of a cannon and the shouts of men quickly followed by the sound of a fight. At last, she thought, standing up from her corner on shaky legs and dusting her dress. She made a special effort to pin up her hair properly and stood next to the desk, waiting for the dashing rescuers.

Her rescuer came in the form of a very young man, barely out of boyhood probably, with golden hair and riveting sea green eyes. The stranger didn’t see her at once but when he did, the flash of surprise quickly gave in to a wolfish smile.

“You are not the Royal Navy.” Effie commented with a certain amount of disappointment.

It wasn’t much of stretch to deduce that. The most obvious clue was the lack of an uniform.

“I’m afraid not.” the boy shrugged. “I’m only me but no lady ever complained.” His eyes darted all over her, taking in the dress and the fancy hairdo – as fancy as she could manage by herself anyway – and bowed down with exaggeration, yet she thought it was amused rather than mocking. “Sea god, sex god and the most handsome of all pirates to ever sail those seas… Yours truly, Finnick Odair.”

Sea god was about right, she thought, as for the rest… She couldn’t help a blush. There were words that propriety never allowed a lady to hear – even less think about.

“It’s a mutiny then?” she asked politely which seemed to amuse him greatly. “Is this a mutiny then?”

It would be her luck, she mused. It was probably Enobaria… Enobaria was taking control of the ship and Effie would end up dead before she could say parley.

“Vengeance actually.” Finnick said matter-of-factly. “We, pirates, take those seriously.”

“To be sure.” she humored him, leaning slightly against the desk. The sounds of fighting were dying out, replaced by orders about preparing to board and rounding up the prisoners.

“Sorry, Miss, but Captain Abernathy needs one of those maps.” he said, stepping past her with his hands up to show he didn’t intent to hurt her. At least some of those pirates had manners. “He will be here soon, I guess. You can tell him what you’re doing here… Or you can tell me, I could put a good word for you, Haymitch likes me.”

The man was leaning over the desk, frowning as he looked for something specific…

Effie saw her chance and she took it. She grabbed the spyglass abandoned there and swung it against the back of his head with all her strength. Sea god or not, Finnick collapsed on the desk. The spyglass was broken in two and she tossed the pieces on the floor before gathering her skirts in her hand and running toward the door. She would take advantage of the confusion to steal a boat, she decided, and then she would await the Royal Navy a safe distance away from those pirates.

After so many days being locked up in a cabin, the fresh air was very welcome. Not that she paused to savor it, she ran down the short stairs leading to the main deck and straight into something heavy. Damned her dress, she and the thing fell on the floor in a tangle of limbs.

It soon appear the thing was human and armed. She saw the flash of a knife and…

“Jo, no.” a gruff voice ordered. The knife was dropped but the fist still connected with her cheek with such blunt strength it shocked her.
“Don’t you know you should never strike a lady?” Effie shrieked. She blamed what happened next on her nerves: she had seen people she had known almost her whole life being murdered in front of her eyes, she had been chased through Port Capitol’s streets, she had been abducted by pirates, she had been held prisoner in a cabin with not enough food and no possibility to wash, her favorite dress was ruined, she hadn’t been able to take her corset off for days, she was smelly, ugly and uncomfortable, and the Royal Navy still wasn’t there. She was entitled to a spur or madness. And that was why she tried to claw her adversary’s eyes off.

“Get that crazy bitch off me or I’m gutting her!” the mysterious Jo spat. And Effie realized she was a woman.

“Why is it all crazy women go into piracy?” she screamed. “You… You… You rascal.”

There was a round of laughter but Effie didn’t even mind, she simply attacked harder with a war cry that might have been a little pathetic to bloodthirsty pirates. She was grabbed around the waist and pulled back no matter how hard she kicked her legs or tried to get free. The arms around her were too strong. The smell of rum, sweat and salt was almost too much for her.

“Stop this, now.” a man growled in her ear.

“Let me go!” she hissed, trying – and failing – to kick him in the leg. “I demand you let me go!”

“You demand, yeah?” the pirate snorted. She didn’t know how he did it but he managed to shove her against the wooden panel next to the stairs and pin her there with a hand around her throat. She instinctively stopped struggling. “Good girl,” he mocked. “Let me tell you how this works. I’ve taken this ship. This ship is mine. You don’t make demands here. I do. We’re clear, sweetheart?”

Her lips wobbled but she jutted her chin higher despite the hand loosely wrapped around her throat. It was a powerful hand, calloused and tanned. The man it belonged to was tanned too, with dirty blond hair that fell to his chin, stubble that hadn’t seen the blade of a razor in days and grey eyes that, for a second, took her breath away. Pirates shouldn’t have been allowed to have such appealing grey eyes. All the more so pirates who were now threatening to strangle her.

“Stupid bitch.” Jo grumbled, rubbing her elbow. Her dark hair was cropped short like a man and she was wearing leather pants and a leather corset with nothing underneath. Effie blushed when she realized just how much was on display.

“I am Lady Euphemia Trinket and I refuse to be insulted by a common whore.” she spat.

“That’s the worst name ever. No wonder the bitch looks sour.” Jo commented, rolling her eyes.

“Where’s Finnick?”

That question was addressed to the Captain, Effie surmised, but she was delighted to answer it with a smug smile. “I knocked him out.”

They needed to understand she wasn’t a helpless lady in distress. She could handle herself. She wasn’t a prey. She refused to be a prey.

The Captain’s eyebrows shot up and his mouth twitched. “Feisty, are we?” He studied her for a few seconds and then moved his hand from her throat to her shoulder – to keep her in place but not to hurt, she mused, if he had wanted to hurt her he would have taken out the knife at his belt. She took it as a good sign. “What do you say, Jo? How much money can we make out of that?”

Again? What was it with pirates and wanting to sell her like a common good?
“I have money.” she interjected quickly, before Jo could say anything. “I am worth a good ransom. I promise you won’t regret not selling me. Please.”

It was as close to begging as she was willing to go for now.

Distaste flashed on the Captain’s face. “I was talking about the dress but it’s good to know you’re worth money.”

Just then, Finnick came rushing out of the cabin, rubbing his head, his sword half out of his scabbard. He stopped dead in his tracks when he saw the three of them at the foot of the stairs. “Oh, good, you found her.”

“What did I say about pretty women?” Haymitch asked.

“Deadly.” Finnick shrugged. “But I can’t resist. I have the map.”

“Good.” the Captain nodded. “Take…”

“Haymitch!” someone shouted from behind them.

That was when Effie’s focus shifted from the imminent threat to the rest of the ship and she felt her stomach churn. The deck was red with blood, she spotted Cashmere’s blond hair a few feet away, an arrow jutting out of her chest. One of the three masts had fallen down, The Career was framed by two other ships on either sides – smaller ships, she decided, but no less impressive, both of which showed the pirates colors – and the people coming and going from the belly of the ship to one of the two other ships with arms full of goods, treasure and food alike, weren’t the same pirates who had attacked Port Capitol. Her shaky legs weakened even more. The hand on her shoulder moved to her upper arm, steadying her. She was almost glad for it.

“What have you got here?” the man calling the Captain asked, watching her with open curiosity. He was black, in his fifties and waved a stump around when he talked. Effie supposed she should have been grateful there was no hook fastened to the appendage.

“Not sure yet.” the Captain grumbled. He gave a nod to Jo and Finnick and they both scattered away like they knew what to do without him having to ask. He let go of her after makings sure she could stand on her own but not without a warning look. “Captive, most likely. ‘Says she’s got money.”

“It is rude to speak about someone who is standing right there in third person.” Effie huffed. “Have you no manners at all?”

“Sorry, love.” the pirate laughed, grabbing her hand and pressing an unwelcomed kiss on it. “Chaff, Captain of the valiant Rue to your service.”

“Valiant.” the other Captain snorted. “That ship is as valiant as me.”

“Don’t insult my ship.” Chaff grumbled. “It’s faster than your Mockingjay.”

“My Mockingjay can put your Rue to shame.” the pirate argued.

Abernathy, Finnick had said, Captain Abernathy…

“There are a lot of prisoners down there.” Chaff said, becoming serious again as he nodded to the trickle of men and women being guided up by some of the pirates crew. “I’m taking them. I will drop them off at Tortuga or something like that.”
“I’m keeping this one.” Captain Abernathy said, nodding in her direction without looking at her.

“Yeah, she looks your type.” Chaff laughed.

Effie instinctively took a step back but her retreat was blocked by the wooden wall.

“Not like that, sweetheart.” Abernathy sighed. “He just meant I could do with the ransom money. You’re quite safe, I promise.”

“A pirate’s promise isn’t truly reassuring.” she hissed.

“Well, better make do with it ‘cause that’s all you’re going to get.” he snapped back. “God, you’re annoying. Maybe I should just leave you to the sharks.”

“Two seconds ago you said I was safe and now you are threatening me.” she retorted. “Do you see why I am disinclined to trust your word?”

Grey eyes locked with hers and they glared at each other until Chaff’s bark of a laughter boomed out.

“Oh, yeah, she’s your type alright.” The Rue’s Captain declared.

Abernathy rubbed his face. “I need rum. My flask’s empty.”

Chaff wordlessly reached at his belt and handed him his own flask. Effie watched, incredulous, as he downed half of it in one long mouthful. She was prevented from commenting on it by the apparition of a blond head exiting the belly of the ship.

“Peeta!” she shouted in relief and ran toward the boy – she wasn’t relieved that he had been captured, naturally, but she was relieved to see him alive.

“Miss Effie!” the boy exclaimed. “I thought you were dead! Are you alright? Did they hurt you?”

“And who’s he, then?” Abernathy asked behind her. She hadn’t realized the two Captains had followed her. The other prisoners didn’t stop walking toward The Rue, grateful to be allowed to roam freely. Some pirates glanced at the commotion but most of them kept focused on the task at hand.

Peeta, brave, sweet Peeta, immediately stepped in front of her as if to protect her.

“Bodyguard, I think.” Chaff taunted. “He’s too young to be her boyfriend.”

“I won’t let you sell him like a common slave.” Effie declared, grabbing the boy’s shoulder – although perhaps she should have stopped referring to him as a boy, he was almost as tall as she was and her boots had heels. “I will pay for his freedom too. Just… Don’t sell him. I will pay.”

Peeta tried to protest but she hushed him. Now wasn’t the time for grand demonstrations of heroics. The two Captains looked at each other. It was Chaff who talked. “We’re not slavers, love. I’m going to take those people where they can find a job or a ship back to wherever they come from. The ones who want can join my crew, I’m a little short staffed, but we’re pirates not slavers. We don’t sell people.”

“You should tell that to Captain Brutus.” she replied.

“I would but he’s rotting at the bottom of the ocean.” Abernathy shrugged. “He killed two of Chaff’s
last month. We take our crews seriously on those waters. Nobody’s going to sell you. I will take that ransom though.” His grey eyes darted to the boy, evaluated him and then he shrugged again. “We can take him with us if that makes you feel safer. ‘Seems like he’s going the same place you are anyway.”

“Yes.” she agreed.

“Okay.” he granted, looking around for someone. “Katniss!” He waited until a girl around Peeta’s age appeared. She had a bow passed over one shoulder and a quiver full of arrows around the other, a long dark braid, and grey eyes that looked similar enough to Abernathy’s that Effie wondered if they were related. “Take her and her little bodyguard to the ship. She goes to my cabin and him…” Find him something useful to do.”

“No.” Effie cut in before the girl could nod. “We will remain on The Career.”

“Not unless you want to take a swim, no.” Abernathy laughed. “We’re sinking that bloody ship as soon as it’s empty, sweetheart.”

“But…” she argued and then fell silent. If she switched ships the Navy would never find her. She would be well and truly lost to the hands of those pirates.

“I get you’re not a sailor and you’re not used to life on a ship but here’s how it works : the Captain gives orders, you obey.” he scowled. “I’m the Captain, I give orders and you, what do you do?”

If he had hoped to intimidate her, he was very much out of luck. Effie huffed and stood straighter.

“A lady only takes orders from her husband and even that, I have come to understand, can be discussed.” she stated.

“I think that means she wants to marry you.” Chaff suggested, obviously amused to no end by the scene they were causing. “I could do it right now, you know. It’s been a while since my last wedding.”

“Fuck off.” Abernathy growled, before turning to the girl. “Take them and make sure everyone’s ready to go. We’re almost done here.”

Effie was left no choice in the matter as Peeta’s insistent hand on her arm probably was meant to convey. Captain Abernathy had shown patience until then and they would have to make do with his promise that neither of them would be sold. It was either that or the boy’s sudden eagerness in following Katniss could be explained by her pretty grey eyes and the light swinging of her hips. She was dressed like a man too, with dark cotton pants and a large white shirt completed with a – also too large – leather jacket. In short, she looked nothing like the girls she had seen chasing after Peeta in the streets of Port Capitol.

Katniss wasn’t talkative and answered none of their questions. She didn’t depart from her scowl either, she guided them to the side of The Career and swiftly jumped on a narrow wooden plank that stretched between the two ships like it was the most natural thing in the world. She was standing on The Mockingjay’s deck in less than ten seconds.

“Under no circumstances am I walking on that.” Effie protested.

“It can’t be that difficult, can it?” Peeta hesitated. “She makes it look so easy…”

The girl was staring at them, almost challenging them to accept defeat and it was clear Peeta’s pride was in jeopardy. He climbed on the plank and very slowly made his way to the other ship. Effie
clasped her hands, her heart racing in her chest, convinced he would plummet to the ocean and drown. Nothing happened though, he reached *The Mockingjay* and the girl granted him a small smile. They both turned to her and gave her an expectant look.

Effie folded her arms over her chest despite the fact that it wasn’t very ladylike and took her sterner expression. “I won’t do it.”

“Oh, yes, you will.” someone laughed behind her. She barely had time to identify Jo before the pointy end of her knife was tickling her between her shoulder blades. “You’re walking or dying. Your choice, Trinket.”

“Your Captain assured me I was safe!” she huffed. “You can’t harm me.”

“Wanna bet?” Jo mocked, putting *that* little bit more pressure on the knife.

“Stop it, you will tear my dress!” she exclaimed, finally climbing on the plank. Jo followed her suit and remained right behind her, either to threaten her with her knife if she stopped or make sure she wouldn’t fall that was anyone’s guess.

Reaching the middle of the plank was easy, it was then that it started to get complicated. The wind was making it difficult to keep her balance, it made her skirt puff and she was sure everyone around had a good peek at her legs, and, of course, the sight of the sea below wasn’t helping matters. Small waves crashed around the hulls of the ships, making the whole thing unstable. The plank kept swaying under her feet.

“Don’t look down.” Jo commanded. “Keep going.”

“I will fall.” Effie squeaked.

“Better not, ‘cause I will let you.” the pirate threatened cheerfully.

Yet, Jo didn’t let her fall. When she stumbled, she grabbed her arm and shoved her forward, forcing her to move until they had finally reached *The Mockingjay*.

“You did it, Miss Effie.” Peeta congratulated her warmly.

“Effie?” Jo repeated, wrinkling her nose. “That’s better than Euphemia. What kind of name is that?”

“Says the woman with a man’s name.” she hissed.

“Jo is short for Johanna.” Katniss explained. It was good to know she *could* speak. “Don’t worry, she barks but she doesn’t bite. *Much.* Follow me.”

That instruction seemed completely unnecessary where Peeta was concerned. The boy was trailing after her, looking around with utter fascination. It seemed that now that he wasn’t a prisoner anymore, he was decided to enjoy his stay.

Katniss dropped her in Captain Abernathy’s cabin. It was *much* smaller than Captain Brutus’. A double bed was crammed in one corner under big windows that out looked the sea, the sheets were dangling on the floor and it was obvious it hadn’t been made or changed in some times. There was a wooden wardrobe, a desk cluttered with papers and a small shelf with a few mementoes and quite a number of bottles on it, and that was it.

Too tired to care about politeness, Effie took a sit on the only chair in the room, behind the desk, to Katniss’ obvious amusement.
“May I request some food?” she asked. “I am famished.”

The girl nodded and left with Peeta in tow, leaving the door open behind her which was for the best because she would probably have felt trapped otherwise. Of course, when Johanna showed up with a dry piece of bread that was green in some places, it didn’t do much for her comfort. At least the water the pirate brought her was clear and she drank her fill, relieved not to taste any trace of salt.

When she left her to her meal, Johanna was cackling like a mad woman.

Effie poked at the bread unhappily, wondering if she was *that* starved or not.

She was still deliberating when Captain Abernathy arrived. There was a great deal of noise outside, a shout of “*Hoist the sails!*”, and she understood they were taking sail once more.

“Made yourself at home, did you?” he snorted when he saw her behind his desk. He shrugged off his heavy grey coat, revealing the dirty white shirt underneath – it was open at the collar and she could glimpse pale blond chest hair – before going straight to the shelf from which he took a bottle, uncorked it with his teeth and spat it on the floor.

She couldn’t help but wrinkle her nose.

*Appalling.*

His gaze fell on the untouched bread and he rolled his eyes. “Jo’s idea of a joke.” He took the plate away and stepped out for a minute. There was a hushed conversation outside and when he came back, the plate was gone. “Someone’s going to bring you stew. ‘Can’t say it’s any good but it’s better than molded bread.’” He closed the door and sat at the foot of his bed, as far away from her as he could. She idly wondered if he was trying to look unthreatening before deciding he was a pirate and most likely didn’t care about making her feel comfortable. “So…” he said, taking a mouthful of whatever was in his bottle. “How much are you worth?”

“However much you want.” she answered.

“Rich husband?” he snorted.

“I am not married.” she denied. “I was my father’s only heir. I am under my godfather’s guardianship but my money is my own. I will give you whatever you want if you only take me home…”

She realized her voice sounded whiny but she was exhausted and she felt like a child. She just wanted to go back to her house, take a hot bath, change her dress and sleep in her own bed.

“Whatever I want… That’s a dangerous thing to offer a pirate, sweetheart.” he commented.

“It’s Lady Trinket to you.” she hissed. “Or lady Euphemia if you insist.”

“The boy calls you Effie.” he remarked, watching her closely as he took another sip.

“*Miss* Effie.” she corrected. “And I don’t tolerate such familiarity from just anyone.”

His smirk was slow and teasing. “But I’m not just anyone, *Effie*.”

“You are insufferable, that’s what you are.” she sighed. “Will you take me back to Port Capitol or not? The Governor will pay my ransom.”

“Governor?” he frowned, suddenly more alert.
“Governor Snow, my godfather.” she clarified. “Do keep up.”

“Governor Snow is your godfather?” he frowned. “Coriolanus Snow?”

“Why, yes!” she beamed. “You heard of him, how marvelous! Those other pirates didn’t seem to understand the matter at all. They were hell bent on taking me to slavers bay except for that woman who wanted to kill me…”

“Why?” he asked. “Why did they want to sell you if you’re as rich as you say? You would sell well, I guess, you’re pretty and some men would pay quite a lot to get their hands on someone like you. But a lady? That’s risky business. And why would they want to kill you at all? Losing money, that’s not like the Careers.”

She didn’t even know how to begin answering those questions. “Does it matter? Captain Abernathy…”

“Haymitch.” he cut her off. “We don’t stand on ceremony on this ship. My name’s Haymitch.”

“Haymitch.” she repeated, testing the name. It rolled easily on her tongue and she found out she quite liked it. “I assure you I can pay.”

“Yeah, that’s not what I’m worried about.” He rubbed his face and took another mouthful. “Sweetheart…”

Whatever he was about to say was interrupted by a quick knock on the door. He rose to open it, stepping aside to let in a girl carrying a tray. She was wearing a long bright blue skirt and a loose blouse untucked at the back so it looked like she had a tail; she had blue eyes, an easy-going smile and her hair was separated into two neat braids.

“She’s a child!” Effie exclaimed in dismay. “Women, children… Does everyone go into piracy nowadays?”

“I’m twelve!” the girl protested softly.

“Everyone who doesn’t have a choice.” he spat.

“A pirate ship is no place for a child.” she insisted.

“Where’s her place then?” he retorted. “Waiting on an island somewhere for her settlement to be destroyed? She’s safer here. We take care of our own.”

“I’m happy here.” the girl cut in, placing the tray on the desk in front of Effie. “I’m Prim, nice to meet you.”

Mollified by the child’s good manners, Effie offered a smile of her own. “You can call me Miss Effie.”

“So she gets to call you Effie but I don’t?” Haymitch taunted. “How does that work?”

“She is cute, you are not.” Effie scorned.

“Haymitch is a little bit cute.” Prim offered before shrugging. “Finnick is very cute but don’t tell Annie I said that. Mom wants to know if you need her. She’s busy with the injured from the fight but she can come right after.”

“Aster’s our healer.” Haymitch explained. “If you’re hurt…”
“I am not.” Effie was quick to say before directing her next words to the girl. “Thank you.”

Apparently satisfied by that answer, the child sauntered away, softly closing the door behind her. The smell from the stew was enticing and Effie reached for one of the bowls hesitantly. There were two on the tray but Haymitch had gone back to sitting on his bed and didn’t move to take his. His grey eyes were studying her a little too closely.

“You’re sure you’re not hurt?” he pressed. “Look, you’re obviously a very arrogant woman but there’s no shame in that…”

“I am neither ashamed nor hurt and I am certainly not arrogant.” She rushed the words out between clenched teeth. “I am perfectly fine. Captain Brutus intended to sell me unscathed – to make sure to obtain the best price I am sure.” It was disconcerting to speak of being sold so callously and she felt her cheeks flush red. “If anything, I had quite a fright but he was a gentleman.”

“He was anything but a gentleman.” Haymitch scoffed. “I guess you were just lucky.”

It was rude to start eating before everyone was served but he didn’t seem in any hurry to grab his stew and she was starving so she dipped the hand carved wooden spoon in the bowl, clinked it against the side to make sure it wouldn’t spill and brought it to her lips. It was probably the most disgusting thing she had ever tasted and yet at that moment it seemed delicious – anything that wasn’t stale bread and salty water would have tasted delicious. It was all she could do to repeat the process calmly, like a proper lady should. Her hands were shaking with the sheer restrain she was exerting.

“You don’t have to put up a show, Princess.” Haymitch commented. “You’re starved.”

“Manners are important.” she argued but the temptation was too much and she stopped clinking the spoon against the side to shovel everything she could in her mouth. She was so lost to the need to eat that she didn’t see him stand up or approach the desk. She startled badly when he placed a hand on her wrist.

“Slow down.” he advised. “You’re going to make yourself sick.”

He took his hand away quickly and grabbed his own bowl before going back to sitting on his bed. She did slow down, heading his advice, and they ate in an easy silence for a while.

“I will take you back to Port Capitol.” he declared once his bowl was empty. “But I have some things to do first. Appointments to keep. It will take a few weeks.”

“Weeks?” she screeched. “No, that doesn’t suit me at all.”

“Too bad.” he shrugged. “Cause that’s what you get.” He gave her another look. “Ask Jo for some clothes and you might wanna drop the corset, sweetheart, it makes you look constipated.”

She sputtered with horror at such a crude remark. “Certainly not! I will keep my dress and my corset, thank you very much! How improper of you to even mention such things!”

“Yeah… I’m not big on propriety.” he winked. “Suit yourself. Two days working at sea in that dress and you will suffocate.”

“Working?” she pouted suddenly. “What do you mean working?”

“It’s not a fucking cruise, Princess.” he chuckled. “You gotta earn your keep.”

“I am a lady. Ladies do not work.” she hissed.
“They do on my ship.” he retorted.

The worst thing was that he wasn’t joking.

Chapter End Notes

This was a long chapter! I need feedback :p
Chapter 3

Haymitch didn’t step out of his cabin before midmorning and his first stop was the helm that Finnick was expertly steering. The sea was endless and smooth around them, the way he liked it best. The only noises were the seagulls above, the water below, the soft wind in the sails and the shouts and calls from the crew going about their duties.

“No problem?” he asked Finnick.

“No, Captain.” the younger man answered with one of his wolfish grins. “Except Sae says she’s quitting as soon as we’re back to The Hob.”

He frowned at that news, not eager to find a new cook to replace her. “Why?”

“Just try the new boy’s bread.” Finnick laughed. “The kid’s a baker’s son. He can bake and he can cook. He can make rat taste like chicken. We’re keeping him, Haymitch, we all voted.”

“Maybe ask his opinion first.” he snorted, amused by his friend’s antics.

“Oh, no need.” Finnick waved that objection away matter-of-factly. “He’s head over heels for Katniss already. I’m ready to bet he would follow her to the other end of the world.”

“Yesterday he was ready to fight me for Miss Prim and Proper…” Haymitch scoffed, his grey eyes instinctively searching the deck below and spotting what he was looking for. “How’s that going?”

Jo was busy arguing with Effie, waving a mop and a bucket, while the other woman stared her down like he hadn’t seen many people do. Only stupid people butt heads with Johanna Mason. She hadn’t accepted any change of clothes either, he noticed, she was still wearing the battered pink dress. Stubborn.

“Well…” Finnick grinned and let his sentence trail so Haymitch would understand the implicit statement. That wasn’t going well. At all. Haymitch hadn’t particularly expected it to. She was a pain in the ass, he had gathered that after a couple of seconds. Yet he hadn’t seen many women still acting so feisty after being a pirates’ captive for a few days – or many women trying to kill Johanna with their nails for that matter… She was brave and he could respect that. “So far, she has refused to cook, wash laundry and Jo’s been threatening to drown her in the bucket if she didn’t scrub the deck. They’ve been at it for half an hour.” Finnick added helpfully. “There are bets going around if you want to join.”

Another circular glance told him most people on his crew were focused on the fight rather than on their task. Even Katniss, high on the look-out post, was staring at the screaming match taking place below instead of watching the horizon. The usual routine of his ship was disturbed.

That woman was trouble.

“She’s Snow’s godchild.” he said, low enough that his voice wouldn’t carry much further than Finnick. It was moot to try and hide something like that, naturally, it would be all around the ship before long, but he still wasn’t sure what to do with that information.

“You’re not taking her to Coin, right?” Finnick frowned, his joyful expression completely gone.
He would have been lying if he had said it hadn’t crossed his mind. As much as he didn’t want anything to do with Coin and her half-cooked crazy idea of rebelling against the Crown – and, more specifically, the envoy of the Crown Snow was – her fleet was still the most organized line of defense they had against the Governor and it would have been too easy to drop the woman at her door and wash his hands of the whole business. But he also knew just what Coin would do with an asset like Snow’s godchild – or to the asset that was Snow’s godchild for that matter.

And he was still pissed about her convincing Gale to leave his ship for her fleet.

“No.” he answered at last. “She’s clueless and she’s been through enough. We’re going to take her back to Port Capitol and take her money. And if I can think of a safe plan to take Snow out before we get there we’re going to do that too.” The logical course of actions would be using her as bait but he needed a better thought-through plan than that and… “There’s something fishy to her story. She says Brutus wasn’t interested in her money and Enobaria wanted to kill her. Seems to me they wanted to get rid of her quietly.”

“What were they doing with her in the first place?” Finnick asked. “Snow hired them often enough in the past. Why would they go against him? I thought they were good friends. I remember hearing Cashmere say he paid as good as two captured merchant ships would.”

“I don’t know.” he shrugged. “The Career attacking Port Capitol and taking Snow’s godchild? Fishy. From anyone else, I could buy it, but from Brutus…” He waved those questions away for now. He would need to talk with her again, to try and make sense of it all because he had an inkling of an idea already and he didn’t like it one bit. He turned his back on the lady arguing with Jo and nodded to the helm Finnick was steering. “How long until we reach the Cornucopia?”

That map he had found in Brutus’ cabin was a godsend. It was notorious The Career had a huge treasure somewhere on one of the small islands lost in the middle of the sea…

“If the wind doesn’t change. One day and a half, two maybe.” Finnick estimated. “I think we can be at The Hob in less than a week once we’re done.”

“Let’s hope so ‘cause they will be waiting.” Haymitch sighed, already feeling the headache slowly forming behind his eyes. He thought about the starved children and elderly people who always gathered on the dock every time The Mockingjay rallied their camp and he felt the need for a swallow of rum.

They had stolen and stored enough food in the ship’s belly to feed anyone at The Hob for a month or two if they followed rationing, but if he was right and they managed to take the Cornucopia… Chaff might have wanted to attack The Career to avenge Seeder’s and Wiress’ death but Haymitch’s idea had been more practical. He had wanted the map to Brutus’ secret cache. If everything went according to plan there would be no more than a handful of men guarding their treasure – easy to take with a few selected members of his crew – and he could exchange whatever money and gold was there against more food.

Trading could only happen on Tortuga and they would have to go to The Hob first, though, people there couldn’t wait… Which meant they would need to go back to The Hob before sailing for Port Capitol which, in turn, meant they would keep their annoying guest for a while and…

Something clattered on the deck below.

Effie had just thrown the mop and the bucket at Jo’s feet and was now stomping her foot like a spoiled little girl. She looked thunderous. Some strands had escaped the fancy hairdo she kept her hair in and were framing her face in untamed curls, her chest was heaving with every breath, her
cheeks were flushed red in annoyance, her lips were pursed and her eyes were shining in anger… He shifted a little on his feet, irritated to find himself reacting to her. Irritated but not surprised. She was a beautiful woman. And the idea of what would have happened to her at slavers bay was making him sick to the stomach.

It didn’t mean he could tolerate that kind of behavior on his ship though.

They might be less than strict on formality but he was still the Captain, this was still his ship and she had defied his authority too many times already in the short span of time she had been on board.

~°~°~°~

Effie tossed the bucket and the mop of the deck at Johanna’s feet, feeling a gleeful satisfaction in hearing the wood clatter to the ground.

“I am not a slave. I am not a commoner. I will not clean after you like a maid.” she hissed for what felt like the thousandth time that day. They had tried to make her help peel vegetables, they had tried to make her wash their dirty laundry… And now they wanted her to scrub and mop the deck? There was no way in hell she would lower herself to such a task. She had barely slept all night and she was in a very, very bad mood.

Captain Abernathy had refused to do the honorable thing and leave her his cabin, relegating her to share the female crew’s quarters. The company hadn’t been as bad as she had feared. Prim had been kind enough to show her around and introduce her to some of the other women on board. She had quickly decided Annie was a sweet person even though she seemed a little disturbed, the cook Graesy Sae shouldn’t be crossed and Aster, Katniss and Prim’s mother, was a nice woman but deeply melancholic. There were a few others she hadn’t quite properly met like Cecelia. She had been puzzled by the presence of Mags who looked ancient for a pirate and diminished by a stroke but it had been obvious to her after only a few hours of acquaintance that the old woman was just as good at handling herself as anyone else on this ship. Effie had been assigned a hammock between Johanna’s and the wall, in a corner relatively apart from the rest of the women – she doubted it had anything to do with deference for her status and everything to do with Johanna wanting to keep a close eye on her. Sleeping on a hammock was not an enjoyable experience.

The Mockingjay must have been the weirdest pirate ship she had ever seen and her crew must have been the weirdest pirates to roam the seas.

Nevertheless, Effie was fed up with being a pirates’ captive and was determined to make it known.

She would not remain on that ship for weeks while its good for nothing Captain wandered around instead of taking her home. This was a business arrangement after all: her money against her freedom, and she had a right to make the rules.

“Aren’t you going to say anything?” she challenged when Johanna simply sneered instead of answering. “Are you too daft to understand a simple…”

“All your screeching is making my ears hurt, sweetheart.” a man growled right behind her – entirely too close, she had no idea how he had crept that close. She jumped and turned around to find Captain Abernathy glaring at her. It probably would have scared her if she hadn’t been so furious. If anything, her anger only seemed to encourage his own. He looked her up and down and then glanced at Johanna. “Didn’t I tell you to give her clothes?”

“She didn’t want them.” Johanna scorned, folding her arms over her chest with obvious delectation at seeing Effie in trouble. “I think she’s trying to hide the poker up her ass.”
“Language!” Effie snapped, appalled.

“You can’t do anything in that dress.” the Captain scoffed. “Get into proper clothes and then get to work. You’re distracting my crew.”

He had nerves lecturing her about her dress, she silently seethed. He was back to wearing that awful heavy grey coat over his dirty white shirt open at the collar and they were both so much in need of a washing she was almost tempted to reconsider her views on laundry chores. And they were still cleaner than his hair – or the rest of his body.

“Unlike anything you can offer me, my clothes are proper, thank you very much.” she retorted, planting her hands on her hips. “And I refuse to work.”

“Too bad, Princess. ‘Cause you don’t have a choice.” he chuckled darkly, picking up the bucket and the mope and forcing them in her hands.

She shoved them back at him and, since he didn’t take them, they clattered back down to the deck. They were making quite the scene, she noticed with an uneasy feeling. Everyone had stopped working to look at them. Mags was sitting a few feet away with Annie, working on fishing nets, and the old woman winced and shook her head at her.

“I demand you take me back to Port Capitol immediately.” she declared, loud and clear.

“I thought we’ve already established I’m the only one making demands on my own bloody ship.” he scowled.

She didn’t let that deter her.

“You will provide me with safe passage to Port Capitol, three meals a day until we arrive there and you will leave me your cabin. In return I will pay you a handsome amount of money.” she exposed. “Those are my conditions.”

For a second, all you could hear was the seagulls above and the sound of the small waves crashing against the hull. She didn’t know who started laughing first. Johanna probably. Then there were snickers all around.

“I don’t think so.” he sneered. “I don’t take orders, sweetheart.”

“You will address me as Lady Trinket.” she hissed, taking a step forward which very much brought her in his space. In retrospect, that might not have been the wisest idea. “And since I refuse to comply with your wishes you will have to comply with mine.” She calmed down a little, appeased by her own logic : if she refused to give in to him then he would have no choice but to give in to her. He needed her if he wanted her money. A triumphant smile blossomed on her lips. “After all… What else can you do?” she mocked. “Make me walk the plank?”

She had intended that as a joke.

She made a mental note to never ever again joke with a pirate.

His sneer turned into a smirk and his grey eyes sparkled with unabashed amusement.

“Now, that’s an idea, sweetheart.” he taunted, looked over her shoulder at Johanna. “Take out the plank.”

“Awesome!” Johanna cackled with glee before screaming louder. “Take out the plank!”
The order was echoed by several people until someone arrived carrying a huge wooden plank.

“You are not serious.” Effie stuttered.

“You think?” he snorted and grabbed her arm, pulling her toward the plank that had hastily been pulled on the side of the ship. She struggled and looked around for help but none was forthcoming. Peeta ran out of the kitchen but was intercepted by Prim who exchanged a few words with him and shook her head. The boy made a face, tossed her an apologizing look but walked back inside.

*Traitor.*

“Haymitch…” Annie sighed, clicking her tongue with obvious disapproval. “Is that strictly necessary?”

“The lady asked for the plank. I’m only obliging.” the Captain shrugged, pushing her toward the side of the ship. She planted her feet in the ground and resisted his shoves, refusing to walk to her death.

“You are a ruffian!” she screamed, whacking at the hand firmly wrapped around her upper arm. “Unhand me!”

“And you’re still giving me orders…” he grumbled. “You really don’t get how this works do you.?”

“I will make you pay for this!” she threatened as he wrapped his free arm around her waist and hauled her up to the plank. She fell on all four and grasped the sides of the plank for dear life, her sight blurred by tears. The water below was dark and unwelcoming and she knew that with her dress, petticoat and corset, it would be a death sentence. She would drown before she could even try to swim. She shut her eyes tight and waited for the final shove that would force her to move further away from the safety of the ship.

The laughter was cruel, she decided, even if it was most likely Johanna and a few of her friends. She didn’t think Annie or Mags would laugh at her misery – yet neither of the women had tried to help either.

“You’re done throwing a tantrum?” Haymitch asked, his voice mocking.

That was when she realized he had never let go of her arm. The moment of realization was shocking but also liberating. He had never intended to let her fall, he just wanted to humiliate her.

“You… you…” She looked for the right word but couldn’t find it and the fact that she was still on all four on that plank, gripping the side so tightly she could feel splinters piercing the skin of her palms, wasn’t helping.

“*Pirate*, sweetheart, that’s the word you’re searching for.” he taunted, slowly tugging her back toward the ship. He helped her down carefully and she let him help her. It was only when both of her feet were safely on the deck once more that she shoved him hard with both hands.

“Do you think yourself funny?” she roared. “How would you like to be given such frights, I wonder?” Forgetting any sense of self-preservation – and also very certain now that he wouldn’t actually hurt her – she grabbed his arm and tried to get him on that plank, to give him a taste of his own medicine.

Everyone was laughing now but she couldn’t tell at which one of them.

Haymitch Abernathy was strong. He didn’t have much in terms of muscles – Captain Brutus had looked more impressive – but he didn’t lack for strength. He barely took two steps back, out of
surprise probably, before standing his ground, letting her pound at his chest with her small fists.

“You’re completely *hysterical.*” he accused.

“You are making me hysterical!” she retorted. “I could *kill* you!”

“Sure.” he scoffed. She moved for a slap but he grabbed her wrist before she could land a hit and groaned with irritation. “Now, *that’s* too far.”

He suddenly tugged on the wrist and tossed her over his shoulder. She let out a piercing shriek and barreled at his back with punches. She would have kicked him too but he had her legs in a vice-like grip.

“Let me down!” she ordered.

“Stop telling me what to do!” he barked.

The laughter didn’t stop but she didn’t get truly afraid until she realized he was carrying her to his cabin.

“What are you doing?” she asked. “Let me go!”

He dropped her on the bed, head first and it took her almost a full minute to get herself out of the mess of puffy skirts, petticoat and torn fabric that was now her favorite silk dress. The sound of the door slamming shut was more alarming than any other noises she had ever heard. He turned to her and shrugged off his coat. She glared at him but didn’t quite dare attempt an escape. She remained where she was on the bed, forcing her racing heart to calm down, judging the distance between her and the door the best sort of defense since he was standing next to it.

“Try *anything* and I will scream.” she warned.

An amused smirk tugged at his lips. “That’s rather the point when you’re in a man’s bed, sweetheart.” He obviously noticed she was scared because he waved that off. “Relax, Effie, I won’t hurt you.”

“You almost tossed me over the side of the ship.” she pointed out, forgetting to object to his familiar address.

“I can’t say I’m a fan of discipline, sweetheart, but on a ship with so close quarters *some* discipline’s *necessary.*” he replied. “Another Captain would have you whipped bloody for disobeying orders. You did that how many times today?”

“You wouldn’t dare!” she spat, folding her arms over her chest if only to hide the tremors in her hands.

For a second, she thought he would take her up on that challenge but instead of making another corny joke, he sighed and flopped down on the chair behind his desk.

“No, I wouldn’t.” he stated. “Not because you fancy yourself a highborn lady but because being whipped *fucking* hurts and I don’t think any man should be treated like an animal.”

“Language.” she chided him, a little subdued.

He looked amused by that but it was fleeting. “I can’t keep you if you don’t earn your keep, you get that? What if everyone else just decide they don’t fancy doing their job? Where would we be then?”
He had a point, she supposed, but she was decided not to grant it to him.

“I won’t cook and I won’t clean.” she refused stubbornly. “I will be awful at it and I really don’t want to.”

He pondered that for a moment.

“Can you sew?” he asked. “Mend sails and clothes?”

“Of course, I can sew. I am a lady.” She pouted. That arrangement would be acceptable but not by much. “Just take me back…” she pleaded. “I don’t want to be here as much as you don’t want me to be here…”

His grey eyes were understanding she thought and when he shrugged this time, she read the apology he wasn’t willing to voice in it.

“There are people depending on me, sweetheart. I can’t drop everything to get you back to Port Capitol.” he explained. “I will do it but you will have to wait a week or two. And you can’t throw tantrums like today everyday either or someone will get tired of you and will toss you overboard.”

She searched his face for treachery but he seemed earnest so she slowly unfolded her arms and admitted to herself that, perhaps, she might have overreacted. After all, she hadn’t been harmed, she had been fed, she had been given water to wash herself with, she had been offered a bed – granted it was a hammock but on The Career she had been sleeping on the floor – and Johanna did offer a change of clothes even if said clothes were absolutely improper.

“I will keep my dress.” she declared.

He rolled his eyes. “Suit yourself, sweetheart.”

“Except if you have something propriety wouldn’t frown over.” she amended, glancing down at her beloved gown. His gaze followed hers, lingering on her chest and Effie flushed red. “Staring is rude.”

“Can’t help staring when the view’s so sweet.” he smirked but looked away nevertheless. “I don’t know how you can breathe in that corset. Jo chunks hers all the time and that’s leather, it’s practical, it’s not even made to do… whatever it is yours is meant to do.”

“Discussing a lady’s undergarments isn’t done, Captain.” she gritted between her teeth. Curiosity got the best of her though. “Chunk it, you say? But what does she do then?”

“She walks around naked.” he chuckled. “That makes for a sweet view too.”

Her jaw dropped and she snapped it shut.

“You’re too easy to rile up, Princess.” he snorted. “By the way, do you still want my cabin? We could share…”

He wasn’t serious, just teasing, but she detected a hint of yearning underneath the playfulness that got her to her feet and out the door with a huff. Everyone stared at her when she stepped out. Jutting her chin high in the air, she quickly went in search of Annie – who was the only one she was comfortable talking to at that point – and explained she and the Captain had come to an agreement and she was agreeable with mending clothes.

She ended up sitting on a upturned bucket, in the shade of the main mast, with a heap of shirts, long
skirts and cotton pants at her feet. By the time the day ended, her fingers were stiff, she was a little sunburned but when Mags handed her a bowl of stew full to the brim with a proud smile, she was too starved and too tired to do anything but smile back, a little proud of herself too, and she shoved the food in her mouth, forgetting every lesson her mother had drilled into her head from an early age.

When Katniss offered her a white shirt to sleep in that night, she accepted it.

She wouldn’t lie, getting out of the corset at last was a relief. It had been on for so long the knots were stiff and it had been digging into her skin so painfully it left red marks. Johanna rolled her eyes when she saw the damages and made a crude joke that Effie only half understood – she always understood only half of what was coming out of Johanna’s mouth anyway, the woman was too crass, and for all her education there were things that were beyond Effie’s knowledge – but Aster offered a balm that did marvels.

It was only the first day, she mused when she lied petrified on her hammock that night, scared it would overturn, but it was already an improvement.

Chapter End Notes

What do you think? Let me know!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The wind had died down during the night and the ship was straining to take up speed. Haymitch alternated between glances to the look-out post where Katniss was scanning the horizon, checking his compass, and taking a swing out of his flask. They couldn’t be too far away from the Cornucopia now. It wouldn’t be long before Katniss warned them they were approaching land…

“Too much alcohol is bad for you, you know.” a female voice remarked. “I noticed you drink a lot.”

He turned his eyes to their estimated guest, amused to see that, despite her would-be aristocratic detachment and her – he suspected fake – cheerful expression, she was hesitant about climbing the last few steps that would brought her to the deserted upper deck where he was steering the helm.

“It’s rum. It’s medicinal.” he argued.

“I highly doubt that.” she declared, finally making the decision and joining him near the helm. “I have been told to report to you since I have nothing left to mend. Should I salute you too, Captain?”

“Careful, sweetheart.” he smirked. “Too much sass and I will think you’re bitter.” He let his eyes roam on her body, he couldn’t help it. The dress might have been in tatters but it was still flattering. She would have looked better in a more revealing pirate outfit and he deeply regretted her refusals to borrow anything from Jo’s closet but that was just his lust talking. “You’ve mended everything that needed mending?”

“Everything and then some.” she stated proudly. “I am nothing if not efficient. Johanna said I should move on to scrubbing the deck but we have an agreement on that account so you should find me something else to do.”

He had thought sewing pieces of fabric back together would occupy her at least until he could decide what to do with her He was quickly finding out he shouldn’t underestimate her and thus he rolled his eyes. “Let me think about it. You can do whatever you want for now but don’t bother anyone.”

“I would never bother anyone.” she huffed. “I have better manners than that.”

“You’re bothering me right now.” he pointed out despite the fact that he was enjoying the distraction.

She pursed her lips, narrowed her blue eyes and tilted her head to let him know she wasn’t amused. Clearly, she was also bored because instead of sauntering back below to annoy someone else, she peered at the compass in his hand.

“How does it work?” she asked.

“It points north.” he deadpanned. He could have explained better but he didn’t think she truly wanted to know about the particulars of how a compass worked.

“Yes, thank you.” she hissed. “I meant the ship.”

“Why? You’re planning on launching a mutiny and stealing it?” he snorted.

She pursed her lips even more, so tightly it must have hurt. “If you will excuse me I will go and see if
Annie wants company.”

“I’m joking, sweetheart.” he scoffed, reaching out for her arm before she could storm away. “Come here, I will show you.”

He explained how the speed was mostly dictated by the wind and the configuration of the sails, why and how they could play on that by pulling on ropes and pulleys, pointing out to different elements with his finger and to the different people handling them. He wasn’t sure she registered everything but she seemed interested enough.

“I’ve spend more than a week at sea and I had no clue about how everything works.” she confessed, when he was done explaining the helm was used to steer the ship in a particular direction. “It’s… more complicated than I imagined. You must have a lot of skills to oversee all of this.”

“Lot of skills for an uneducated pirate?” he mocked, reading clearly in her mind what she was too polite to say. She blushed and looked away, shyly brushing her fingers against the helm. It made him lift his eyebrows. “Wanna try?”

“Oh, I don’t know…” she protested. “It is hardly a lady thing to do…” But she was biting her bottom lip in obvious longing to do the forbidden thing and, in the end, she took his place behind the helm. “It’s hard!” she exclaimed in surprised when she had to struggle to keep the wheel in position.

There was a corny joke to be made there but Haymitch refrained because he could be delicate when he wanted to and he was already very much in her space, he didn’t want to make her feel uncomfortable. Not about that at least. He glanced at the compass and placed a hand over her right one to correct the direction. Her fingers were very white against his tanned skin, almost milky, and they were soft too compared to his calloused palm. She flashed him a bright smile, her eyes sparkling in delight and he figured she was having the time of her life. She might pretend all she wanted that she was the perfect lady but Haymitch could see the yearning for more every time he met her eyes. He had seen it too many times not to recognize it on sight. She was one of those who were craving the thrill of adventure but weren’t built for danger. He hated those people. Problem was, he didn’t hate her eyes. At all. Or her lips. Her lips were… Talking, his brain supplied helpfully.

He had no idea what she was babbling about but she was chatting nonstop without waiting for him to reply. He let her be for a while, his mind wandering to other problems, occasionally correcting her direction. He saw Finnick wriggling his eyebrows at him suggestively from the deck below but he resolutely ignored the boy.

“When they grabbed you from Port Capitol, was it random or did they target you?” he asked, out of the blue.

He kept thinking back to what she had told him and the more he thought about it the more he was certain something didn’t add up.

Her happy chatter died down abruptly and her fingers tightened on the helm to the point her knuckles turned even whiter. Her voice was subdued when she talked. “They chased after me.”

“So it wasn’t an accident?” he insisted. They had taken other people from the town after all, people like Peeta… It could have been an accident, they could have found themselves with Snow’s godchild on their hands and panicked… Getting rid of her would have been the smart decision, no one would have wanted to ask Snow for a ransom – except it still didn’t explain why they had attacked the Port in the first place.

“I… I don’t know.” she hesitated. “I thought… I thought they wanted me because I am rich? It is
obvious I am rich. I have a beautiful house and staff and…”

“Yeah, I get the picture.” he cut her off. “But they didn’t want your money. You’re sure about that?”

“Of course, I am sure.” she scowled. “I spent days begging them to bring me back, to send a letter to Governor Snow…”

“It makes no sense.” Haymitch mumbled out loud, rubbing his face. “They worked with Snow before. He paid them enough money to do his dirty work… Attacking Port Capitol… It makes no sense.”

“What do you mean they worked with Governor Snow before?” she frowned, letting go of the big wooden wheel to turn around. He grabbed the helm instinctively, accidentally caging her in his arms in the process. She was so busy glowering at him she didn’t even seem to notice. “You meant Governor Snow tried to arrest them of course. And he certainly didn’t pay them. He is dedicated to destroying piracy.”

Yeah, he mused, maybe he should have thought twice about how to broach that particular subject with her but he wasn’t one to embarrass himself with tact.

“Snow’s an asshole, sweetheart.” he shrugged. “He’s a murderer and a tyrant and…”

“Stop it.” she hissed, pushing at his chest with the flat of her hand. It didn’t do any good to shove him away if that had been her intention and her hand remained on his chest, half of her fingers under his open coat. He could feel the warmth of her palm through his cotton shirt.

“How do you think Port Capitol got so prosperous?” he snorted. “He needs slave labor so he raids islands, he destroys small settlements, he kills the kids and the old people and captures the rest…”

“No.” she interrupted him. “You’re a liar and I won’t hear any more of this.”

She looked distraught and he wondered if it was out of love for her godfather or because she had had an inkling all along and had refused to believe it. He felt no pity for her. He had no pity for people who wished to remain blind to what was happening in front of them.

“I’m a liar?” he chuckled bitterly. “Ask anyone on this ship. We all escaped at one point or another.” He pulled his sleeve up and showed her the mark, burned on his forearm. A slave’s mark but not just any slave’s mark. A crescent shape burnt patch of skin. “The C stands for Capitol. Or for Corelianus, who knows.” She stared at it but didn’t move one inch, apparently frozen in place. The hand that was still on his chest clenched a little, bundling the fabric under her fingertips. “The guards made us fight each other to the death for fun. Whoever won was called a victor. They got special privileges, more food, more freedom. That’s how we escaped. All of us.”

For a few seconds, they remained silent. She stared at the mark, her hand still on his chest, her breathing quick.

“I don’t believe you.” she said softly. “You are mistaken. Governor Snow is a good man. He is a great man. The Crown…”

“Yeah, I don’t think he’s working for the Crown anymore.” he taunted. “He’s making himself a nice little empire all to himself very far from the King’s reach.”

“Nothing is out of the King’s reach.” she whispered.

“The King sure didn’t come to save you, did he?” he spat nastily. “Where was the Royal Navy,
Effie? You got kidnapped right under Snow’s nose, why didn’t he send his fleet after them? Why would they want to sell you to slavers or kill you instead of getting their hand on your money? You’re a fucking goldmine, why would they pass on that?”

“I don’t know!” she snapped, slamming her hand against his chest. She tried to walk away but he grabbed her arm and pinned her against the helm. He tried not to be brutal but he needed answers because her story was weird and he had a good idea of what was going on and he simply couldn’t put his crew in danger.

“You’re sure you don’t know?” he accused. “What happens if you die? Who gets your money then?”

“Let me go!” she demanded, struggling against his grip.

“You get where I’m going with this, don’t you?” he snorted. “Think about it. It makes no sense otherwise.”

“Let me go.” she growled, abandoning her attempts at escaping to slam her fists against his chest. He let go of her arms to block her wrists. “You’re a liar!” she screeched. “A liar! Governor Snow would never do what you say! And he would never work with pirates either!”

They were causing a scene again, he noticed. People were looking at them.

“Snow’s a fucking murderer.” he snapped.

“Liar!” she shouted, glaring at him with fury.

They were close, too close, he could feel the ragged puffs of her breaths on his lips. Her eyes were bright with suppressed tears and anger and, maybe, a tinge of panic. He let go of her wrists slowly.

“He worked with them before.” he insisted. “There are pirates and pirates, they weren’t the good sort.”

“Because there is a good sort?” she retorted. She laughed and it was all bitter and wrong. She wasn’t made to laugh in bitterness. She was made to laugh in joy and happiness. She was too bright to be dragged down in something like that. She was too bright and that was exactly why he was so attracted, he mused. Darkness loved light.

“There is the sort who won’t blink when they kill you and there are those who will take you in and give you shelter even if you have nothing to offer.” he shrugged.

“You are all the same.” she accused, leaning in slightly in her loathing. It brought her even closer and that wasn’t a good thing. His eyes flickered to her mouth… She noticed. He knew she noticed because she tensed but instead of running away like he expected her to, her breath caught in her throat and she licked her lips...

“Ship!” Katniss suddenly bellowed from high above. “Ship at starboard! And land behind her!”

Haymitch looked up at the girl and then hurried to the side of the ship, already fumbling with his spyglass.

“Haymitch?” Finnick asked, joining him, ready to relay to the crew whatever order he wanted to give. The ship was between them and the Cornucopia and it wasn’t out of the realm of possibility that The Career wasn’t the only ship Brutus had possessed.
He had to strain his eyes to read the name on the other ship’s hull and he cursed loudly when he finally found it. “It’s The Rebellion. And they’re coming straight at us.” And not only was Coin’s ship standing between them and their coveted treasure, he really didn’t want to see the woman. “Load the canons and tell the crew to get ready for a potential fight but we’re not engaging if we don’t have to, hear me?”

They couldn’t win against The Rebellion, Coin’s crew were soldiers, better trained, better fed and used to leave nothing but floating planks behind them. She wasn’t after pirates though. She was after Royal Navy’s ships and, more precisely, Snow’s fleet.

He stormed back to the helm where Effie still stood, watching the sudden franticness of the crew with puzzlement and a little fright.

“Are they pirates?” she asked.

“Worse. Revolutionaries.” he scoffed. “And they won’t be friends of yours if they find out who you are. Go below deck and stay there. If anyone ask, you’re a whore, got it? I picked you up on Tortuga and you’re on board because I fancied a nice distraction.”

“Certainly not!” she spluttered, her whole face red with outrage.

“They’re separatists, Princess. They hate Snow more than I do, they will tear you apart if they think they can use you against him.” he growled. “Now, do as you’re told and don’t come out until I send someone to get you. Katniss! You’re on babysitting duty.”

Katniss had been running around, her arms full of ropes and didn’t look pleased by that new chore given the sullen ‘please, no’ look she gave him. He furrowed his eyebrows a little and she rolled her eyes, grabbed Effie’s arm and dragged her away.

It wasn’t long before The Rebellion was close enough that Haymitch could spot Alma Coin standing near the scary roaring mermaid at the bow.

“How do we play this?” Finnick asked, not so subtly toying with the trident in his hand, his weapon of choice.

A glance behind his second made it clear that everyone was armed. Jo was leaning against the main mast, she looked calm but her grip on the handle of her axe was sure. Mags was a few feet behind her, an innocent looking old woman arranging fishing nests – if it weren’t for the cutlass between her teeth. He locked eyes with several other members of his crew – his family – and licked his lips nervously.

“Cool.” he answered at last. “We play it cool.”

The Rebellion was a big ship compared to The Mockingjay. Its grey sails identified her as a part of Coin’s separatist fleet more clearly than the flag stamped with a bird Coin had chosen as the emblem of her cause. Haymitch watched as the three mast anchored alongside his more modest ship, not able to resist the urge to crack a joke about damaging the polish.

They could have sent a boat. They didn’t need to act as if they were taking the ship. Damn Coin and her love for power play.

“Prepare to board!” someone shouted on The Rebellion.

“You could ask first.” Haymitch muttered as a pathway was quickly secured between the two ships.
There were women, like Jo, who made piracy look hot. Alma Coin wasn’t one of those – then again, as she liked to repeat to whoever wanted to listen, she wasn’t a pirate, she was a political leader. That was something Haymitch would never be able to understand. He didn’t want to be a leader, he had never wanted the responsibility of having people depending on him. Those people, his crew, they had made him their leader out of a misguided notion that he could keep them safe. There weren’t more than twenty-five people on his ship, never mind the refugees waiting at the Hob, and the responsibility was already crushing, the dread that he would make a mistake that would kill them all was enough to keep him awake at night… He didn’t know why anyone, Coin or Snow, would want to rule over that part of the sea. Too many people would depend on whoever would win and he wasn’t sure either of them would have their best interest at heart.

She had imposed an uniform on her fleet, to distinguish her soldiers from the Royal Navy, and she wore it herself: grey cotton pants, grey shirt and grey coat that matched almost perfectly her ice cold grey eyes and hair. That woman always gave him a chill. She made him think about the old ghost stories he used to read his brother at night.

As soon as she was on The Mockingjay’s deck, she looked around with the air of someone who owned the place. It annoyed Haymitch to no end. He had worked hard to steal that ship. The Mockingjay was his and no one else’s.

“Captain Coin.” he said at last. “Please be my guest.”

If she noticed his sarcasm, she didn’t let on.

“Captain Abernathy.” she nodded briefly, her eyes stopping on Finnick’s trident. Her lips twitched in an amused smile and her hand came to rest on the gun at her belt. She was big on guns, always looking for more firepower, powders and canons. Bogs, her second, stood by her side, looking far less amused, he was assessing the potential threats, Haymitch knew, and once he had located Jo, he never quite stopped glancing in her direction. She had a reputation after all and no gun would be a match against a flying axe.

“Permission to come on board, Captain?”

Haymitch gave a dismissive glance at the third uninvited guest and snorted. “You didn’t need my permission to leave, boy, you don’t need my permission to come back.”

“I was just trying to be polite.” Gale retorted dismissively and hopped from the wooden plank to the deck before wandering away, greeting some old crewmates, probably looking for Katniss. He hoped he would find the girl. She was eager to punch him. Gale had been on his ship for as long as Katniss had but he had been taken by Coin’s speeches and the rumors flying all around about the separatists. He had deserted in the middle of the night while they were ashore after Katniss had refused once again to follow him, leaving only a note behind him to explain his disappearance.

“We will be more comfortable in your cabin to talk.”

It was an order disguised as a suggestion. Haymitch wanted to tell her to go fuck herself but he was very much aware that The Mockingjay’s canons were no match for The Rebellion’s and that they were badly outnumbered. With a shrug and a not-so-discreet sign for Jo to remain on watch on deck, he led her to his cabin. Boggs didn’t follow them inside and so Finnick stopped alongside the man, starting a conversation that could have been easier if their Captains hadn’t been in some sort of covert fight.

Haymitch made a point of shutting the door and glared when he saw she was already near his desk, commandeering the only chair in the room and throwing the maps scattered around a disdainful look.
It hadn’t bothered him when Effie had sat there but, to be fair, Effie might be bossy but she wasn’t a power hungry sea-witch. And she was pretty to look at which never hurt.

“Did you steal that from *The Career*?” Coin asked, nodding at the map spread wide on top of the others. The Cornucopia’s emplacement was neatly marked with a tiny red cross. “Rumor has it you and *The Rue* took it.”

“We didn’t take it, we sank it.” he corrected, moving over to the shelf for a bottle of rum. “And rumors go awfully fast.”

“It depends on who spread them.” she replied. “I have good sources.”

He supposed she meant Plutarch Heavensbee. The man was a close relation to Snow and also happened to be a French spy – if Snow was aware of that, he was happy to ignore it. Another brand of rumors had it that Heavensbee was a double agent and was, in fact working for Snow. A selected few knew better and had quickly figured out that Heavensbee was very much working for himself. At the moment, his interest seemed to lie with Coin’s.

“Sources that told you where to find the Cornucopia?” he snorted. It wasn’t a question. They were too close to the island marked on the map and too far from the island she had annexed to her cause.

“It wasn’t much of a catch.” she offered, almost apologetically. By that, she meant she had taken everything worth taking.

“People at *The Hob* would disagree.” he pointed out.

“Your people are welcome on Thirteen.” she retorted.

He was of an opinion that her island needed a better name – he would have found a better name if he had been in charge: calling it Thirteen because it was the thirteenth isle of the archipelago? *Boring.* But Coin was a boring person. Down to earth. Practical. Dangerous.

“That’s an old argument.” he scoffed. “Let’s not have it again.”

“You will have to surrender eventually, Haymitch.” she said. “Once we’ve taken power…”

“If you ever take power…” he countered, taking a swing out of his bottle.

“I won’t tolerate piracy on my seas.” she glared.

“Funny since your fleet is made of pirate ships.” he smirked.

“They’re not pirates anymore once they joined my fleet. They’re officers.” she snapped. “You have a fine ship and a good crew, Haymitch. Soldier Hawthorne…”

“Yeah, he deserted so I’m not too interested in whatever he has to say.” he scoffed. “Look, we can have that same talk a thousand times, the answer’s still no. I’m not interested in going to war. I just want to feed my people.”

“I could protect them.” she argued. “Once Snow is out of the picture…”

“And *how* are you going to take him out? He is untouchable, Alma.” He rolled his eyes. “I want him dead as much as anyone but…”

“But you’re content with stealing merchant ships and doing nothing concrete about the problem?” she cut him off. “Like a coward.”
He toasted her with his bottle. “Cowards outlive the braves.”

“Don’t you feel you owe something to your dead?” she insisted. “Your mother? Your brother? There was a girlfriend too, wasn’t there? Your story’s quite popular on Tortuga, you did a number on the taverns’ waitresses…”

“I think we’re done here.” he growled. “And if you know what’s good for you, you won’t ever talk about my family again.”

“Don’t threaten me.” she advised coolly. “I could sink your ship right now.”

“But you won’t. ‘Cause you want her.” he scowled. “And I’m not giving her up so let’s make things easier for you: either you’re taking her by force or you’re going back to your ship and sailing away.”

She studied him for a while and he tried not to show just how much her spooky milky grey eyes were unnerving him. His hands weren’t as steady as they used to be but he could hold his own with a sword or a knife and he was positive he could beat her. Then Boggs would probably kill him if Finnick wasn’t quick enough to finish him first. And, if they managed to get away with that there would The Rebellion to face and that wouldn’t end well. Probably.

Slowly, Coin stood up and walked past him to the door.

“My patience is growing thin.” she warned him. “Join before I decide you’re more trouble than I can tolerate on my sea.”

“Yeah, see, it’s not your sea.” he spat, opening the door for her.

He immediately met Finnick’s eyes. Despite his wolfish grin, the boy was obviously wary and he gave him a brief reassuring nod before escorting Coin back to her ship. She left without a goodbye and he bit back on the gibe he wanted to shout after her. It wasn’t only his life at stake, after all. Boggs nodded at him and Gale hurried after his new friends, pausing long enough next to him to snort.

“You never got a whore on board before. ‘Must be a good one.” the boy joked, more to take a jab at him than because he cared. He didn’t know where Gale’s resentment was coming from but he couldn’t say he was sorry the boy had chosen to switch sides.

Haymitch waited until the plank was gone and the two ships were separated before turning to Finnick to give his orders.

“We’re going to shore, see if they left anything salvageable for us.” he said, his eyes quickly assessing who would be best qualified. “I’m taking Jo, Katniss and Blight with me. The ship is yours.”

“Yes, Captain.” Finnick nodded and shouted his orders to the crew.

It appeared obvious very soon, as the boat took them closer to the shore, that they wouldn’t find anything of interest on the island. There were still pillars of smoke rising straight to the sky and, when they reached what the pirates had used as a camp, all they found were corpses.

Haymitch would have pillaged their treasure but would have left them alive.

That was another reason he refused to join Coin. He didn’t like her methods.

“Look around.” he ordered the others. “Maybe they left something we can use.”
Chapter End Notes

So I have forgotten to mention on Invictus but I might not update chaptered stories next week since it is hayffie week on tumblr and there will be a one shot a day all week. I am not sure yet but... We will see =) Let me know what you think about this chapter!
Effie let Katniss drag her down to the ship’s belly, watching the surrounding franticness with dread. *The Rebellion* was barely more than a dot on the horizon for now but Katniss assured her it would be there fast. The girl led her to the female crew quarters where several women were already waiting, sitting cross-legged on the floor and talking in soft voices. Aster, Prim, Annie and a couple of others she had never talked to...

She bypassed them and went straight for her hammock, feeling the need for some solitude. She was upset by Haymitch’s attempts at turning her against her godfather. Upset and... She pursed her lips and blinked away the tears by pure force of will. She couldn’t afford to believe him. She *couldn’t*.

Katniss exchanged a few words with her sister, ruffled her hair, and then swiftly hopped on Johanna’s hammock with more confidence than Effie would ever show faced with those suspended sheets. Her bow was on her shoulder with her quiver but only her knife was out and, Effie surmised, ready to use.

“Are they going to attack us?” she asked the girl.

Revolutionaries... She had no love for revolutionaries – not that she loved pirates but at least pirates weren’t *complete* traitors.

“Hopefully not or we’re dead.” Katniss shrugged, shooting Prim a glance with obvious wariness. “We can’t win against them.”

“Fabulous.” she deadpanned. Her life kept getting better and better, didn’t it?

“Don’t worry, Coin wants us to join her army,” the girl shrugged. “She’s been trying to force Haymitch’s hand for months. They won’t sink us.”

Coin. That name, at least, was familiar. She was certain she had heard Governor Snow talk about her at great lengths with other officials during balls and parties... She had never cared enough to listen but she could remember fragments... She could remember hearing fragments of conversations about other things too but she had always dismissed those, had always trusted her godfather implicitly and had only been too happy to follow his advices of ordering a new dress instead of letting herself be bored by the men’s discussions.

“Katniss...” she hesitated.

The girl’s grey eyes darted from Prim to her, focused and a little dangerous. Katniss was feral in a different way from Johanna.

“Katniss, may I see your forearm?” she asked.

The teenager frowned but shrugged and pushed her sleeve up, revealing a mark similar to Haymitch’s.

“I was in one of Snow’s slave camp.” Katniss explained. “Haymitch helped me and a few others to escape. He helped me find my family too.” She looked at Prim with obvious relief and love. “I never thought I would see my sister again. I’m never letting her out of my sight.”
“Why...” Effie stopped and licked her lips. She didn’t want to ask but she needed to know. “Why do you say it was Governor Snow’s?”

“’Cause some of the guards were Navy.” she scowled. “And they told us we were working for the glory of Port Capitol and we should be proud...” She let out a bitter laugh. “Proud of what? How twisted is that?”

Effie didn’t have time to answer, Peeta came down the stairs and straight to them once he had spotted them.

“Finnick says I should stay here with you.” he told Effie, his fingers playing with the handle of a new cutlass passed through his belt. “Keep you safe.”

“I can keep her safe.” Katniss huffed, clearly vexed. “Probably better than you, too.”

“I’m not saying you can’t.” Peeta smiled. “I think he just wanted me out of his hair.”

“Oh, alright then.” the girl declared, pacified.

Peeta was so obviously infatuated with her Effie couldn’t help a soft smile. She listened to their conversation for a few minutes, neither of them paying her any attention anymore, wondering why Katniss had to be so confrontational when Peeta was so sweet.

She couldn’t stop her mind from thinking. She was thinking about odd little sentences she had heard at the fort and at her godfather’s house. She was thinking about all those deliveries from other islands that ensured Port Capitol’s prosperity. She was thinking about Haymitch’s claims and about Enobaria’s insistence that they should kill her. She was thinking about the fact the Royal Navy hadn’t caught up with them when she knew for a fact Governor Snow’s fleet was one of the best on that side of the Caribbean sea...

Every conversation abruptly died down and Effie looked up to see a young man at the foot of the stairs, all dressed in an awful grey uniform. He was very handsome.

“Catnip!” he exclaimed when he spotted the girl. He made his way to her, greeting several women on his way but no one answered him. And by the time he reached their corner, it was clear he was feeling put out. Katniss’ folded arms and sullen face was obviously not the welcome he had hoped for. When she remained silent, he nodded to Peeta who was standing close to the girl, hovering protectively behind her in a fashion that, Effie was certain, Katniss probably hated even though it was the correct gentlemanly attitude to adopt. The newcomer eyed Peeta with equal part annoyance and amusement. “Who’s that?”

“Your replacement.” Katniss hissed.

“A little short, isn’t he?” the young man snorted despite the fact that he barely had an inch on Peeta. His eyes fell on her next, took in the tattered silk dress and frowned. “And her?”

“I’m... Haymitch’s special friend.” Effie lied at once, completely forgetting her shame at being mistaken for a prostitute. She didn’t want to be captured by yet another ship. The Mockingjay was an upgrade from The Career and, for pirates, people were nice.

The young man lifted his eyebrows, clearly taken aback by that. “Special friend?” He looked to Katniss who simply shrugged.

Effie swallowed down the rest of her dignity and closed her eyes. “Whore. I’m his whore.” she clarified.
“Since when does Haymitch take whores on board?” the stranger frowned.

“What the Captain does is none of your business anymore, is it?” Katniss glowered, grabbing his arm and dragging him further away but not without glancing at her over her shoulder. “Stay here.”

She had no intention of going anywhere else.

“We'll be okay, Miss Effie.” Peeta told her in a soft voice, reaching for her shoulder and squeezing gently. “You will be home soon.”

“Hopefully.” she whispered, not sure she believed it herself.

It took forever for The Rebellion to leave but the tension on the ship didn’t decrease when the Captain declared they were going to explore the land. Effie was careful to remain out of the way, even going as far as offering Annie her help in tucking ropes away. It was heavier and more difficult than she had thought it would be but it kept her mind occupied.

The crew only relaxed when Haymitch and the people he had taken with him returned to the ship unharmed but grim-faced and mostly empty-handed. She heard Cecelia tell Mags that there was no food and the few tokens they had brought back wouldn’t sell for much. She remained with Annie, she liked her a lot and felt sorry she was stuck on a pirate ship because she deserved much better. She loved Finnick though and it warmed Effie’s heart to see them together. Despite his flirtatious nature, no one could deny his love for Annie.

“Trinket.” Johanna called, later that night, as she was about to settle down with her allotted bowl of disgusting stew. “The Captain wants to see you.”

She tossed her bowl a regretful glance and readily accepted Prim’s offer to watch it for her before someone else took it and ate it.

Haymitch was sitting behind his desk when she entered, his flask in his hand. He appeared to be reviewing maps, his untouched bowl of steaming stew had been pushed on one side, dangerously close to the edge.

“You can read and write, right?” he asked her, before she could even properly close the door.

“Are you bent on insulting me at every turn?” she scowled. “Naturally, I can read and write.”

He shot her a glance but there was no amusement in it, it was all business. “Can you count too?”

“Yes.” she replied simply.

“Good.” He rummaged in the drawer of his desk and took out a notebook, a quill and an inkpot. “I need you to do a complete inventory of what we have in the hold. The food first, it needs to be accurate, then I need to know how we are doing on our powder stock, you can take Mags for that part, she will help. I also need you to do an inventory of what’s in the treasure chest and try to estimate how much we can sell every item but that’s less urgent.”

It was asking a lot but it seemed better and certainly more interesting than mending sails and clothes so she reached for the notebook, the quill and the inkpot, but he touched her wrist before she could actually take them. She froze as if he had grabbed her instead of simply brushing his fingers against her skin. Their latest argument was fresh into her mind.

“There wasn’t much left at the Cornucopia but I found something for you.” he mumbled, without looking at her. “It’s on the bed.”
Curious, she walked to his bed and immediately spotted the dusty blue fabric. She unfolded it to find a dress. A proper dress with sleeves, a decent cleavage and a long skirt.

“It’s out of fashion.” she pointed out.

He snorted with actual amusement this time. “You’re welcome, sweetheart.”

Her lips twitched but, as rude as it was, she couldn’t bring herself to thank him. Somehow, she felt as if they were playing a game and thanking him would have made her lose. She kept her eyes on the blue fabric.

“The soldiers didn’t leave the fort.” she whispered reluctantly.

She was glad she didn’t have to clarify what she was talking about. He slumped a little in his chair, bringing the bottle to his lips and watching her silently.

“What does it mean?” she asked, finding the nerves to meet his eyes.

“I’m not sure.” he shrugged. “But I think we should try to find out before I take you back and you get yourself killed in another pirate attack in a month or so.”

“If you are right...” she said slowly. “If Governor Snow is the man you say he is... If he truly asked those men to kidnap me...”

“I think he paid them to have you killed, Princess.” Haymitch cut her off. “Brutus hated losing money, that’s why I don’t think he would have passed on a ransom. He wouldn’t have made a big benefit by selling you to slavers but it’s always a little more than what he would have gotten for simply killing you like he was paid to do.”

She shivered. Her lips were wobbling but she pursed them tight and jutted her chin in the air, refusing to show how afraid she was. He noticed anyway. He hauled himself off his chair and stepped around the desk to place a hand on her arm.

“You’re safe now, sweetheart.” he said in a low voice.

“For how long?” she murmured. “Because if you are right, if it was all a ploy to steal my inheritance... I have nothing to pay you with.”

She hugged the dress close to her chest as he sighed.

“Effie, I would have taken you on board with or without money.” he scoffed. “I’m a former slave. I’m not in the slaving business.”

He tucked a wayward strand of hair behind her ear and she realized suddenly that they were much closer than propriety allowed. She had never allowed another man such behavior, she had always played by the rules of society and she didn’t understand why he was affecting her so much, making her flirt and banter like a shameless commoner... She ducked her head to hide her confusion and hugged the dress tighter.

“How can we be sure?” she asked. “Perhaps you are wrong... Perhaps it is all a misunderstanding... Perhaps...”

“Perhaps somewhere monkeys can fly.” he scorned.

“I want to go back to Port Capitol anyway.” she declared. “Either way, if I reappear and people see
I’m alive, he can’t deny me my money.”

“No, but he can have you killed once the dust has settled down.” he shrugged. “He can lock you away, pretend you’re sick and get control of your finances... There are a lot of things he can do, sweetheart. Coin is becoming a real threat and piracy is putting a dent in his budget. He needs money more than he needs to keep up with appearances.”

“It might be a huge misunderstanding.” she insisted.

“Fine.” he snapped even though the idea clearly held no appeal to him. “Here’s what we’re going to do... I will try to get a hold on Heavensbee...”

“Plutarch?” she interrupted him with a frown. “How do you know Plutarch?”

She liked the man well enough. He travelled a lot but visited Port Capitol several times a year and was never short of impressive tales of pirate attacks, dashing officers at the rescue and more generally improbable adventures that he had heard about through his travels.

“Everybody knows Plutarch.” he sneered. “And Plutarch knows everything. We’re going to track him down and I will see what he knows about this then we will decide what we do.”

He truly meant to help, she thought. Regardless of the fact he was right or wrong about this, his intentions were genuine.

“Thank you.” she murmured, suddenly touched by everything he had done for her. He had kept her on The Mockingjay when it would have been easier to let her go with the other prisoners on The Rue. What would have happened to her then? If Chaff was true to his word – and since he was Haymitch’s friend she was inclined to trust him – he would have dumped her on an island somewhere and she would have maybe – probably – managed to make her way back to Port Capitol and then... Then they would have known for certain if Effie’s life was in danger probably.

“Don’t thank me.” he grumbled. “It’s not charity. You earn your keep. I need you to do the inventory.” He was ill-at-ease now, looking down at his boots.

It made her smile. Fearsome pirate who couldn’t take a simple expression of gratitude...

“Thank you all the same.” she declared, pressing a kiss on his cheek.

He turned his head, surprised by the move.

A dangerous move.

Her lips accidentally landed at the corner of his mouth and she felt a thrill run down her spine. His breath caught, his hand landed on her waist. She lingered longer than she had meant to but then she stepped back with a smile, grabbed the notebook, ink and quill on her way out, not quite grinning but a little pleased all the same despite her improper behavior. It was nice to know she could still make an impression when she was wearing rags.

Her amusement didn’t last long when the reality of the situation hit her.

If Haymitch was right and if Governor Snow truly wished her dead...

Then...

What would she do?
Chapter End Notes

What did you think?
Haymitch leaned against the upper deck railing, watching the lesson taking place below. Jo, Katniss and Finnick were relentless and even though there were quite a few rounds of laughter, seriousness prevailed. Peeta wasn’t too bad with a sword, Haymitch decided, but he would need more training. With those three coaches and Mags butting in from time to time to give advice, though, he wasn’t worried. The kid would learn how to defend himself in no time.

“Is it strictly necessary?” Effie asked, joining him near the railing.

She didn’t agree with Peeta learning how to use a sword, she had been very vocal in her disapprobation.

“It could save his life.” Haymitch shrugged, turning to face her. “It could save yours too.”

Almost a week on *The Mockingjay* had toughened her up which was a relief. Some people never took to life at sea. The sunburns on her cheeks, nose and forehead were starting to fade into a light tan, she looked healthy – healthier than when they had found her anyway. And angry but she was always angry about something.

She was wearing the blue dress that day, it made her eyes look even bluer.

“Johanna is already shouting at me all the time, I refuse to engage in a screaming match while we are toying with sharp things.” she huffed. “Besides, it is not proper for a lady to wield a sword.”

“I don’t know, sweetheart, I know a good deal of ladies who enjoy wielding swords.” he smirked.

If she understood the joke, she didn’t let it show.

“I wouldn’t.” she retorted. “And I wouldn’t trust Johanna to teach me properly.”

“I could train you.” he offered. That would involve a lot of touching and he wasn’t against that. At all. It would probably be worth the aggravation even.

“Certainly not.” she scoffed.

“You need to learn how to protect yourself.” he pointed out. “You’re on a pirate ship, sweetheart, anything could happen.”

“Does Prim know how to protect herself?” she retorted. “Does Aster?”

“They have Katniss.” he shrugged.

“And I have you.” she declared, resolutely watching Peeta’s training instead of him.

It made him smirk. “So sure of yourself… Why would I risk my life for you?”

“Because you are honorable.” she hummed.

“Am I?” he chuckled, placing a hand on her waist. He kept the touch light but she pursed her lips all the same. “I think you may have the wrong idea here, Princess.”
For a second, she leaned into his hand.

“I don’t think so.” she grinned, sauntering away and swinging her lips in a way that made it really hard for him not to run after her. He went back to his watching instead.

There was a smirk on his face that he didn’t manage to suppress for some time.

She was trouble.

~°~°~°~

“Land!” Katniss screamed from the look-out post.

There was a rush of excitement on the ship, Effie heard it all the way from Haymitch’s cabin. She had requisitioned his desk to properly copy her notes on the inventory. She was quick and efficient but she couldn’t write with a quill while standing on a swaying ship. There were limits to her powers.

She was trying to make sense of Mags’ explanation on gun powder and canons so her inventory could be as precise as possible. She had done the food stock first and had been surprised to find so much edible things in the hold, it had made her wonder why they were stuck eating a variant of the same disgusting stew every day. Katniss had said the food was for refugees waiting on an island called The Hob. It was a black market smaller than the legendary pirate port of Tortuga and where principally children and elderly people lived. From Annie, she had gathered that the refugees were all more or less family to members of the crew or, at the very least, former neighbors. People who had escaped slavery but not by much. It was Johanna who explained in sharp tones that The Mockingjay was their main source of food supplies and that Haymitch traded everything in the hold for almost nothing. People didn’t like charity so he gave them the impression that it wasn’t charity.

She remained at the desk, listening distractedly to the orders being shouted by Finnick while she worked. The anchor had longed been dropped and the noises of the stock in the hold being unloaded had stopped for a few minutes when Haymitch appeared at the door. He had grumbled a lot about her stealing his desk at first but she hadn’t left him a choice in the matter and so he had relented. He barely blinked when he found her there, grabbing the stack of papers on the right where her small but neat handwriting held account of every piece of fruit on the ship, and frowning at her in the same move.

“You’re coming?” he asked. “You’ve been at sea for weeks, you can’t say you don’t want to go back on dry land...”

Given who she was, she was a little scared of the reception she would get at The Hob. Rumors of her parentage had spread on The Mockingjay a few days earlier and everyone hadn’t been happy about it. It had taken Johanna not so subtly toying with her axe and reminding everyone she was under the Captain’s protection to settle the score. Mostly, it was now old news and people didn’t care. They were pirates, Katniss had explained, they judged people on their actions not on who their godfathers were. And, Prim had added, she was part of the crew for now at least.

“She should I?” she asked. “I wouldn’t wish to make anyone uncomfortable...”

“Nobody knows who you are,” he shrugged. “And it’s going to stay that way. I gave very strict orders. I don’t need rumors that you’re with us flying around.”

“I don’t look like one of you.” she pointed out, glancing down at her blue dress. “Won’t it give the game away?”
“Just say you’re my lady friend.” he mocked.

She glared at him. “You seem intent on everyone believing I am your personal prostitute.”

“Can’t blame me for trying, sweetheart.” he winked but he soon became serious again. “Nobody will ask questions here. It’s safe.”

The temptation of actually walking on something that wouldn’t sway under her feet was too much and she stood up, smoothing her blue dress and checking her hair was in place.

“I still think you should lose the corset.” he teased.

“Ruffian.” she retorted, not as offended as she used to be by his coarse jokes. A few nights sharing space with Johanna had taught her much more about life than she ever wanted to know, and, compared to her, even Haymitch’s rudeness and discourteous remarks seemed tamed. She didn’t even blush anymore when Johanna talked about body parts Effie had always been taught should only be privy to a man and his wife.

To his obvious surprise, she looped her arm through his.

“I’m keeping up the pretense.” she said innocently in answer to his questioning gaze. “Surely you would give your arm to your lady friend, Captain?”

Her flirting was blatant and at any other time she would have been mortified by her own bluntness – but at any other time she wouldn’t have been taken captive by a pirate ship and rescued by another pirate ship with a handsome Captain a little too partial with his drinks.

His lips twitched in a smirk. “You’re toying with fire, Princess. Careful you don’t get burned.”

“Your grammar is atrocious.” she declared, steering him outside.

He rolled his eyes but let that fly, perhaps because she was pressing against his arm.

Her amusement died down as soon as she saw the settlement. She had been expecting poor but not that poor. The houses were barely more than unsafe shacks, people were wearing rags and looked malnourished...

She remained silent while Haymitch made his transactions with the refugees’ leader, a man called Undersee, only piping in when he had difficulties decrypting her handwriting. The price he asked for the whole thing was ridiculous and Undersee obviously knew it because he thanked him at least ten times. Haymitch waved it off every time, promising they would be back soon with more.

He had given everyone the day and the night off and a group of them, including Johanna headed to what passed for a tavern in that corner of the world. Katniss asked her to join but she declined, preferring to return back on board. The female quarters were silent, everyone was either out and about on the island or partying on the deck.

She loved parties and she suspected if she had made an effort she could have enjoyed the music and the dancing even if it wasn’t the kind she was used to but her heart wasn’t in it. All the surrounding poverty... She buried further under the blanket, having gotten a hold of sleeping in a hammock at last, and forced herself not to think too much about that – or to think at all for that matter. The future was too uncertain for her to linger on it.

She didn’t leave the ship again before their departure and if she was a little less cheerful than usual for a few days, no one commented on it. Johanna and her unwelcomed comments that she simply
needed to get laid weren’t helping matters and not only because they were utterly improper and left her blushing to the root of her hair. The pirate woman loved to make fun of her innocence in the matters of the flesh.

Needless to say since she was already unsettled, it was entirely off-putting to be shaken awake late one night. She had had trouble falling asleep to begin with, a storm was brewing and the ship kept tilting left and right, carried off by powerful waves that had chased her below deck well before nightfall.

“Are we sinking?” she fretted when Johanna almost pushed her off her hammock in her urge to wake her up.

“We’re under attack.” the woman replied, already turning away from her to snatch knives everywhere on her person: hidden in her boots, strapped to her thighs, wedged in her belt...

“Haymitch wants you to go to his cabin and stay there.” She blinked, completely stunned by that news. “Now, Trinket!”

She jumped and grabbed her clothes. She had barely put her petticoat on before Johanna shoved her in direction of the stairs.

“No time!” the pirate claimed. “Trust me, if we’re taken being dressed will be the last of your worries.”

And so she stumbled on the deck, wearing nothing more than the white shirt she slept in and a petticoat, while the rest of the crew shouted orders to each other. The deck was wet with water spilling from the enormous waves the ship was riding. She could see the enemy ship looming in the dark, enormous and dangerous looking, and she could hear Haymitch’s voice somewhere on the upper deck screaming himself hoarse with instructions. They were trying to avoid being boarded, she thought.

Someone crashed into her but didn’t pause to help her up. The ship was rocking so hard she thought she would never manage to reach Haymitch’s cabin and when she did, she locked herself in it. The papers and maps that used to be on his desk had flown everywhere, the little mementoes he kept on the shelves were on the floor... She had to grip the heavy wardrobe to keep herself upright. Water kept splashing against the window over the bed and she wondered if it would resist the assault of the sea.

Naturally, she soon had greater worries when she heard the first canon going off. And then a second. Her fingers clenched the wood so hard her knuckles turned white.

She could only guess at what happened next. There was a huge shock that had nothing to do with a stormy sea and that sent her rolling on the floor. It was several minutes before she managed to pick herself up, hauling herself upright by grabbing the edge of the desk. She would have a nasty bruise on her elbow...

That was when she heard the cries. Battle cries. And even the noise of a raging sea couldn’t cover the racket of swordfights, gunshots and canons going off.

It was more than curiosity that pushed her to unlock the door to take a peek outside. It was dread. She didn’t want anyone on board to get killed. Not even Johanna.

They had been boarded.

There were strangers harassing The Mockingjay crew, other pirates she thought, but it wasn’t as bad
as it could have been. More than one stranger fell down, an arrow neatly jutting from their back.

Dangling from the net of ropes that led to the outlook post, Katniss was making a quick job of their enemies. And then there was Johanna who kept a deadly circle around her by swinging her axes, and Finnick who didn’t hesitate before stabbing every passing pirate with his trident... She caught sight of Blight in the confusion whirling his sword around and then...

Then she spotted Haymitch, near the side of the ship, locked in a fight with what could only be the other ship’s captain given the outlandish feather hat. The ship kept tilting one way and the other and Haymitch was far too close to the wooden edge, he had difficulties blocking the other man’s blow and remaining on his feet. In a moment of clarity, she saw how it would unfold: the enemy captain’s plan was obvious: pushing him overboard – which given the state of the sea would be a death sentence.

She bit her lips, her eyes darting around for help... Everyone was either locked in a fight of their own or too far to do anything. A bottle of rum rolled to her, bumping against her bare foot. It was still full – not a given with Haymitch – and heavy, she grabbed it by the neck and before she could think about what she was doing, mainly because if she had paused to think she would have probably locked the door again and prayed like a proper lady should do, she left the safety of the cabin and ran.

How many blades did she avoid on her way to the two captains? She didn’t know, she didn’t let herself count. She ducked when someone came at her with a sword, closed her eyes when she felt it pass too close to her neck and only breathed again when she realized the man was dead thanks to a well placed arrow. She would thank Katniss later.

She was a woman on a mission and she didn’t stop until she was right behind the enemy captain. She swung the bottle with all her strength. It shattered against the back of the man’s head. She should have thought about the hat because it cushioned most of the blow but it, at least, distracted him long enough that he turned to her, incredulous, before raising his sword. Haymitch, who was slumped against the wooden railing, pushed himself forward and impaled him with his sword.

It was a horrifying scene even if the man had just been about to murder her and she would certainly have screamed if Haymitch hadn’t stood there, panting, his white shirt tainted with quickly spreading blood at the shoulder.

“You had to waste the rum, didn’t you?” he scoffed.

“I saved you!” she retorted, outraged he would even think about the alcohol in such a moment. “A thank you would be in order.”

A huge waved crashed on the ship just then making everyone lose their balance and she would probably have plummeted to her death if he hadn’t caught her. For a second, it was doubtful if they would remain on the right side of the railing but he had brute strength and he kept them there.

Once they realized their captain was dead, the enemy crew was easy to overpower. Not that Effie had any part in that, she grabbed the wayward mop and was ready to use it as a weapon if anyone came near her but no one did.

“Maybe I will get you a club.” Haymitch mocked once everything was over. “You’re good at hitting things.”

She made a face and looked at the surrounding chaos with equal part disgust and horror. The deck was damp with blood and sea water. The captain’s amusement disappeared soon enough. For the next hour, it was all about assessing how bad the damages the ship had sustained were, how many
wounded, how many dead... Fortunately, even though there were quite a few people heavily injured, they had lost no one from the crew.

Aster had her hands full though even with Prim’s help.

“You need to check Haymitch’s shoulder.” Effie insisted because she had been trying to make him sit down for more than an hour and he always refused, stating that there were things he needed to do.

“I’m fine.” Haymitch grumbled from a few feet away where he was talking with Finnick about the holes in the hull they had hastily patched up. Nothing could be done until the storm was over but it was clear they would need to drop anchor somewhere to repair.

“No you’re not.” she argued.

“The bleeding stopped!” he snapped. “It’s fine.”

Aster still took a look and shook her head.

“It needs stitches.” the healer declared, before glancing at Effie. “There are more urgent wounded. You’re good with a needle. Do it.”

She was gone before Effie could argue that she would certainly not.

“I’m fine.” Haymitch repeated for what felt like the hundredth time.

“It’s okay, there’s nothing more to do for now.” Finnick countered. “Go get yourself stitched, Captain.”

Despite his protests and her reluctance, they ended up in his cabin. He grabbed a bottle of rum on the way to the bed and pulled his shirt off. The fabric had stuck to the wound and he hissed in pain.

She hovered in front of him uncertainly, unable to keep her eyes politely averted. She hadn’t seen a lot of men’s chests – mainly workers down at the dock of Port Capitol – and she had certainly never watched or touched before. And now that it was expected of her...

“Finally forgot the corset?” he snorted, taking a swing of rum. “I have to say, Princess, I like this look better.”

He was bare-chested and she was wearing nothing but a white shirt that was damp in places and a petticoat. The realization made her flush red and to hide her uneasiness, she inspected the wound. It didn’t help. She knew nothing about nursing.

“I have never done that before.” she confessed.

“Walking around without a corset?” he joked. “I’m sure you can get used to it... I sure could get used to see you walking around without one. I like the view.”

She pursed her lips and tilted her head to let him know he wasn’t funny. That was when the ship chose to rock again and she almost fell down, only staying upright because he steadied her by grabbing her waist. The fabric of the shirt was thin – so thin it was probably not hiding much but she didn’t let herself think about that, there was nothing she could do about it for now – and she could feel how warm his hands were. It made her wonder how warmer they would feel on her skin and the thought made her blush even more. She reached for his uninjured shoulder instinctively, trying to keep her footing. His skin was warm and not as smooth to the touch as hers was. They remained frozen like that for a few seconds and then she cleared her throat and grabbed the needle and thread.
He had to guide her through it all step by step. He did it in a bored voice, explaining how to sterilize everything, occasionally taking a swing from his bottle for “medicinal reasons”. Obviously it wasn’t his first wound, there were quite a few scars on his chest. He winced every time she pulled the needle through his flesh and she did too if only because her shaking fingers, the poor light coming from the lantern hanging from a hook next to the bed and the rocking of the ship didn’t make the task any easier.

“It’s done.” she said, when she was sure the wound was properly stitched and she had wrapped it in clean bandages. The storm seemed to finally have calmed down so she picked up the papers and maps and placed them in neat stacks on the desk.

“You should get some rest.” she declared in her best bossy voice, making sure to keep her back on him. It all seemed very improper – it was very improper – but she couldn’t seem to simply... leave. She didn’t hear him move but she felt his presence at her back. She was trapped between him and the desk – if trapped was the word because despite everything her reason was screaming at her, she didn’t feel the need to escape. “Haymitch...”

“I owe you a thank you.” His voice was a growl and she could feel his breath tickling the back of her neck.

She turned around slowly, wishing he had put on a shirt because she was itching to touch, to explore and to map this forbidden territory. There was a thin line of pale blond hair running from his navel to below his belt and she couldn’t seem to look away, fascinated with it. She wanted to touch and that was bad.

Ladies didn’t have that sort of impulses.

Perhaps she had been amongst pirates for too long.

“I wasted the rum.” she retorted, if only to keep up with the banter.

“True.” he chuckled.

She knew what he was going to do before he did it but she was still a little bit surprised when he leaned in. She had had suitors and flirts before, she had kissed and been kissed. But never like that. Haymitch’s kisses were not gentle respectful pecks, they were hard and demanding and when she felt his tongue lick her lips, she gasped. She had never been kissed like that but she caught up pretty fast as to how it worked and what he wanted of her. She kissed him back just as aggressively and when his hands bundled her shirt at her waist, she placed hers on his chest, eager to finally touch. Naturally, a corner of her mind, the sane corner of her mind, reminded her that what she was doing was a social suicide. Not only was her virtue and reputation in jeopardy, her conduct was absolutely shameful.

She paid it absolutely no mind because Haymitch’s skin was warm under her hands, his chest all muscles and bones and soft hair... When her nail accidentally scrapped his nipple he let out something that was halfway through a groan and a moan and she drew her head back, afraid she had hurt him. It was only when he latched his mouth at her throat that she figured out it was a noise of pleasure and she did it again only to test the theory. He pushed her against the desk, his teeth sunk into the soft skin at the junction of her neck and shoulder, his hands slipped under her shirt...

It was almost too much to take at once.

She could feel something hard against her stomach and she had a vague idea of what it was – again,
you didn’t spend weeks in close quarter with Johanna without getting a crash course in those matters – it was enough to make her hesitate. When his hands roamed higher, his thumb brushing the underside of her breast, she pushed hard on his arms. His mouth left her shoulder with a disgusting noise of suction.

He looked confused for a second and then leaned in for another kiss, a slower one. It was less rough and less pressing, more questioning.

“Maybe you should go back to your quarters, sweetheart.” he advised, pressing kisses along her jaw line. “You’re a little too tempting for me right now.”

“You’re drunk.” she accused.

“Hardly.” he scoffed against her neck. “Although hardly’s a good word. I am hard...”

That was added in a growl that made her shiver. The ship rocked a little, sending him that little bit closer to her, pressing his body against hers in all the right places and suddenly she wanted more. She didn’t know exactly what she wanted but she had no doubt that whatever it was, he would know how to give it to her.

“I want...” she hesitated, uncertain of how to put it into words.

“What?” he prompted, his fingers still bundling her shirt at her sides.

“You.” she breathed out. “I want you...”

It seemed he had only been waiting for that invitation. He pulled the shirt over her head and she only had to lift her arms to help him, resisting the urge to cover her breasts – not that she would have had time anyway because his mouth was on one of them as soon as it was uncovered and his hand was toying with the other. She gasped, short of breath, and gripped his shoulders, careful of the wound. If this was what pleasure was about, she understood why so many women fell prey to it.

“Haymitch.” she whispered when he pushed her even further against the desk.

“Yeah?” he asked, leaving her breasts to drop rough kisses on her neck. “If you want to stop, you should tell me now, Princess.”

“No, I...” she faltered. Confessing her lack of experience in that area would probably have been best but she could already imagine the smirk and the cocky attitude he would give her and she decided perhaps he didn’t need to know after all. “Bed?”

The suggestion was uncertain but he was only too happy to oblige. His mouth never leaving hers for long, he nudged her back until her knees bumped against the side of the bed and she fell on her back.

“Fuck, you’re gorgeous.” he mumbled and then they were kissing again. The kisses were violent but his hands were not. When they slipped under her petticoat and caressed her in a place she had never thought anybody would touch, she could swear she saw stars. Her sight flashed white and a helpless cry escaped her. For a second, she thought she was either dying or struck by divine punishment. His chuckles were low in her ear. “Eager, are we?”

He sucked her earlobe in his mouth while she recovered, trembling and breathless, and...

“Again.” she pleaded. And because something had felt missing, she added “More.”

“Didn’t peg you for the lazy kind, sweetheart.” he teased. “I’m doing all the work here.”
Of course she would be expected to reciprocate, she thought. Except... She chewed on her bottom lip, tensed all of a sudden, hating the idea of disappointing him.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, obviously picking up on her change of demeanor. He sat up, a leg on either side of her hips, watching her with weary eyes. “You’re okay?”

“I... I don’t know what to do.” she admitted.

“What?” he frowned, a little startled.

“I don’t know what to do.” she repeated, mortified. She didn’t know why she was ashamed. After all, a lady wasn’t supposed to know those things and thus he shouldn’t expect her to, but...

“What do you mean you don’t know what to do?” His eyes widened almost comically. “You’ve done it before, right? You don’t kiss men like that when you’ve never done it before....”

“I’m a fast learner.” she hissed, vexed. “I’m unmarried, I’ve never been married. I’m an honest woman, I’m a lady. Why do you expect me to know those things?” She couldn’t help herself, she pouted. “This is insulting, Haymitch.”

“Says the lady half naked in the pirate’s bed...” he scoffed.

She folded her arms over her chest and glared at him.

“Fine.” he grumbled, lifting his hands in a defensive gesture. “You’re sure you want to go on or...”

“I’ve already ruined myself.” she cut him off, reaching for him, suddenly scared he would put an end to whatever was happening. “And I never leave things unfinished. Just... teach me.”

“Bossy.” he complained, but there was a smirk tugging at his lips.

Men didn’t like bossy women, she had observed, but Haymitch didn’t seem to mind. He liked the challenge, she thought, and so, she didn’t hesitate before coiling a hand behind his neck and pulling him in a kiss.

“Teach me.” she ordered again.

He was only too happy to comply.

And he was an excellent teacher.

Chapter End Notes

Loooot of things happened! I would love to hear what you thought of everything :p
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

She woke up to a low rumble of voices.

For a second she was confused by the lack of hammock and she thought she was back in her old room in Port Capitol and everything had been nothing but a dream. Then the door clicked shut and she opened her eyes. She was in Haymitch’s cabin, in Haymitch’s bed, naked and alone. She sat up suddenly, wrapping the sheets around her chest, her eyes darting around. It was no use though, Haymitch wasn’t there.

She wasn’t sure exactly why she had expected him to be.

*Foolish girl,* she berated herself, *foolish foolish girl.*

She located her shirt and petticoat easily and slipped both on, her heart hammering in her chest. She could hear the usual noises of the crew going at their duties on the other side of the door and it made her pause because if she stepped out of that cabin now, wearing nothing but what she was wearing, everybody would know.

Of course, she figured, everybody already knew since she had never gotten back to the female crew quarters the previous night.

It didn’t mean she was ready to face their staring or the taunts... She would deserve everything they threw at her naturally, she wasn’t much better than the prostitute she had pretended to be for the revolutionaries now.

*What on earth had possessed her?*

The answer came in the form of a pirate Captain with stormy grey eyes. Haymitch paused briefly when he saw her standing next to his desk but his lips stretched in a smirk. “You’re up. You sleep like the dead, sweetheart.”

“You were gone.” she accused slowly.

“Yeah.” he replied absentmindedly, wrapping his arms around her waist and tugging her against his chest. She didn’t know why she was letting him. But when his mouth touched her neck, she melted. “The ship isn’t doing great and we’re low on ammunitions. Tortuga’s the closest port so we’re going there.” One of his hand slipped under her shirt, roamed on her skin and she leaned against him, remembering just how much pleasure his fingers could provide. “You’re in luck though. Heavensbee’s often there. Maybe we will find out if I can finally get rid of you or not...”

The words were light but she stepped back all the same, abruptly pushing him away. He seemed startled but she didn’t pause long enough to register it.

“This is fabulous news.” she declared. “Because I can’t wait to get rid of you too.”

She didn’t wait to see how he would react, she simply fled, slamming the door shut behind her. People *did* stare when she crossed the deck to join the crew quarters but she pretended she didn’t see. She lifted her chin, pursed her lips and looked straight ahead. She was relieved to find the quarters empty except for Johanna who was sleeping in her hammock, having probably been up all night.
She snatched the blue dress she had never had time to put on the night before and flung it away in anger.

“Did he finally get that poker out of your ass?” Johanna snickered, without taking away the arm that was thrown over her eyes.

That was too much.

She burst out in tears, cursing her own stupidity. How many times had she been warned about that exact danger? How many times had she been told that young women were preys to men like Haymitch? Why exactly did she think it would be any different than all the other tales about fallen women who ended up selling themselves to survive? Why exactly did she expect it to be more than just a night of passion?

Of course, he couldn’t wait to get rid of her, she had been a burden from the start. And not only couldn’t he get a ransom after all, but he was stuck with her because despite all of his claims of the contrary, he was honorable and he would never leave her somewhere dangerous.

“Wow.” Johanna frowned, sitting up in her hammock. “What are you wailing about now? He didn’t hurt you, right? He’s not that sort.”

Effie didn’t think they were friends, they spent all their time arguing, but she knew instinctively that if he had hurt her Johanna would have made him pay for principle only.

She shook her head and sat carefully on her hammock, willing her sobs to subside. There was no reason to cry. It wouldn’t help. What was done was done. She had ruined herself. He hadn’t forced her, he hadn’t promised her anything, she had done it all by herself. Now wasn’t the time to fall apart. Chin up, eyes bright, smile on, she chastised herself.

“You’re sore?” the pirate insisted, clearly puzzled.

“Johanna!” she exclaimed, blushing red. “You don’t discuss this sort of things.”

Johanna rolled her eyes. “Suit yourself.”

The pirate lied back down, clearly intending to go back to her nap. Effie picked up the pink dress she had tried to wash and mend to no avail but didn’t make a move to slip it on.

“He said he wanted to get rid of me.” she whispered, running her fingers over the frayed fabric. The dress had once been beautiful and now it was ruined. A little like her maybe.

“He told me he was going to speak to Heavensbee about you.” Johanna shrugged. “If you’re in the clear, we’re taking you back home. If not, I don’t know. You’ve been screaming that you wanted to go home since you put a foot aboard and now what? You’ve changed your mind?”

Her lips wobbled but she forced her emotions back under control. “But I lied down with him, Johanna... We...”

“You screwed him.” the younger woman scoffed. “Or he screwed you, whatever.” She waved that technicality away. “What? You thought he was going to go down on one knee and propose? Doubt you’re that good of a lay.”

No, she hadn’t been that gullible.

“I thought it meant something.” she retorted. “It meant something to me.”
“Sex is sex.” Johanna mocked. “Never think it means something to men. Use them as they would use you, that’s the key.”

That was a very practical way of looking at the world and, Effie thought, a little sad too. She exchanged her white shirt for the corset, struggling to lace it up on her own and slipped the old pink dress on.

“I’m a little sore.” she admitted reluctantly after a few minutes. “Is it normal?”

“It’s fine. It will pass in a few hours.” Johanna mumbled sleepily.

She had nothing to do and she knew the chances that Haymitch hunted her down to the female quarters were slim so she lied down on her own hammock and listened to Johanna’s snoring, trying desperately not to think about the previous night. It was a lost cause though, she couldn’t stop thinking about it, reliving it second by second.

It left her hot, bothered and aching for him in ways, she was certain, no proper lady would be.

~°~°~°~

_The Mockingjay_ had taken a huge blow and Haymitch had no time to focus on ladies not so in distress who made delicious noises when he kissed them – or at least that was what he told himself.

He didn’t know exactly what Effie was pissed about. One second everything was fine, the next she was pushing him away and sticking close to Jo at all time of days. Every time he caught a glimpse of her though, his mind took him back to that night and, more often than not, it left him hard, annoyed and wishing she would just stop avoiding him.

She was very good at avoiding him despite the limited amount of space on the ship.

It took four days for them to reach Tortuga and Haymitch considered it a small miracle that they managed without sinking. As soon as they had anchored in the port, he went in search of Beetee, the only one he trusted to supervise the repairs.

He also made enquiries about Heavensbee.

It seemed Effie was in luck because according to his old friend, Plutarch Heavensbee was on the island. Tracking him down didn’t take long, he was in one of the taverns near the dock.

“Haymitch!” the man exclaimed when he flopped down on a chair at his table. “How good to see you. Did you think about our offer yet?”

“My answer’s still no.” he grumbled, annoyed by Heavensbee’s and Coin’s insistence that he joined the fleet. “Can I buy you a drink?”

Heavensbee nodded with a knowing smile. “What do you need?”

“What do people need when they come to you?” he scorned. “Information.” He waited until a waitress had brought them a bottle and sticky glasses that had probably never been washed before talking again. “Snow seems to have a lot of money lately.”

“Inheritance.” Heavensbee shrugged.

“Yeah?” Haymitch frowned, feigning surprise. “What happened?”

“His goddaughter was rich and he needed money.” the spy answered with another shrug. “A shame
though, the girl was nice.”

Haymitch swallowed back a sigh. He had only wanted Heavensbee’s confirmation, he knew Snow’s methods, but it was still another problem to deal with. And the thought of what could have happened to Effie...

“I told him to marry her.” Heavensbee continued. “He said she would be a cumbersome wife. He would rather have her killed. His mistake though... There’s no proof she’s dead and whoever marry her and can prove she is who she says she is will have a right to that money. And we are talking about a lot of money here. It could very well win us the war.”

Haymitch remained silent for a few seconds, making the rum twirl in his glass distractedly. “Thought she was dead?”

“Come on, Haymitch...” Heavensbee chuckled. “I know you took The Career. And now those questions... You didn’t happen to find her by any chance?”

He shrugged dismissively. “Chaff took the captives on The Rue.”

“She wasn’t amongst the captives Chaff rescued.” the man argued. “We checked, not a trace on her on board. He says he doesn’t know anything about her.”

“Then why would I?” he retorted. “Maybe Brutus did kill her.”

Plutarch didn’t say anything for a while, studying him and obviously thinking about what card to play next. “I heard you had taken to bringing prostitutes on The Mockingjay? That doesn’t sound like you.”

“What’s business is it to you?” he sneered. “Maybe I’m lonely and I fancy a fuck more than once in a blue moon.”

Heavensbee didn’t seem convinced and given Haymitch’s track record it wasn’t that surprising. Women on his ship were respected just like any other members of the crew and he didn’t usually visit brothels either. He liked his women free and genuinely interested.

“She could win us the war.” Heavensbee repeated. “We could find her a nice man.”

“You would force her to marry a nice man, you mean.” he scoffed.

“And in exchange we would protect her.” the man argued. “If Governor Snow gets wind she’s alive... She’s a threat, Haymitch, and you know just what he does with those...”

He squatted them.

“Good thing she’s dead then.” he replied.

“Coin doesn’t believe she’s dead.” Heavensbee told him. “She’s looking for her.” The man reached out, grabbing Haymitch’s wrist and giving it a small squeeze. “Join us, Haymitch. You know it is the right thing to do. Join us, give her to us and I’m sure we can convince Coin to let you marry Euphemia yourself if that’s what this is about.”

He shrugged his hand off abruptly, seething with anger, annoyance and disgust.

“First, I don’t know anything about your Euphemia. As far as I’m concerned, she’s dead.” he said so low the noise of the tavern almost covered it. “Second, I’m not in the business of selling people and I
wouldn’t coerce anyone into marrying me for money I don’t even care about. Third, if, hypothetically, your stupid ideas about me hiding her were correct, it makes her a part of my crew and you know what happens to people who mess with my crew.” He slammed his glass down and got to his feet, sparing a last warning glance to the man. “Tell Coin to stay the fuck away from me and my ship.”

He stormed away and to the dock, almost expecting to see The Rebellion’s grey sails looming in the distance. Coin and her ship were nowhere to be seen tough, The Mockingjay was still where he had left her in the process of being made brand new by Beetee and his working crew.

He found Effie on the upper deck with Jo and Katniss.

“Sweetheart, my cabin. Now.” he barked.

She flushed red. “Certainly not. How... Who do you take me for?”

He rolled his eyes. “Take your mind out of the gutter, Princess, it’s not a booty call. I’ve got news.”

She became even redder with embarrassment. In another time and place, he would have enjoyed taunting her about it but not now. Now...

“Oh.” she said. “Alright then.”

He placed a hand at the small of her back when she passed him by and she became stiff and tense. He took his hand away as if he had been burned. He didn’t understand what had changed in the last few days. They had had fun the other night. She had enjoyed herself, he knew she had, she hadn’t been shy about telling him just what she liked and didn’t like and she had been vocal in her pleasure. Maybe it had been her first time and that was never easy but he had made sure it was good for her.

“I saw Heavensbee.” he told her as soon as the door of his cabin was closed. “Snow did want you dead.”

It didn’t come as a shock but she did lower her eyes and grabbed the edge of the desk to steady herself. “I see.”

“Yeah, there’s more.” he snorted, dropping on the chair behind the desk. “The rebels know you’re alive – or suspect it at least – and they’re dead set on marrying you off to whoever raise their hand first to get control of your money. Whatever you do next, you can’t be Euphemia Trinket anymore, you understand?”

She gave a shaky nod.

“Sweetheart...” he sighed. “For what it’s worth, I’m sorry.”

“Thank you.” she whispered, before leaving his cabin.

He wanted to go to her, to comfort her but he was afraid she would push him away again. Better to let her be, he mused. She probably regretted everything. And why wouldn’t she? He was who he was and she was... Well... Out of his league.

He remained at his desk, alternating between sipping from his flask and studying maps, looking for somewhere to lie low for a little while. Ten minutes hadn’t passed since she had left that Jo barged in, a sneer on her lips and her hands on her hips.

“You’re being an asshole.” she declared.
“What?” he frowned, completely confused. The frown soon turned to a sneer of his own. “What’s your problem now?”

Jo was glaring. “Look, you just wanted to scratch an itch, fine. But you should have told her up front. She’s stupid and she’s as naive as a kid and that’s fucking annoying but you were her first, that counts for a girl. Men are such jerks, couldn’t you let her down easy?”

He was so stunned he barely understood half of her speech. “What are you...”

“And what do you mean you don’t want her to stay?” she hissed. “We never kicked anyone out before. So if she wants to stay, she stays. We can use her to mend sails or to make inventory or whatever. I can’t fucking believe you sometimes, Haymitch. You’re...”

“Stop.” he shouted, effectively putting an end to her rant. “I never said she couldn’t stay, that’s bullshit. Of course, she’s staying. Where else would she go?”

~°~°~°~

Effie staggered out of Haymitch’s cabin in a daze.

She collapsed on the stairs leading to the upper deck, not caring at all about her less than regal attitude. She pressed her hands against her eyes and forced herself to take even breaths. She wouldn’t cry. She couldn’t afford it. What was she going to do? Where would she go?

“So?” Katniss asked, dropping on the step next to her. “What happened?”

“You’re going to wail again?” Johanna taunted. She remained standing on the step behind them.

“I don’t know what I’m going to do.” she confessed, completely lost.

“Well, that’s easy,” Katniss shrugged, once she was done explaining what Haymitch had found out. “You’re staying here with us. We’ll find you a real pirate outfit and everything. Latest pirate fashion. Jo and I will take you shopping, yeah? That will cheer you up. We’ll bring Annie and Prim too.”

“I can’t stay.” she protested.

“Don’t be stupid.” Jo scoffed.

“But he doesn’t want me to, Johanna.” she argued, looking up at the pirate. “He wants me gone.”

Katniss frowned and awkwardly wrapped an arm around her shoulders. “Haymitch would never kick you out, Effie. We take in everyone who have nowhere else to go... That’s our thing.”

“He told me the other day he wanted to get rid of me.” she countered, her voice breaking slightly in places.

Jo mumbled something rude under her breath, pushed past them and disappeared in the direction of the Captain’s cabin.

“What am I going to do?” she asked Katniss, even though the girl wouldn’t know any more than she did.

“You’re going to stay.” Katniss insisted. “You’re part of the crew now and that means you’re family. I’m telling you, nobody will let him kick you out.”

“But if he doesn’t want me here, I can’t impose.” Effie argued. “That’s...”
“Who ever said I didn’t want you here?” Haymitch grumbled and she looked up in time to see him following Jo out of his cabin. “See, that’s the problem with you. You talk too much and you never listen and you put ideas in your own head.” He glanced at Katniss. “Take a walk, girl.”

Katniss didn’t move or remove the arm from her shoulders. Instead, she glared at Haymitch. “You’re not kicking Effie out.”

“Isn’t it what I just said?” he snapped. “Go on, get lost.” It took some convincing but in the end, the girl left with Johanna after tossing Haymitch a last glare. He sat down in the space Katniss had just vacated. “Okay, shoot. What is this all about?”

“You said you couldn’t wait to talk to Plutarch so you would know if you could finally get rid of me.” she hissed. “Are you going to deny it?”

He looked taken aback for a second and then he lifted his eyebrows and rubbed his neck. “And that’s what had you acting like a bitch all this time? Sweetheart, I was joking.”

“No, you were not.” she snapped. “I woke up and you were gone. You took what you wanted and...”

“Hey, I didn’t take anything you didn’t want to give.” he cut her off. “Don’t put that on me.”

She turned her head away, knowing he was right and, on that front, she was being unfair. “You were gone when I woke up.”

“I needed to see to the ship.” he sighed. “Finnick had been at the helm all night.”

She kept her eyes riveted on the main mast. “Johanna says you’re not interested in me anymore because you got what you wanted.”

“Jo should shut the fuck up.” he spat. “I’m interested. You’re the one who’s been avoiding me like the plague.” He took her hand and squeezed. “Look, Effie, I’m not good at any of this, okay? But... You’re the one always saying I should leave you my cabin. I don’t mind sharing. Just saying. You don’t have to or anything, you can stay anyway, but...”

He let the sentence trail off, probably unsure of how his offer would be received.

“You want me to be your mistress.” she clarified.

The thought should have been appalling but it wasn’t. She had already lost everything and she knew nobody on the ship would judge. Annie and Finnick weren’t married and nobody gave the young woman any grief about it. It was a different world than the one she was used to. One that she was about to embrace.

“Do we have to put a label on it?” he muttered.

She decided that he was right and, perhaps it would be best not to put a name on whatever they were or not.

Feeling bold all of a sudden, she leaned in and pressed her lips against his. The kiss immediately turned greedy and she felt the very same spark as she had the previous time... The need for more.

“Am I a pirate now?” she asked against his mouth.

She could feel his chuckles all the way down her chest.
“I think you’re a siren, sweetheart. And I’m happy to drown.”

Chapter End Notes

One chapter left! I hope you liked it. Coming next: Coin the comeback. What did you think of the chapter? Let me know!
“Beetee really did a good job.” Finnick observed. “She’s quicker.”

The ship’s speed was good, probably better than before Beetee had tinkered with her, but Haymitch was content not to push her too much. They had been sailing at random for a while, avoiding every corner Coin’s fleet usually sailed in, but they had taken a merchant ship the previous week and it was time to go back to the Hob. Even three weeks later, Heavensbee’s warnings were still ringing in his ears though.

His eyes followed his thoughts and fell on the woman leaning against the railing below. She was laughing with Annie. Jo and Katniss had finally prevailed and forced her into a more sea-friendly outfit. The second she had tried on the pants, she had been sold, and now she wandered around in those tight leather pants and a white shirt completed with a leather corset – latest pirate fashion, he had been told very seriously – and it was driving him crazy on a daily basis.

“I need to review maps.” he told Finnick, abandoning the helm to him.

The boy snorted, flashing him a wolfish grin. “Sure, Captain. Go... review maps.”

He felt neither guilty nor embarrassed about that. Reviewing maps had become his favorite activity of late, he liked it even more than he liked his rum.

He joined the two women on the deck, placed a hand at the small of Effie’s back and shot an apologetic smirk at Annie. “I need her to copy maps for me.”

Annie wasn’t any more fooled than Finnick was but she let them go easily. Effie’s lips were pursed but her eyes were twinkling with amusement.

“Which map?” she asked innocently, once he had closed the door of the cabin behind them.

“You’re hot.” he replied, seeing no point in not going straight to the heart of the matter.

“You say that every day.” she laughed.

“’Cause it’s true every day.” he growled, trailing a hand against the side of her neck before pressing a kiss at the hollow of her throat.

“Smooth.” she mocked.

He wanted to keep the banter up but her mouth crashed on his and soon his head was too full of lusty thoughts to come up with something clever. She pushed him on the bed and he couldn’t help but chuckle as she straddled him. He never liked it when other women took charge, he didn’t trust them, but Effie... He would give her everything he had to give. It was a sobering thought but not as startling as it could have been.

The second she had tried to claw Jo’s eyes out that first day, he had known he was lost.

Afterwards, she slumped on his chest and he wrapped his arms around her, happy to close his eyes and make the most of the moment. He petted her hair absentmindedly and she drew circles and
strange figures on his left side... She was quiet. Effie never was quiet unless she was upset.

“What’s wrong?” he mumbled, a little sleepy.

“Nothing.” she hummed, propping her chin on his chest so she could look at him. “I was just thinking...”

“Did you hurt yourself?” he teased. She whacked his side playfully, fighting to keep a grin off her lips. He gently tugged on a strand of her hair. “About what?” he prompted.

“Well...” she sighed. “I am a fallen woman who has gone into piracy, my reputation is in tatters because of you, and I’ve never been this happy in my life. What does that say about my character?”

He shrugged. “Who cares? Important thing is you’re happy. Life’s too short to wonder, sweetheart.”

“I know.” she admitted. “It’s just... It was so important to me... Being a lady, following the rules of proper behavior... It was a huge part of me.”

“It’s still is.” he pointed out. “You’re still annoying the shit out of everybody with your fucking manners.”

“Language.” she chided him. “It still is for the most part but you and me... I don’t know, I guess I have never pictured myself breaking that particular rule. Society would shame me.”

“Society can kiss my ass.” He rolled his eyes. “Does it really bother you?”

“Sleeping with a man out of wedlock?” she snorted. “I’m certain my parents are spinning in their grave.”

“You know, I’m a captain.” he said. “I could marry us right now.”

“Would you?” she asked.

“I’m not really the marrying type, sweetheart.” he winced.

He might though. If it was really that important to her.

“That’s alright then.” she declared, pressing a kiss against his mouth. “As long as I’m the only woman for you.”

“One and only.” he promised, rolling on her and pinning her to the mattress.

It was a while before they were done reviewing maps and Jo lost no time in taunting them crudely as soon as they went back on deck. It ended up in a fight between Effie and the pirate but since those two fought on a daily basis, he left them to it.

They reached the Hob six days later.

He knew at once that there was trouble.

After all, the grey sails were difficult to miss.

He was almost tempted to turn around and flee before Coin could send her ship after them but he couldn’t abandon the people on the island.

“We’re keeping *The Mockingjay* in the harbor.” Haymitch ordered. “We’re taking a boat to the
docks.” He looked around, studying the expectant faces. “Jo, you’re with me. Finnick, keep the ship ready to sail.”

He didn’t know what they would find, after all.

“I will come too.” Katniss offered.

“No.” Haymitch shook his head. “You’re staying here. If they attack us, we need you in the air to shoot your arrows.”

“Haymitch.” Effie tried to object but he didn’t listen. He pressed a hard kiss on her lips, which made her blush like it always did when he kissed her in public, and joined Jo in the boat.

The trip to shore didn’t take too long but it was tense.

“How are we getting out of this one?” Jo asked.

“I don’t know.” he confessed.

“But you know what they want.” she scoffed. “We could trade.”

He watched her. “You’re serious? You would give Effie up for our freedom? She’s one of us.”

“One against all of us and the Hob.” Jo shrugged, her eyes hardening. “But, yeah. She’s one of us. And nobody touch our crew.”

That settled it then.

There was a welcoming committee when they reached the dock. He didn’t spare a look for Coin and the soldiers flanking her, focusing on Undersee. “Everything’s alright here?”

“We’ve decided to join the revolutionaries, Haymitch.” the Hob’s leader was quick to explain. “They can offer us advantages that...”

“Advantages?” he scoffed, feeling betrayed. “What about the drawbacks?”

“We took a vote.” Undersee insisted. “We’re grateful for everything you did for us but...”

“But they saw reason.” Coin cut in. “And so should you. Surrender, Haymitch, or we will take The Mockingjay by force.”

“Like hell.” he spat. “By the time you get your Rebellion over there, she will be long gone.”

“Without her Captain?” the woman mocked. “They would never leave you.”

“I say we can take them.” Jo cackled, toying with the handle of her axe.

Haymitch wasn’t as confident. There was only a small group in front of them but more when they came from.

“I gave my orders.” he shrugged.

“Is it your ship you’re so eager to protect or what you stole from me?” Coin sneered. “You had a whore on board the last time we saw each other. Soldier Hawthorne saw her.”

Gale wasn’t amongst her little group of friends, he was happy to notice. At least, if it came down to a
fight, he wouldn’t have to hurt the boy.

“And then what?” he snickered. “If you want to get laid so badly, Alma, there are brothels all over the Caribbean, no need to go after my women.”

Coin’s face remained blank but the corner of her mouth twitched in anger. “Surrender your ship and Lady Trinket without a fuss and I will let you live.”

“There is no Lady Trinket on my ship.” he retorted.

“I know she’s there, there is no point in lying.” the woman insisted. “Rest assured we will find her a good husband. I am not the monster you paint me out to be.”

He wasn’t so sure about that.

And he could only see one way to protect Effie.

“Too bad she’s already married.” he replied. “There is no Lady Trinket on my ship but there is an Effie Abernathy. You come anywhere near my wife and I will gut you.”

Jo’s eyebrows shot up in surprise but he ignored her. Assuming they both managed to get back to the ship in one piece, Jo would tell Effie as soon as she saw her because even though they spent their time arguing they were sort of friends – and then Effie would kill him.

Coin pursed her lips. “It’s an easy enough problem to fix. We will have to make her a widow.”

He unleashed his cutlass just as Johanna lifted her axe, both of them adopting defensive stances. Undersee looked dismayed and tried to intervene but Haymitch told him to leave. That didn’t concern the people of the Hob after all. They didn’t need to spill more blood than strictly necessary.

“You really think you can fight us?” Coin asked, almost taunting. “You are surrounded and your ship won’t evade us for long. You...”

A canon boomed in the distance and Haymitch looked over his shoulder, alarmed. Why would Finnick give a warning shoot?

The answer came in the form of another ship coming fast toward the Hob. Haymitch felt like laughing. He would have known that ship anywhere.

“It’s The Rue.” Jo smirked. “Now who’s surrounded?”

“Chaff won’t attack us.” Coin dismissed.

“Wanna bet?” Haymitch scoffed. “So here’s what we’re going to do. Jo and I will go back to our ship and you will let us leave without giving pursuit.”

“Or I could kill you.” she objected, her cold eyes calculating.

“Or you kill us and then you will have to deal with two crews of very angry pirates.” Haymitch challenged. “But we take vengeance seriously. Ask The Career.”

Her eyes darted to The Rue and to The Mockingjay whose canons were ready to fire and then to her own ship that was sitting down in the dock, nowhere near ready to take off.

He knew he had her.
“We’ll take our leave now, Captain.” he declared, nudging Jo toward their boat. He didn’t let himself look back as they stir the boat away from the Hob. *The Rue* was closer, they headed there.

“I heard from Heavensbee you might get yourself in trouble.” Chaff said, clapping him on the shoulder as soon as they had been hauled on board. “Told you that woman was your type.”

“Let’s get out of here.” Haymitch muttered, eager to put as much distance as possible between Effie and Coin.

*The Rue* and *The Mockingjay* might have been less powerful than *The Rebellion* but they were quicker and they evaded the rebels easily enough.

There had been some questions as to where they should be headed next. Without the Hob to tie them in the Caribbean, they had discussed going further away. It was Chaff who had suggested Asia, just as eager as Haymitch was to escape Coin and Snow’s war for a while. They had decided on China. They would be safer there.

It was an odd feeling to leave everything behind after all this time, he mused as he stood at the helm, enjoying the relative silence of his ship at night. He wasn’t exactly surprised when Effie joined him. He had left her asleep in their cabin but she tended to wake up if he left her for too long.

“I had an interesting conversation with Johanna today.” she hummed.

“Yeah?” he asked, lifting his eyebrows in open curiosity.

“Apparently we are married.” she answered casually. “Which is odd because I don’t remember saying any vows.”

“Told you.” he shrugged. “I’m a captain. I can marry us whenever I want.”

He waited, half expecting her to throw a fit in anger, but she simply laughed and wrapped her arms around his chest from behind, pressing her face between his shoulder blades.

“Pirate.” she accused with unabashed fondness.

“Always, Princess.” he retorted.

And he wasn’t simply talking about his pirate ways.

**The End**

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed the trip on a pirate ship! Meet me again on two Sundays time for a brand new hayffie story called “Happiness Therapy”!

What did you think of that last chapter? Reviews make my day!
So? What do you think? I will let you guess who will show up next chapter ;)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!